



Mark Speakman
Attorney General

MEDIA RELEASE

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EDITORS NOTE: Brief biographies are provided below

SCALES ON LOCAL COURT BENCH APPROACH BALANCE

The NSW Local Court is on the cusp of achieving gender balance following the appointment of five new magistrates.

Attorney General Mark Speakman said almost 50 per cent of Local Court magistrates will be female, following today's appointment of barristers Melissa Humphreys, Kirralee Tennant and Justin Peach and solicitors Nicole Ford and Robyn Richardson.

"It is heartening to see the gender gap closing further in the upper echelons of the traditionally male-dominated justice system, recognising the deep reservoir of legal talent among females in the profession," Mr Speakman said.

These new appointments boost the number of female magistrates to a record of 69 – 49.3 per cent of the total of 140.

"The new magistrates have a wide range of experience, with much of it gained in the Local Court," Mr Speakman said.

The new magistrates replace retiring judicial officers. They will typically spend at least a year in the Sydney metropolitan region sitting in the Local Court, Children's Court or Coroner's Court, before relocating to regional or country areas.

"The Local Court is the backbone of the legal system. It deals with 96 per cent of all criminal prosecutions and more than 90 per cent of all civil litigation in NSW," Mr Speakman said.

The magistrates will begin taking their judicial oaths on Monday, 15 February when Ms Richardson is sworn in. Ms Humphreys and Mr Peach will rise to the bench on 1 March and will be joined by Ms Tennant and Ms Ford on 15 March.

Ms Ford will be allocated to the Children's Court to replace Magistrate Jeffrey Hogg.

Magistrates' Biographies

Melissa Humphreys has been a lawyer since 2005 and was called to the Bar in 2007. She has focused principally on criminal, civil and family law matters. Her most recent position was as Head of Chambers at Hargrave Chambers and serving as the regional representative for the NSW Bar Association. She was a sessional lecturer in advocacy skills and evidence law at the University of Wollongong and is accredited as a family law arbitrator. She has regularly appeared in the District Court in jury and judge alone trials, sentence hearings and appeals and in the Local Court. She routinely appears for parents and Independent Children's Lawyers in The Federal Circuit Court and The Family Court of Australia in both property and parenting matters, including appellate work.

Kirralee Tennant was admitted as a solicitor to the NSW Supreme Court in 2001 and has worked in criminal law for the last 19 years. She was called to the Bar in 2018. She has worked extensively with the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions and her most recent position is as Crown Prosecutor in Gosford. She has appeared regularly in the Local Court, Children's Court, District Court and Supreme Court and has been involved in some of the state's most complex cases.

Nicole Ford (formerly Dwyer) has spent her 25-year legal career working in rural and regional communities. She started working in a Wagga Wagga law firm in private practice before joining Legal Aid in 2007. Her most recent position was as solicitor in Charge of the Legal Aid NSW Riverina Murray offices in Wagga and Albury where she played a crucial role in providing access to justice for some of the most vulnerable people in the community.

Justin Peach joined the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions in 2010, becoming a Crown Prosecutor in 2018 and conducting complex District Court trials. He was admitted as a lawyer in 2005, joining Aubrey Brown Partners on the Central Coast and appearing regularly in the Local, District and Children's Courts in criminal and civil litigation. In 2018, he was admitted to the NSW Bar.

Robyn Richardson is an accredited specialist in criminal law and established her own practice in 2013, five years after she was admitted as a lawyer to the NSW Supreme Court. She worked for the Director of Public Prosecutions and leading criminal defence firms in Sydney. She also was an intern in the Office of the Prosecutor at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. Before becoming a criminal lawyer, she worked in public policy. She holds Masters' Degrees in both Law and Public Policy.