

**AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY
ANU COLLEGE OF LAW**

Launch of
**THE AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR MILITARY LAW AND
JUSTICE**

Thursday 8 May 2008
Sparke Helmore Law Theatre
ANU College of Law

WELCOME from PROFESSOR MICHAEL COPER
Dean, ANU College of Law, Australian National University

Minister, your excellencies, distinguished members of the armed forces, other distinguished guests, colleagues, and friends.

A very warm welcome to the ANU, and to the launch of one of our two newest Centres, the Australian Centre for Military Law and Justice.

Let me not leave that reference to two Centres hanging—next month we will be launching our world-first Centre for Climate Law and Policy—but today it is the turn of the Centre for Military Law and Justice.

May I first of all acknowledge the Ngunnawal people—something that is not a mere ritual for us here at the ANU College of Law, because we are very connected to indigenous issues. We house the National Centre for Indigenous Studies (NCIS), led by Professor Mick Dodson, and we have a good number of indigenous students—so I acknowledge the traditional owners of this land and their contribution, past and present, to the region.

I am absolutely delighted to introduce this event this morning. I have been Dean of the ANU College of Law now for just over a decade, and nothing has given me greater satisfaction than to see the College thrive and grow:

- In the last five years, for example, the number of our PhD students has grown from around 15 to over 60, a wonderful testament to and augmentation of our research culture.
- We appointed nine new colleagues in our annual recruitment round last year, and are just in the process of shortlisting for this year's round from over 100 applications.
- We introduced a new graduate-entry law degree program this year called the Juris Doctor, or JD, and our postgraduate programs continue to grow, especially in areas such as migration law and legal practice.
- We now occupy all three sides of the big white building just outside—some of you will remember when the north wing housed the Faculty of Asian Studies. In fact, we have run out of space, and have architects' plans for a major extension. (A minor detail is that we have no funding for it yet, so if anyone here would like their name up in lights, please talk to me afterwards.)

I mention these examples of our recent growth only to give you some context for the launch of our new Centre for Military Law and Justice. Centres are one way in which we organise ourselves and our cognate interests into a coherent and focused critical mass, in order to foster our research, give our work a bit of profile, attract students, especially PhD students, with an interest in the area, in some cases run our teaching programs in the area, and generally build our reputation.

We had a fascinating debate within the College last year about what our guiding principle should be for the establishment of new Centres. Should it be 'let 1000 centres bloom', as we respond to powerful arguments from colleagues that their areas of special interest and expertise are worthy of support in the form of a Centre, or should we be more circumspect? Would the 'let 1000 Centres bloom' approach send a message of vibrancy and growth, or of fragmentation and incoherence?

Fortunately, this was not a debate we had to resolve when it came to the Australian Centre for Military Law and Justice. It easily satisfied our criteria that the subject matter be of national significance, and that we should have a critical mass of colleagues with expertise in the area.

Indeed, that expertise was manifest in the teaching program that preceded the establishment of the Centre. As my colleague Robin Creyke will tell you in a moment, we were delighted two years ago to win the tender to teach military law to defence lawyers. It is from that beginning that the idea of the Centre, with a serious research dimension, grew.

Robin, and also Minister Snowden, will tell you in a moment about the importance of military law. I would add only that, for non-experts like me, it has been a revelation to get an insight into how broad military law is, spanning not only military operations but also criminal law, administrative, law, international law, constitutional law, and many other areas of general importance.

The more I realised that, and the more I connected it with our range of expertise in the College, the more excited I became about the idea of a Centre to draw all of these strands together. And that is what we have done, so may I congratulate Robin, the inaugural Director of the Centre, her three Associate Directors Simon Bronitt, Don Rothwell, and Gary Tamsitt, and all of my other colleagues, especially the teachers in the military law program, who contributed to the Centre's establishment.

Finally, may I just mention briefly our distinct 'ethos' in the ANU College of Law. All law schools in Australia are committed to achieving excellence in their teaching and research, and we are no exception. Different law schools achieve that aspiration to different degrees; the much-publicised international rankings over the last few years suggest that ANU has achieved it to a high degree, and indeed leads the pack. But at the ANU College of Law we have a further aspiration, and that is not merely to accept the law as we find it but rather to promote and facilitate its improvement.

Nothing is more indispensable to law reform than a sound research base, and I would expect that, in the area of military law, as in other areas, we will be providing that base and thus a solid platform for continuous improvement, renewal, and the achievement of best practice.

That platform will occur through the Australian Centre for Military Law and Justice, and I invite my colleague Professor Robin Creyke to tell you a little more about the Centre and to introduce the Honourable Warren Snowden, the Minister for Defence Science and Personnel, to launch it.