

Media Release

The Hon Jill Hennessy MP

Attorney-General

Minister for the Coordination of Justice and Community Safety – COVID-19

Minister for Workplace Safety



Friday, 19 June 2020

NEW APPOINTMENT TO THE VICTORIAN LAW REFORM COMMISSION

One of Victoria's most experienced judges has been appointed to the Victorian Law Reform Commission.

The Victorian Government has announced the appointment of the Hon. Jennifer Coate AO, who brings to the Commission 35 years of experience across five court jurisdictions. It also announced the reappointment of Gemma Varley PSM, who has served as a Commissioner since 2016, and Bruce Gardner PSM who was first appointed in 2012.

Justice Coate was a Commissioner to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, where she presided over public and private hearings with victims during the course of the five-year inquiry.

Justice Coate was admitted to practice as a barrister and solicitor in 1985, and holds a Diploma of Teaching from Frankston Teachers' College and a Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Laws from Monash University.

She was appointed as a magistrate in 1992, then as the Senior Magistrate of the Children's Court in 1992 and as Deputy Chief Magistrate of the Magistrates' Court just one year later.

Justice Coate then became a judge of the County Court and the first President of the Children's Court in 2000, where she oversaw the establishment of the Children's Koori Court, before becoming the first County Court judge to be appointed State Coroner in 2007.

Justice Coate was appointed a Justice of Family Court of Australia in 2013, a position she held until 2019 and in April of this year was appointed Chair of the Victims of Crime Consultative Committee.

Reappointed Commissioners Gemma Varley PSM and Bruce Gardner PSM will continue to bring significant experience to the Commission.

Ms Varley has more than 37 years' experience as a legislative drafter in the Office of the Chief Parliamentary Counsel, becoming Chief Parliamentary Counsel for Victoria from 2008 until 2016. Ms Varley is in private practice as a consulting legislative drafter.

Mr Gardner PSM was Senior Legal Advisor to the Victorian Director of Public Prosecutions until 2018 and has 36 years' experience in the Crown Solicitor's Office and the Office of Public Prosecutions as a prosecution solicitor.

Justice Coate has been appointed for two years and replaces the Hon. Frank Vincent QC, who resigned from the Commission in 2019 after serving as a Commissioner for seven years.

The Attorney-General recently asked the Commission to review the state's laws relating to rape, sexual assault and associated adult and child sexual offences, to identify ways to reduce the trauma experienced by victims and improve processes – Justice Coate will provide invaluable expertise to this work.

The Commission will provide its final report on improving the response of the justice system to sexual offences to the Attorney-General by 31 August 2021.

Quotes attributable to Attorney-General Jill Hennessy

"Justice Coate has had a highly distinguished legal career spanning 35 years. She has shown unwavering support and dedication to the Victorian people and will continue to be a pioneering voice for victims."

"I thank Justice Vincent for his commitment and invaluable contribution to the Victorian Law Reform Commission over the years, and congratulate Ms Varley and Mr Gardner on their reappointments."

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