

Centennial Symposium: An Australian Retrospective

FOREWORD

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The federal union forged by the people of the former colonies of New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Queensland, Tasmania and Western Australia took effect at the commencement of a new century. The centenary of federation is celebrated at the commencement of a new millennium. The occasion is auspicious.

The contributors to the Centennial Symposium entitled 'An Australian Retrospective' have not given a narrow interpretation to the general subject they have been invited to address. This is as it should be. The main purpose of looking back over a hundred years of constitutional and legal history is to seek understanding of the past, and guidance for the future.

The early members of the High Court who interpreted the *Constitution* were among the leaders of the federation movement. They were deeply involved in the political negotiations, and compromises, which resulted in the Constitution's ultimate acceptance by the people and parliaments of the colonies. Perhaps this is why they were so concerned to limit the powers of the new central government. They were sensitive to the delicacy of the balance that had been struck, and were anxious not to alter it. Circumstances changed. The progress to full nationhood and sovereignty developed its own momentum, and created new circumstances to which the original federal agreement had to respond.

We can scarcely imagine the circumstances to which the law, the courts, and the *Constitution* will have to respond a hundred years from now. But if we have the same confidence and vision as the people who gave us our federal *Constitution*, then we can play our part in helping to ensure that what occurs will be progress, and not merely change.

I congratulate all those who have participated in this important Symposium.

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