

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE5705

Bicket, Robyn

(1964 -)

Born	1 January, 1964, Leeton New South Wales Australia
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Occupation	Lawyer, Public servant
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Summary

Robyn Bicket has enjoyed a long and distinguished career in the Commonwealth public service. She has represented the Australian Government in the United Kingdom and at the United Nations in Switzerland. She was the first lawyer in the Australian Department of Immigration to be posted to the Australian High Commission in London as First Secretary Immigration. She also has the distinction of having been the Department of Immigration and Citizenship's very first chief lawyer. She has made a significant contribution to immigration and humanitarian policy, governance, public sector reform and management in Australia. In 2001 Bicket was awarded the Secretary's Public Service Medal in the Australia Day Honours List, for services to the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs.

Robyn Bicket was interviewed by Kim Rubenstein in the Trailblazing Women and the Law Oral History Project. For details of the interview see the National Library of Australia [CATALOGUE RECORD](#).

Details

Robyn Bicket was born to Matthew and Heather Bicket in the New South Wales Riverina town of Leeton in 1964; she was the youngest of six children. She retains vivid memories from her early life in that farming district of the environment and landscape – floods, droughts, scorching heat in summer and corresponding cold in winter, thunderstorms, dust storms, billowing grain crops. Her childhood recollections also include sleeping outside on the lawn in summer because it was too hot to remain indoors, the orchard, the vegetable garden, the snakes, spiders, mice plagues, swimming in the dams, bushfires, brilliant sunsets, and the starlit skies with satellites visible [Bicket].

Raised in a religious family where reading and an interest in the wider world were strongly encouraged, Bicket's formal education began at the two-room, two-teacher local public school: Grong Grong Primary School. At the age of 11, Bicket entered Scots School in Albury as a boarder; however, she was only there for a term before the family moved to eastern New South Wales in search of a better farming climate [Bicket]. After attending Koorringal High School in Wagga Wagga, and with a budding interest in history, politics and international affairs, she enrolled in a Bachelor of Arts degree at the Australian National University; she also took up a Bachelor of Laws. (At the Law School in the 1980s, she recalls few female lecturers but was impressed by those who were there, including the late Phillipa Weeks). Bicket was interested in women's issues, including the Reclaim the Night protests, and was, to some extent, politically active. She admired the work of Hannah Arendt, Jean Elstain and Helen Caldicott [Bicket].

Having graduated in 1987, in 1988 Bicket joined the Department of Immigration: she would devote the next 25 years of her life to working there. In 1991, in a reflection of her rapid rise within the organisation, Bicket was posted to the Australian High Commission in London as First Secretary Immigration – the first lawyer in the Department of Immigration to achieve this distinction. Although it meant she was in London during the IRA bombing campaign, Bicket enjoyed her work there and managing the cases which came across her desk, including a refusal to grant controversial historian David Irving a visa to travel to Australia [Bicket and Rubenstein].

Bicket came back to Australia in 1994 and was Director, Legal Policy Section, Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. In 1997, she was appointed Counsellor (Immigration), Australian Permanent Mission to the United Nations (UN) in Geneva. At the UN, her work was concerned with humanitarian crises, including the Kosovo crisis and evacuation; conflict in East Timor; the 2001 September 11 bombings in the United States; and the Tampa crisis.

In 2002, Bicket returned to take up the position of Director, Asia Pacific Section, International Cooperation Branch at the Department of Immigration. In this role, she looked after regional cooperation arrangements with Indonesia as well as other regional engagements. In the same year, she was promoted to Assistant Secretary for Humanitarian Affairs; in this position, she was responsible for policy and delivery of Australian Refugee and Humanitarian Resettlement programs, overseeing refugee resettlement for Africa, Nauru and Manus Island.

A promotion in 2005 saw Bicket become the Department of Immigration and Citizenship's very first chief lawyer. Now a central member of the Department's executive, with responsibility for legal services on all immigration-related matters, including domestic and international law, advice, litigation and legislation, she also managed one of the largest – comprising 200 lawyers – in-house legal areas within the Federal Government [Bicket]. During this time (2007 and 2008), Bicket represented the Department of Immigration at a high-profile Senate hearing regarding the government's liability for the illegal detention of refugees, including Cornelia Rau, who was found to be a German-born Australian resident wrongfully held in detention [ABC].

In 2010 Bicket accepted a position as Chief Counsel with the Department of Human Services; this resulted in her leading legal services in the areas of social security, Medicare, child support and related government programs [Bicket]. Three years later, having overseen a service delivery reform agenda achieving savings based on restructured services in Centrelink, Bicket returned to the Department of Immigration as Special Adviser in the Refugee, Humanitarian and International Policy Division. She finally retired from the Commonwealth Public Service in 2015 [Bicket].

These days, Bicket is occupied writing on people movement issues and consulting on regulatory reform and immigration matters. Currently undertaking a certificate course in positive psychology with the Wholebeing Institute, USA, she is interested in using positive psychology to assist the legal profession [Bicket].

Bicket has said of her career: it "has been wonderful and varied" [Harrison]. She has devoted herself to managing policy, service delivery and public sector reform in the areas of immigration, refugee, international and humanitarian law. She has also applied her knowledge and skills to the important area of human services. As a senior executive in the Commonwealth public service, Robyn Bicket has made a significant contribution to immigration and humanitarian policy, governance, public sector reform and management on behalf of the Australian Government.

Published resources

Site Exhibition

Australian Women Lawyers as Active Citizens, Trailblazing Women Lawyers Project Team, 2016,
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/lawyers>

Archival resources

National Library of Australia, Oral History and Folklore Collection

Robyn Bicket interviewed by Kim Rubenstein in the Trailblazing women and the law oral history project

Author Details

Robyn Bicket

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