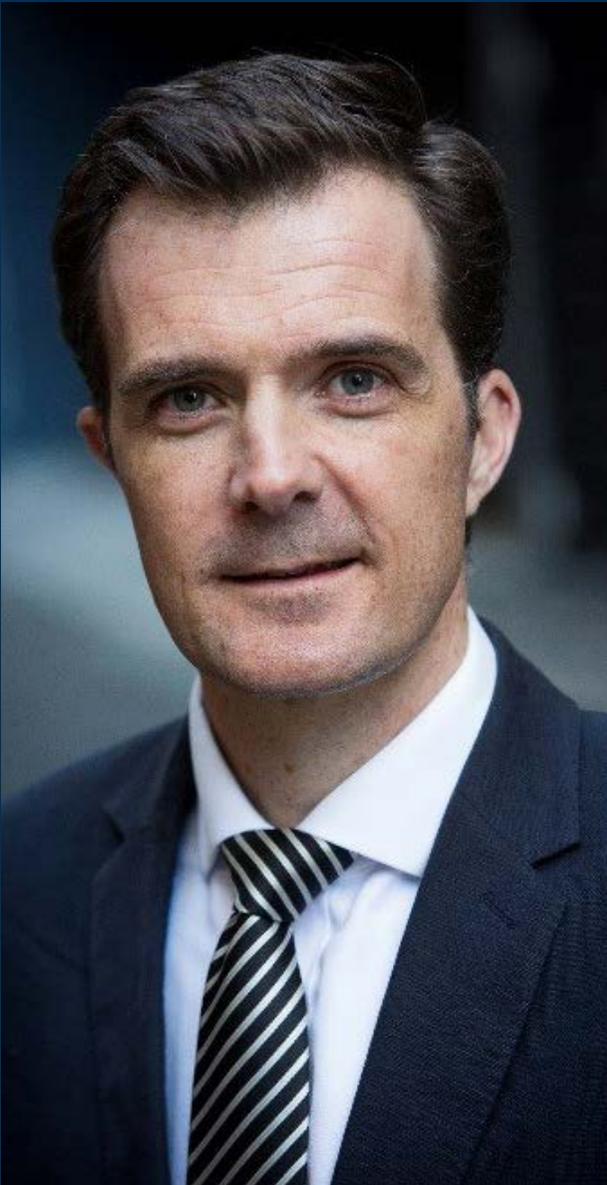


## Spotlight on Australian Pro Bono Centre's Board: Jonathon Hunyor, Director



I sat down with Jonathon Hunyor, Nominee of PIAC on the Centre's Board, over Skype to discuss his time working and living in the Northern Territory, some of his memorable court cases and what he has been doing during lockdown to stay sane.

Jonathon grew up in Sydney and had what he describes as a "completely unremarkable and lovely childhood". After leaving school he decided to study law because "that was a sensible thing for a young man who got the marks to do". Part way through his Law and Economics degree at the University of Sydney, Jonathon developed a particular interest in issues of social justice and human rights.

Propelled by his interest to better understand the social justice and human rights issues that exist in Australia, Jonathon decided to move to Darwin. He found Darwin a really interesting place to live and work. "The thing about the Territory is, all of the parts of the Australian narrative are playing out there on a daily basis and you are exposed to them unless you try to avoid them. Our relationship with First Nations people and the land is just a part of the daily conversation in the Territory," he said.

Similarly, Jonathon found that issues like the environment, Australia's relationship with Asia and people seeking asylum on boats have a really long history in the psyche of people in the Top End and infuse the way that issues are talked about and dealt with up there. "Those things are endlessly fascinating and make living in the Northern Territory an extraordinarily interesting and rich experience. I've always felt really privileged that I have had a chance to do that", he remarked.

Yet working as a young lawyer in the Territory also came with an interesting set of challenges. Jonathon recalls in

*"The thing about the Territory is, all of the parts of the Australian narrative are playing out there on a daily basis and you are exposed to them unless you try to avoid them. Our relationship with First Nations people and the land is just a part of the daily conversation in the Territory."*

one of his first bail applications encountering an issue that College of Law had not prepared him for. He was representing a very vulnerable young woman who had been arrested for smashing a window. Unfortunately, the woman had also taken drugs before coming to court and was not in good shape. Jonathon got up to make the bail application and was attempting to project as much confidence as he could when the magistrate looked at him, raised an eyebrow and said, "Mr Hunyor I don't think I can hear your application". He immediately thought, is that because I am not wearing a tie? Instead it turned out that his client had fallen asleep in the dock! Despite Jonathon raising his voice and using her name in the hope it might wake her up, she just slumped further forward in the dock until her head hit the edge of it. So he was grateful when the magistrate said, "I think I will just stand this down till after lunch".

Despite the interesting start to court work, Jonathon really enjoyed the opportunity to do court advocacy. "It was a really exciting time," he reflected. Although he had to learn on his feet, he also had a number of fantastic colleagues who he was able to observe for guidance.



*Jonathon with the legal team challenging the paperless arrests laws in NT in the High Court*



*Jonathon with Speedy McGinness at a Gurindji Freedom Day event in Kalkarindji in 2011*

*“Interestingly, although we were unsuccessful in stopping the postal survey going ahead, a lot of people have reflected to me on the importance of that case in the overall campaign because it was a moment where particularly the LGBTI community could see the support it had from within the community and the sense that people were standing up to say this is not ok.”*

Jonathon has also been incredibly privileged to have received pro bono support for a number of cases including two in front of the High Court. In 2010, Jonathon returned to the Northern Territory to work as the principal solicitor for the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA). While Jonathon was working there, NAAJA brought a case in the High Court challenging the Northern Territory’s paperless arrest laws. In this instance the case was brought on behalf of both NAAJA and one of its clients, Miranda Bowden, an Aboriginal woman from Katherine. With the pro bono support from Human Rights Law Centre and Ashurst, NAAJA was able to bring the case “with a legal team as good as the richest person in Australia could have had,” he said. “It was an amazing feeling to be down at the High Court with a senior council, two junior council, an extraordinary team from Ashurst and the support of the Human Rights Law Centre”. Although they lost the case, Jonathon said, “it felt like what access to justice should look like”.

Similarly, when the Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC) ran a case challenging the same-sex marriage postal vote, it had pro bono support from a law firm working off the record. The phenomenal pro bono support allowed PIAC to “bring an incredibly important case and feel like we did absolute justice to it,” remarked Jonathon. “Interestingly, although we were unsuccessful in stopping the postal survey going ahead, a lot of people have reflected to me on the importance of that case in

*the overall campaign because it was a moment where particularly the LGBTI community could see the support it had from within the community and the sense that people were standing up to say this is not ok,”*

Having worked in the legal profession for over 20 years, Jonathon has been able to see the huge growth in pro bono over that time. While there was a pro bono culture in the 90s, Jonathon reflects that it was nothing like what it is today. “One of the wonderful things to see develop in the legal profession in Australia, is just how much it has grown and the level of commitment”.

As we come to the end of our call, I make a mental note to ask in my next College of Law lecture what to do when a client falls asleep on the stand. I also ask Jonathon what he has been doing during lockdown. He tells me that COVID-19 isolation has enabled him to start playing the trumpet again (luckily for the neighbours – only at social hours). He has also been spending more time with his family and his dog – a German Koolie, which he describes as looking like a Border Collie “but a little less shaggy and a little less neurotic”.

It has been wonderful getting to know Jonathon and I hope that, like him, I am able to find work throughout my career that I am equally passionate about it. ■

**By Anna Jacobs**, Centre Policy and Project Officer (on secondment from Australian Government Solicitor)

*Jonathon was appointed to the Centre’s Board on 20 September 2016. He is the CEO of the Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC). Jonathon has practised for over 20 years as a lawyer in NSW and the Northern Territory in a range of areas including criminal law, discrimination and human rights, migration and refugee law and Aboriginal land rights. His previous roles include Principal Legal Officer at the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency in Darwin and Director of Legal Services at the Australian Human Rights Commission.*