

Honorary Doctorate Citation



The Hon Sally Thomas AC

CHANCELLOR

Chancellor, I have the honour to present to you The Honourable Sally Thomas AC, who Council has decided should be awarded the honorary degree of Doctor of the University and title of Emeritus Chancellor.

Sally Thomas was born in Cambridge, England and moved to Australia with her family as a young girl. She was educated in Sydney and became a solicitor in New South Wales in 1963. She moved to Darwin in 1978 when she was appointed as the first female Magistrate in the Northern Territory, going on to become Chief Magistrate in 1986, a position she held until she was appointed to the Supreme Court bench in 1992.

Sally Thomas has maintained a strong personal interest in tertiary education in the Northern Territory and has made a very significant contribution to and been extremely influential in the development of this University and its predecessor institutions over more than 30 years. In addition to her very busy work life as a Magistrate, in 1987 she accepted the position of Deputy Chairman of the University College of the Northern Territory, a college of the University of Queensland, which was the Territory's first foray into establishing its own university.

When the Northern Territory University was established through the merger of the University College of the NT and the Darwin Institute of Technology, Sally served on the Council from 1989 until 2003. This was a challenging time in the Territory's efforts to establish its own university and her role on the Council would have been at times demanding and difficult as the new university found its feet.

When in 2003 the Northern Territory University became Charles Darwin University, Sally Thomas was appointed Deputy Chancellor of the University Council and then Chancellor in 2010 - a position she held for two terms until 2016. During her term as Chancellor, Sally showed absolute dedication to the role, with the result that this University has benefitted immeasurably from her leadership and commitment and grown to become a world class university, ranked in the top 2% of world universities, that is now a very important and integral part of the Northern Territory's and our region's prosperity and future.

When in 2014 Charles Darwin University celebrated the 25th anniversary of university education in the NT, Sally Thomas was one of a number of people for whom oral histories were recorded around

their involvement in the establishment and progress of the University. Sally noted in this oral history that her association with the University was for her “the bright side of life” and she reflected on what the Northern Territory would have been like without a university. In the Vice-Chancellor’s address to farewell her at the end of her term as Chancellor, he similarly reflected on what the University would have been like without the extraordinary influence and contribution of the Honourable Sally Thomas.

In recognition of her exemplary service to the people of the Northern Territory, in particular to the judiciary and to social justice, as well as her commitment to the advancement of women in the legal profession, to youth and to the promotion and development of tertiary education, she was appointed a member of the Order of Australia in 2000 and then a Companion of the Order of Australia in 2014.

In 2011, Sally Thomas was appointed as the 20th Administrator of the Northern Territory, the first female to hold that position. She held the position with great dignity and dedication until her term ended in 2014 and saw the honour as a means of continuing her path of “embracing all layers of the community and recognising the interests and aspirations of Territorians”.

In addition to her work and University commitments, Sally Thomas has long maintained an interest in and contributed to a number of other areas of Territory life, including as Northern Territory Chair of the Winston Churchill Fellowship since 1992 and Chair of the Northern Territory Legal Aid Commission from 1990–1996. She was also an Honorary Colonel in the Northern Territory Cadet Corp of the Australian Army from 1993 – 1997 and an advisor to the Family Law Council.

CHANCELLOR

In recognition of her leadership and enormous contribution to this University, and to the Northern Territory, the Charles Darwin University Council awards the Honourable Sally Thomas AC the honorary degree of Doctor of the University and title of Emeritus Chancellor.