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## Justice Christopher Maxwell slams ban on women at elite Melbourne establishments

- by: **JOHN MASANAUSKAS**
- From: News Corp Australia Network
- July 24, 2015 11:29PM

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Chief Justice Marilyn Warren won't speak at male-only clubs.

Source: News Limited

**MELBOURNE'S elite male-only clubs are guilty of breaching women's human rights by enforcing a century-old ban on female members, one of Victoria's top judges says.**

In a stinging rebuke, Court of Appeal president Justice Christopher Maxwell revealed that he and Victoria's Chief Justice, Marilyn Warren, had refused invitations to speak at the four clubs because of their male-only rule.

"It is remarkable that, for the first time in Victorian history, the Chief Justice has not been offered membership of any of these clubs — simply because she is a woman," Justice Maxwell told the *Herald Sun*.

"The refusal of all-male clubs to admit women as members is discriminatory," he said.

"Gender equality is a fundamental issue of human rights."

**What do you think of Melbourne's elite male-only clubs? Have your say in the comment section below**

Justice Maxwell's strongly worded criticism of the Melbourne, Australian, Athenaeum and Savage clubs will reignite pressure for them to throw open their doors to women.



The Australian Club in William Street, Melbourne.

Source: News Corp Australia

The clubs have been the exclusive domain of men since their 1880s inception.

Membership is dominated by well-connected and wealthy businessmen, lawyers and politicians.

**OPINION: JOIN THE 21ST CENTURY, GENTS** (<http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/opinion/melbournes-elite-gentlemens-clubs-must-dispense-with-discrimination-and-join-21st-century/story-fni0fh1-1227456230256>)

Justice Maxwell said: "I refused an invitation to speak at an all-male club because I do not believe that a public official should appear to be endorsing discrimination."

None of the elite clubs chose to respond to the criticism when contacted.

Justice Maxwell's strong comments are the most significant intervention in the debate since the Brumby Labor government failed to outlaw men-only clubs in 2010.

Then attorney-general Rob Hulls said at the time that the Government couldn't act because federal sex discrimination laws allowed an exception for single-sex clubs.



Justice Christopher Maxwell has refused an invitation to speak at the clubs. Picture Norm Oorloff

Source: News Corp Australia

Committee for Melbourne CEO Kate Roffey backed the Chief Justice's refusal to speak at an all-male club.

"Marilyn Warren would have been invited to speak at that particular club because she's an exceptionally intelligent person who holds an office of influence, not because she's a male or female," she said.

"Why do we need single gender clubs at all? Where have we gone wrong in the conversation that we don't have mixed access to all sorts of clubs — men's and women's?"

Ms Roffey said a man would be in his rights to take a similar stance to the Chief Justice if invited to address a female-only club.

But a member of a gentleman's club, who requested anonymity, said that such clubs were private and therefore set their own rules.

"People have a right to belong to clubs and the membership of those clubs is defined by certain features.

"This is an issue of freedom of association," he said.

"In my observation of these things, there are never attacks made on women-only clubs. It's all quite absurd."



The elite clubs, including the Athenaeum Club on Collins St, chose not to respond to the criticism.

Source: News Corp Australia

A legal source said it was extraordinary one of the male-only clubs had invited the Chief Justice to speak while failing to offer her membership.

None of the clubs had invited the state's top judge to become a member, the source said.

Melbourne's female-only clubs include the Lyceum and Alexandra clubs.

In 2008, it was reported that the Athenaeum Club was in turmoil after it rejected a push to allow women to join.

It is believed that push came from a 130-strong member group which included former Australian Competition and Consumer Commission chairman Graeme Samuel, Collingwood president Eddie McGuire, former state Liberal Party director John Ridley and former Prime Minister's Department head Terry Moran.

At the time, Athenaeum Club president Don Heathcote was reported as banning debate on the issue as too "distressing".

"The committee now believes most members need a period free of disturbance and, having suffered distress from anonymous press publicity, seek a time for quiet enjoyment of their club," he wrote to members.

The Kelvin Club, established in 1865, was originally men-only but changed its rules to allow female membership in 1997.

[john.masanauskas@news.com.au](mailto:john.masanauskas@news.com.au) (<mailto:john.masanauskas@news.com.au>)

(<mailto:john.masanauskas@news.com.au>)

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