In Memoriam Professor William Ross Edeson

It is with great sadness and sense of personal loss that the Editors of The International Journal of Marine and Coastal Law note the death of Professor William Edeson – known to his many friends as Bill.1

Bill Edeson, whose career combined work in academia as well as with a range of countries and international organisations, was a true international lawyer's lawyer. He combined an almost encyclopaedic understanding of the practice of the law of the sea, particularly fisheries law and treaty law, with a highly endearing albeit somewhat quirky sense of humour. In 2007, for example, he

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1 Thanks to Dr. Pio Manoa, Legal Adviser at FFA, for sharing FFA’s moving tribute to Bill Edeson at https://www.ffa.int/node/2622. This notice draws heavily on that.
wrote a devastating review of the attempt to reform the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) entitled ‘A Legal Extravaganza in the Indian Ocean’. He also delighted in witty and whimsical pieces on issues such as the use of the forward slash punctuation mark (as in ‘and/or’) or the Oxford comma. He was the strongest and most articulate advocate for using the abbreviation LOSC rather than UNCLOS for the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea; a practice that IJMCL still rigorously applies.

Bill enjoyed writing and he leaves behind a substantial written legacy. In addition to a plethora of well-informed and still valuable FAO Reports, Bill was also the author of a wide range of articles on aspects of fisheries law and organisations as well as issues such as hard and soft law. His views and advice were also widely sought and respected by other well-known authors and practitioners. In 2001 he co-authored a well-received volume Legislating for Sustainable Fisheries for the World Bank that is still in print, and, in 2010, Promoting Sustainable Fisheries.

For the last twenty years, Bill was a very active and enthusiastic member of the IJMCL Editorial Board, and for the last decade has been the prime mover of the small jury that awarded the annual Gerard J Mangone Prize to the best article by a younger scholar published in the journal.

Bill began his legal teaching career at Monash University in Australia in 1969, moving to the University of Wales Institute of Science and Technology (UWIST) in Cardiff in 1970 – where his students included Vaughan Lowe (now Oxford Chichele Professor Emeritus). He moved to Birmingham University, and then in 1975, back to Australia to the Australian National University in Canberra, where he worked until 1988, taking a secondment to work for the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) in Panama where his son was born.

In 1988 he moved with his family to Rome to work in the FAO Legal Office – where his considerable legal skills were in great demand as States began to implement the provisions of the new 1982 LOSC. This mandate soon extended

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5 W Edeson, MA Palma and M Tsamenyi, Promoting Sustainable Fisheries: The International Legal and Policy Framework to Combat Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing (Brill Nijhoff, Leiden, 2010).
to the implementation of the 1993 FAO Compliance Agreement and the 1995 UN Fish Stocks Agreement. He was also actively involved in the preparation, and then implementation, of the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and the International Plan of Action on Illegal and, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing and the early iterations of what became the 2009 Port State Measures Agreement.

The Development Law Service, which he led for some time, provided highly professional advice to a range of governments, and Bill himself provided advice to a wide range of countries and bodies including Namibia, South Africa, Vietnam, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, Liberia, Ghana, the Gambia as well as the Ministerial Conference on West African Fisheries, the Bay of Bengal Programme, the Black Sea Programme, the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the General Fisheries Council of the Mediterranean – and as we saw above – the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC).

After retiring from FAO in 2003, he returned to Australia and was appointed an honorary Professorial Fellow working with the team at the ANCORS Centre at the University of Wollongong. It was an active retirement. He continued to do a great deal of advisory work, mostly in the Pacific, and from 2010–2012 he was formally appointed Legal Adviser to the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), although he continued to advise the FFA on a range of issues after 2012 and virtually up until his death. Indeed during 2021 he was very active in the development of the FFA position on legal responses to sea level rise.

His friends will remember his exuberant enjoyment of life and the pleasure he took from his work and from his friends and family. He continued working right to the end, bearing a long and painful illness with astonishing courage.