

Commissioner Alastair James McEwin

Chancellor, it gives me great pleasure to present to you Commissioner Alastair James McEwin for admission to the Honorary Degree of Doctor of the University (*honoris causa*), in recognition of his tremendous service to people with disability, and as a human rights advocate.

Over 25 years, Alastair has been an effective advocate for the rights of people living with disability in Australia and around the world. His contribution to the global and Australian deaf communities, to people with disability, and to the Australian community at large has been relentless. He is a recognised and respected role model who works tirelessly to assist other people with disability to achieve their full potential.

Alastair McEwin was born profoundly deaf in a hearing family. He was also, it seems, born to lead. His first years were spent on his family's farm near Naracoorte in South Australia before moving to Adelaide with his family to attend the South Australian Oral School – now known as the Cora Barclay Centre – where he learnt to speak and lip-read.

From a young age Alastair demonstrated a determination that would see him seek opportunities to advocate for people with disability. Attending Pembroke School in Adelaide for his primary and secondary education, he later pursued tertiary studies in Arts and Law at the University of Adelaide. Alastair has described his decision to study Law as very important in realising the human rights of all people with disability – if people with disability cannot access justice, it is difficult for them to achieve full equality before the law.

Working across the private, government and non-government sectors, Alastair has held roles such as Manager of the Australian Centre for Disability Law (2003-2006), CEO of People with Disability Australia (2006-2007) and Executive Director of Community Legal Centres NSW (2008-2016). He also spent five years as the President of the Deaf Society of NSW (2011-2016) and was the Chairperson of the Disability Council NSW (2015-2016) – the official advisory board to the New South Wales Government on disability issues. He is the former Chairperson of the Australian Theatre of the Deaf and was a Board member for the Deaflympics in 2005. Between 2011 and 2016, Alastair was the Chair of the Expert Group on Human Rights of the World Federation of the Deaf.

Alastair McEwin's systemic advocacy and policy work has seen him put his name to countless professional and personal endeavours, including as Australia's Disability Discrimination Commissioner from 2016 to 2019. Alastair is guided by the community he serves and when he commenced his role as Disability Discrimination Commissioner, he consulted the disability community to ensure his work was reflective of their views on the important issues of discrimination that they face in Australian society. With the information he received, he developed six priority areas including employment, education, housing, criminal justice system, NDIS and violence against people with disability.

Since 2019, Alastair has served as a Commissioner for the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability. He sees this role as an opportunity to serve the disability community on an issue of national significance, one that is often hidden and rarely talked about in the wider community.

In 2017, Alastair, along with his husband Professor Michael Kidd AM, established the Alastair McEwin Scholarship in perpetuity at the University of Adelaide. The scholarship lends financial support to an undergraduate or postgraduate coursework student with a disability who is

undertaking a program of study at the University of Adelaide. It is a testament to him that he chooses to support others in this way.

Commissioner McEwin was made a Member of the Order of Australia in 2019 for significant service to people with disability, and as a human rights advocate. He is the first Deaf person to be appointed as Australia's Disability Discrimination Commissioner within the Australian Human Rights Commission and participated in meetings to develop the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Chancellor, I am pleased to present to you Commissioner Alastair James McEwin, Bachelor of Arts (Juris), Bachelor of Laws, Master of Business Administration, Member of the Order of Australia, for admission to the Honorary Degree of Doctor of the University (honoris causa).

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