



NORTHERN TERRITORY
JUDICIAL COMMISSION

Statement

Dismissal of complaints about the conduct
of his Honour Justice Southwood

17 September 2025

In August 2023, the Judicial Commission of the Northern Territory established an Investigation Panel under s 50 of the *Judicial Commission Act 2020* (“the Act”) to examine and investigate a common matter arising from three complaints made against the Hon Justice Southwood (“the Judge”) arising out of a judgment published on 1 April 2015 in *Lawrie v Lawler* [2015] NTSC 19 (“the judgment”).

The Investigation Panel was constituted by the Hon. Patrica Kelly SC, the former President of the South Australian Court of Appeal, the Hon. Andrew Beech SC, a former Judge of the Western Australian Court of Appeal, and Ms Patricia Howes, a management consultant and board member of the Institute of Public Administration Australia as the community representative.

The common matter arising from those complaints which was referred to the Investigation Panel was whether the conduct of the Judge in making certain adverse findings in the judgment, and in referring two practitioners to the Law Society of the Northern Territory for investigation, was a result of, or indicative of, “malice” towards those practitioners and Ms Lawrie.

The Investigation Panel examined the matter and in a report dated 27 August 2025 determined that the allegation of malice was not substantiated and that the complaints must be dismissed accordingly. By way of summary of its conclusions, the Investigation Panel found that the evidence fell well short of satisfying it that in making the serious adverse findings, or in any step taken after the delivery of the judgment, the Judge acted with malice. Having regard to the whole of the available material, the Investigation Panel found that the markedly more probable inference was that the Judge made the adverse findings in the genuine belief that they were necessary and appropriate to make having regard to the pleaded issues and to the submissions and evidence before him.

The report was provided to the Judicial Commission by the Investigation Panel under s 53 of the Act. The Judicial Commission has resolved to publish the report of the Investigation Panel and it is now available on the Commission’s website at this [link](#).

Northern Territory Judicial Commission