

Sir Anthony Mason (1925–2026) AC KBE DistFRSN FASSA HonFAIB KC

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Distinguished Fellow Sir Anthony Mason AC KBE DistFRSN FASSA HonFAIB KC died on 17 March 2026, just short of his 101st birthday.

Sir Anthony Mason, a former Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia (1987–1995), was a towering figure in Australian law and one of the nation's most influential jurists, whose influence reshaped the nation's constitutional and common law. Renowned for his intellectual rigour, principled independence and dry wit, his judicial legacy profoundly reshaped Australian law.

Born in Sydney on 21 April 1925, Anthony Frank Mason grew up during the Great Depression and the political turbulence of the Jack Lang era. After leaving school, he

enlisted in the Royal Australian Air Force in 1944, training as a navigator in Australia and Canada before the war ended. Returning home, Mason studied arts and law at the University of Sydney, graduating with first-class honours in both. He was called to the bar in 1951 and rapidly established himself as an outstanding barrister. In 1964, he was appointed Solicitor-General of the Commonwealth, before joining the New South Wales Supreme Court in 1969 and the High Court of Australia in 1972.

Initially regarded as a conservative judge, Mason's jurisprudence evolved markedly. As Chief Justice from 1987, he championed principled legal development over rigid adherence to precedent. His leadership shaped landmark decisions, including *Cole v Whitfield*, the Franklin Dam case, Australian Capital Television and *Mabo*, as well as the development of implied constitutional freedoms and national powers.

After retiring in 1995, Mason continued extensive public service in Australia and abroad. Sir Anthony Mason leaves a profound and enduring legacy in Australian jurisprudence. He is mourned by his family, colleagues and the legal profession he served with distinction, and the Royal Society of NSW, of which he had been a Distinguished Fellow since 2018.

