

Greg Stretton SC slams 'shameful apathy' of fellow lawyers over case of Bernard Collaery

Blake Fodden – *The Canberra Times* 29 June 2021

<https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/7317767/top-barrister-slams-shameful-apaty-of-colleagues-over-collaery/>

One of the ACT's most senior barristers has slammed his fellow lawyers for displaying "shameful apathy" in relation to the prosecution of Bernard Collaery.

Greg Stretton SC was dismayed to see only two other members of the Bar at a recent rally held outside the ACT courts in support of Mr Collaery, a Canberra lawyer and former territory attorney-general.

Mr Collaery is fighting five charges alleging he breached the *Intelligence Services Act* by sharing protected information and conspiring with his former client, the ex-spy Witness K, to do so.

The allegations concern the pair's roles in the exposure of a 2004 operation in which this country's spies bugged a government building in the impoverished nation of East Timor to give Australia an advantage in negotiations over lucrative oil and gas resources.

Witness K, who pleaded guilty to a single conspiracy charge, was [sentenced earlier this month to a fully suspended three-month jail term](#).

The case of Mr Collaery, meanwhile, has been slowly dragging on as he appeals against secrecy orders that would result in "significant" parts of his trial being held in closed court.

On [the first day of his appeal hearing](#) last month, a large crowd gathered for a rally outside the ACT courts.

Mr Stretton, a former president of the ACT Bar Association, used his item in the most recent edition of the association's bulletin to express his disquiet at the lack of familiar faces at the gathering.

"The ... rally should have attracted large numbers of protesting lawyers," he wrote, describing Mr Collaery's prosecution as "a disgrace".

He said he spotted only two other barristers, Robert Blowes SC and Douglas Hassall, and did not recognise any solicitors.

"This is shameful apathy on the part of our profession," Mr Stretton wrote.

The senior counsel, who is also a former ACT Law Society president, finished with a warning for his fellow lawyers.

"If you don't speak up, don't expect anyone to speak up for you," he wrote.

Dates for Mr Collaery's trial are yet to be fixed.