

The telephone number for the STCT is:

1300 366 700

If you require hearing assistance the Tribunal has a TTY service available on:

1800 650 662

National Liaison Meeting – Compensation Issues

On 30 October 1997 the President of the AAT convened a national liaison meeting in Melbourne which specifically examined the compensation jurisdiction. The meeting was timed to coincide with the conference of the Employment and Compensation Law Committee, a Committee of the Law Council of Australia which was held in Melbourne on 31 October 1997.

Compensation is the AAT's second largest jurisdiction. Lately it has exhibited signs that it is becoming increasingly, inappropriately adversarial in nature. Manifestations of this tendency include the largest number of matters, when compared to other Tribunal jurisdictions, which settle either immediately prior to hearing or on the day of the hearing. This causes significant cost and inconvenience to both the parties and the Tribunal. It is the Tribunal's aim to ensure that matters settle as early as appropriate in its pre-hearing stages. This is not occurring in the compensation jurisdiction.

Another indicator of an increasingly adversarial stance is the dramatic increase in the number of summonses issued in the jurisdiction. Whilst applications in the jurisdiction have increased by 11% over a three year period, in the same period the number of requests for summonses have increased by 1100%.

The meeting was also convened to discuss the issue of settlement generally and hearing procedure.

Respondents, respondent representatives and applicant representatives were invited to attend the meeting.

As the President wished to encourage full and frank discussion the meeting was organised in a different manner from previous years. The day was divided into a series of three parallel workshops comprised of three groups of fifteen. Each group was facilitated by the Tribunal member and a reporter was appointed to take down the proceedings. The workshops examined the issues of summonses, settlement and hearings.

At the end of the day the President briefly summarised the main outcomes from each group in relation to each workshop topic.

The meeting provided the opportunity to openly discuss the Tribunal's concerns and the external participants' concerns with a view to developing options for the alleviation or elimination of all problems which were identified.

The Tribunal is now considering the outcomes of the meeting.

Tribunal Charter

The Tribunal will soon publish a Charter. The Charter will set out the Tribunal's commitments about the service it will provide. It will also set out the responsibilities of people dealing with the Tribunal.

The Tribunal is committed to maintaining and improving the quality of its services. It will therefore monitor its performance in meeting the commitments set out in the Charter. The Tribunal intends to report on its performance against the Charter commitments in its Annual Report.

At the same time as the Charter is published, the Tribunal will release a pamphlet setting out its complaint-handling policy and procedures.

Interpreting Policy

The Tribunal has recently renewed its policy as to the circumstances in which it will book and pay for interpreters. Under the previous policy, the Tribunal routinely used to book and

pay for interpreters where applicants could not easily do so themselves. In practice, the Tribunal invariably paid for interpreters for unrepresented applicants and sometimes did so for represented applicants.

As a result of the review the Tribunal has decided that, from 1 July 1997, it will book and pay for interpreters for all clients who need one, irrespective of whether or not they are represented.

Community Education Kit

The Tribunal has produced an "Information kit & Training package" for advocates and community workers. This package was compiled by Ms Loula Rodopoulos, a Tribunal Member based in Melbourne, and Mr Peter Kent, Manager Corporate Support.

The package covers the Administrative Appeal Tribunal's processes, as well as those of the Social Security Appeals Tribunal, the Veterans' Review Board, the Immigration Review Tribunal, the Refugee Review Tribunal and the Ombudsman.

The package was prepared in loose leaf format so that it can accommodate future changes in the structure of the Commonwealth administrative review system. The package was sent to approximately 150 peak bodies including community legal centres, welfare rights centres, disability, ethnic, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, women's and veterans' organisations and other advocates.

Other Recent Access Initiatives

Additional information sheet for overseas applicants

A number of people lodge their applications for review of a government decision while they are overseas, or they need to go overseas while their case is processed. The procedures followed in these cases are different because conferences and hearings cannot be held. The

current general information leaflets do not provide sufficient information to these applicants. Consequently the Tribunal has produced an "Additional information sheet for overseas applicants" which is available in English, Greek, Turkish, Serbian, Croatian and Italian.

Audio tapes

The Tribunal's series of five information pamphlets have been recorded on tapes for people with a visual impairment. The tapes have been distributed to disability organisations around Australia.

Large print leaflets

The Tribunal's new plain English information pamphlets are also available in large print (18 point) and in an easy-to-read font for people with a visual disability.

Video tapes

The Tribunal's video "Getting Decisions Right" was recently subtitled in an additional four languages: Greek, Turkish, Serbian and Italian. The video is also subtitled in English for people with hearing difficulties.

AAT decisions

Continued payments of AUSTUDY allowance through administrative error after applicant had advised Department that he was ceasing full-time study – applicant unsuccessful in attempting to have payments stopped – whether applicant received payments in good faith – Prince and Secretary, Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (No N95/1588 – decision (11753) 7 April 1997)

During 1993, the applicant had been studying full-time and receiving AUSTUDY payments. At the end of 1993 he was advised that he would not be permitted to continue his course. He attended the Student Assistance Centre within a few days of receiving this advice, informed them of the advice he had received, completed a form and was advised that the