



A National Profession and the NT Law Society

– What's in store for members –

Law Week

I commence my column this month with a big thank you to all members of the legal profession who put so much effort into making Law Week the most successful event the Law Society has promoted so far.

My thanks also go to the members of the Secretariat of the Law Society for their effort and planning to ensure the whole thing went off so smoothly.

Those of you who failed to attend the lunch at Parliament House missed the most amusing speaker I have heard in quite some time.

My thanks go to Richard Ackland for giving us his time and I also thank Qantas, Sedgwick and Jeanys for their support.

Amendment to Conduct Rule 4.1

Contained in "Balance" this month is notification that the Chief Justice has approved the amendment to the Professional Conduct Rules recently passed by Council.

The amendment allows legal practitioners to describe themselves as "conveyancers".

It has become necessary to allow

such description as many members of the public are under the erroneous impression that legal practitioners are now either not allowed or are unwilling to undertake conveyancing matters.

A National Profession

Indications are that national practising certificates will be introduced in 1997.

The idea is that practising certificates issued in home jurisdictions will entitle legal practitioners to practise nationwide.

A national practising certificate will be of great benefit for legal practitioners in some jurisdictions but for the Law Society of the Northern Territory it may mean financial disaster.

Its benefit to Northern Territory practitioners is also doubtful as inquiries reveal that less than ten Territory practitioners practise to any extent outside the Northern Territory.

For the 134 legal practitioners (132 of whom are noted on the Roll as "Counsel") from other jurisdictions who took out NT practising certificates in 1994/95 it will result in savings of in excess of \$80,000.

For the Law Society it will mean

a loss of 23% of its total income.

Although this Society supported the concept of a national practising certificate, I and previous Presidents have all been of the opinion that they should be issued on a user pays principle.

This principle was not accepted by the Law Council but we were assured that this Society would not suffer any significant loss of income as a result of the move to a national practising certificate.

I have to observe that were the anticipated loss of revenue to be made up from an increase in practising certificate fees, the necessary increase would be almost \$275 for each certificate.

I have been a little concerned that while other matters necessary for the move to a national profession have been receiving considerable attention, the financial plight of this Society has not.

Following representations, a member of the Law Council Executive was asked to investigate the problem and come up with suggestions to alleviate the problem.

The Law Council which itself is operating on a deficit budget has offered this Society a subsidy of \$8,500 per annum.

To my mind this is completely unacceptable.