

# Australian Women Lawyers – National Launch



*Jenny Blokland launches AWL in Darwin*

The NT Women Lawyers' Association joined the national launch of Australian Women Lawyers at their own function held on Friday 19 September in Darwin at James Muirhead Chambers.

In welcoming members and guests, Vice President of NTWLA, Theresa Van Gessel expressed thanks to PII insurers Sedgwick, who provided sponsorship for the event at the request of the Law Society, James Muirhead Chambers, Cridlands, Parap Village Tavern and Australian Gourmet Wildfoods.

Special guests at the launch included the Chief Justice, Justices Kearney and Gallop and Margaret Lyons, representing the Chief Minister.

In her speech of welcome, Theresa outlined the aims and objectives of the

national group and referred to issues which are under consideration by the group.

Current matters of concern to the AWL include proposed changes to the *Family Law Act* which will allow publication of identifying information in certain family law cases and the tardiness of the federal government in appointing a permanent Sex Discrimination Commissioner following the resignation of former commissioner, Sue Walpole. The Australian Women Lawyers will also agitate for the provision of childminding services in courts and the tax deductibility of child care expenses.

NT Women Lawyers' Association has similar aims and objectives to the national body but with a local focus, and includes protection of the rights of children among these aims. The NT group has membership from all areas of the Territory, representing all aspects of the law.

NTWLA believes that this puts them in a strong position to play an active role in seeking equality for women before the law, whether as practitioners of the law or women involved in the justice system as victims, defendant, applicants or respondents.

Jenny Blokland, Dean of the Faculty of Law was invited to launch the national body in Darwin and did so by reminding those present of the changes that had occurred in attitudes towards women lawyers in this jurisdiction. She offered her congratula-

tions to women practitioners in the Territory, making special mention of Merran Short and Sally Gearin who were in Melbourne for the national launch.

Jenny paid tribute to a number of women practitioners whose contributions to the profession in the Territory were notable. These included former Crown Conveyancer, Juliet Shields; Justice of the Supreme Court of the NT, Sally Thomas; former Secretary of the NT Attorney-General's Department, Meredith Harrison; newly appointed Secretary, Margaret Lyons; Jenny Hardy, former Young Lawyer of the year and instrumental in the setup of Darwin Community Legal Service and Eileen Terrill, accredited family law specialist, Secretary of the Law Society and former head of the Australian Legal Aid Office in Darwin.

Jenny's own contribution to the profession not only as Dean of Law at NTU but also as a former President of the NT Criminal Lawyers' Association and a current Judicial Registrar for Industrial Relations was referred to earlier by Theresa Van Gessel.

Anecdotes highlighting the change in attitude towards women in the NT's profession provided enjoyment to those present and Jenny concluded her remarks by suggesting that women practitioners might be at the forefront of creating an environment where lawyers could be not only good, competent practitioners but also reasonable human beings, leading a meaningful life.



*Women practitioners at the launch included Annetta Croft (Clayton Utz), EDO practitioner Robin Dyall and Barbara Tiffin (SFNT)*



*...and the boys gathered in the kitchen. Supporting female colleagues (left to right) Jon Tippett, John Neill, Anthony Gillies SM, Martin Hardie and Chief Justice Brian Martin*