

# Law Society Public Purposes Trust

The following letter was submitted to *Balance* for publication. The Allocations Committee of the Law Society Public Purposes Trust were invited to comment on the points raised in the letter and their response follows.

Lawyers who are members of the Law Society recently received an invitation to celebrations for the opening of the legal year. In particular functions for lawyers were held as part of the celebrations in Darwin and Alice Springs which were apparently sponsored by the Law Society's Public Purposes Trust Fund.

We are puzzled by the choice of this event as falling within the objectives of the trust and concerned that in supporting this event, the Trust Fund was not able to support other initiatives which more properly fall within the objectives of the Trust Fund. We are also embarrassed that the community may per-

ceive, as a result of the support for this function, that lawyers are willing to apply the funds from a trust fund set up for community education and advancement towards their own entertainment.

According to its objects the Trust Fund should provide support for projects and initiatives which advance legal education in the community, improve the access of the community to legal services, improve the quality of legal services available or protect members of the community using or seeking to use legal services.

Which of these objects did the function held for lawyers for the opening of

the Legal Year fulfil?

We are aware that a number of applications made to the fund in 1996 were not successful. In some of these cases no reasons for rejection were given however it was said that there were insufficient funds to meet all the proposals made for funds. We believe that subsidising such a function for lawyers who would all have the capacity to pay their own way for such a function should not be a priority for the Trust Fund.

Kate Halliday on behalf of the NT  
Association of Community  
Legal Services

## Reply from the Allocations Committee of the Law Society Public Purposes Trust

I refer to your letter to the Editor of *Balance* in regard to the Law Society Public Purposes Trust.

As the matters raised by you questioned the actions of the Allocations Committee of the Trust, I thought it fair that it be given the right of reply.

The Allocations Committee comprises a legal practitioner from a private practice, a government legal practitioner and a nominee of the Attorney-General who is not a legal practitioner.

All grants must be approved by the Attorney-General.

The Allocations Committee has asked that I reply as follows:-

The opening of the Legal Year is not a celebration but an occasion when, traditionally, lawyers seek divine guidance in their professional work and deliberations.

Such events have been conducted in Australia since 1931 and follow a tradition thought to reach back to Henry II of England.

It has also been a tradition to use such occasions to advance legal education and the examination of the law.

The tradition of using the occasion for such purposes arose due to the opportunity of reaching so many members of the profession, the judiciary and other legal service providers.

The advancement of education with respect to the law and the examination of the law certainly meets the objects of the trust.

The opening of the Legal Year is not reserved for members of the Law Society or, for that matter solely for the legal profession. The general public are invited to participate in some ceremonies whereas due to accommodation constraints, other events are restricted to invited guests. These invited guests are usually selected due to their involvement in the administration of the law and in addition to lawyers include the clergy, the military, academics, Territory and Commonwealth government representatives to name but a few.

The opening of the Legal Year was sponsored by the Law Society Public Purposes Trust only for expenses related to travel for a speaker to address the profession at church services and lunches held in Darwin and Alice Springs. The speaker selected is certainly not invited to entertain the legal community but to address the profession on matters affecting the proper administration of law and justice world wide. These speakers bring to the Northern Territory their first hand knowledge, experience and opinions, whether they be controversial or not. The Law Society has managed to secure the unpaid services of a number of eminent speakers who have taken time out of their busy schedules to speak to practitioners on important issues of the time.

In the past, the following eminent persons have kindly donated their time for the above purpose:

1997 The Hon Justice Catherine

Branson, Federal Court of Australia  
1996 Mr Mark Woods, President Law  
Institute of Victoria

1995 Commissioner B O'Keefe AM  
QC, Independent Commission against  
Corruption (NSW)

1994 The Hon Austin Asche, QC Ad-  
ministrator of the NT

1993 Mr Rob Meadows, President Law  
Council (Now Solicitor-General WA)

It should be noted that the Society uses sponsorship from Qantas, the Plaza Hotel and other organisations to keep the cost of providing a speaker to a minimum. It is the policy of the Trust that funding will not be provided for food or beverages for any project it funds and in fact whenever funding for food and drink has been sought by any applicant, it has been specifically excluded.

The amount allocated for the guest speaker for the opening of the legal year accounted for less than 2% of the funds available in 1997 for allocation by the Trust.

Following correspondence with the Attorney-General, the Allocations Committee will in future, if appropriate, give unsuccessful applicants reasons why a grant was not forthcoming. Although the Allocations Committee agrees in principle and has sympathy with the majority of applications that fall within the objects of the trust, available funds make it impossible to approve an allocation to all such applications. Applications received

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