

# *Ferae naturae* by Maria Ceresa, Executive Officer

NT Lawyers, like horses, have a birthday each year. For you lot it is 1 October. That is the date your current practising certificates expire.

Now there are those among you who have planned ahead and got your applications forms in. In fact Geoff James was first. This assists the four person secretariat to process more than 400 applications and get your practising certificates to you in time. A special thanks to the early birds and a reminder to the stragglers to get their applications to the Law Society.

On another note members will be pleased

to know we are investigating a better process for lodging proxies for the Law Society's Annual General Meeting. This year was well attended in person by about 50 practitioners holding 163 proxies. While the president Jon Tippet was elected unopposed (see page 10 for more details), I would like to pass on a sincere thank you to two outgoing members of council who have provided valuable service to the council for many years.

First to Max Horton of Alice Springs whose dry wit, substantial experience and sense of history will be sorely missed and to Richard Coates whose measured,



*Maria Ceresa*

insightful and inspired advice has been sought constantly by the secretariat and many in the profession.

Oh yeah and thanks most of all to Steve Southwood. A tireless, dynamic President who has put the Law Society squarely on the map and built a solid foundation for its future. Cheers!

## Witnessing East Timor *From page 1*

They started early observing the unsealing of the empty ballot boxes and continued until the close of the poll, and the transfer of the ballot boxes under armed guard to the UNAMET headquarters.

Ms Ditton says, "I will never forget the courage and the determination of the 98.6% of registered voters who came out to vote - most were in line by 6am. I even saw one mother with a one hour old baby. The voters had been suffering intimidation for months, if not years, right up to the moment of the vote. In some areas there were deaths from shootings just prior to the vote and people fled to the hills, but still they returned to vote."

The morning after voting day the vehicle Ms Ditton was travelling in back to Dili was pulled off the road by heavily armed militia with army standing in the background. The passengers, comprising an East Timorese driver and international observers from the Phillipines, Indonesia, Hongkong, Thailand, Japan and Finland as well as Australia were placed under the "total control of the militia - but possibly influenced by the Phillipino observer in the front seat being a nun wearing a habit the militia let us through without incident."

As soon as all the ANFREL teams got back to Dili there were report back sessions, press conferences and monitoring the checking and counting procedures for the votes brought back to Dili by helicopter from regional centres.

While travelling round Dili during the days after the vote as part of the ANFREL

mission Ms Ditton watched the security situation deteriorate, the militia taking ever greater control of the streets. "We all slept fully dressed and had discussed the possibility of militia attack on the Boy Scout Hall where we were staying." Ms Ditton had the personal good fortune to leave East Timor just before the outrageous and genocidal actions of the police and military backed militias immediately after the declaration of the



*Stephen B'eeby, Shigetsugu Komine and Pam Ditton, ANFREL.*

results of the vote.

Despite those frightening experiences Ms Ditton said she was prepared to work with ANFREL as an election observer again. After witnessing the courage of the East Timorese on voting day, and watching the ensuing events with total horror, she is considering what personal contribution she can make in the near future in East Timor.

Ms Ditton called on the Northern Ter-

ritory legal profession to support the East Timorese people.

"As Territorians we have had long and close ties with East Timor. We have a continuing responsibility of a special nature, which individuals may fulfill in different ways. Some may assist by giving money to aid projects such as Caritas, others may respond more directly by providing their professional skills to the East Timorese people in the coming days and months." The minimal infrastructure Ms Ditton observed during her short stay has now been destroyed.

## Volunteers for East Timor

NSW Supreme Court Justice John Dowd has approached the NT Law Society to be the liaison point for legal practitioners volunteering to assist the International Commission of Jurists in that taking of statements for a war crimes tribunal. Justice Dowd said the ICJ was modelling the procedures to the stringent standards and requirements met by trials in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia. President Jon Tippet said the Law Society would do all it could to assist the East Timorese and the ICJ. Volunteers should contact the NT Law Society for the essential criteria and further information.

*\* Images of the East Timorese people have been pixellated for their protection.*