

On the horizon

Freedom of Information debate

NTWLA will be holding a debate on freedom of information on Wednesday 26 July 2000 at approximately 7.00pm. Stand by for more details. Any members wishing to be a debater, please contact Melanie Little on 8941 5655.

Reconciliation Pledge Book

Everyone is encouraged to sign the Reconciliation Pledge Book, a nationwide project. Lawyers for Reconciliation will be ensuring that the book is circulated throughout the legal profession. The signatures will eventually be bound together as evidence of the measure of support for reconciliation.

Federal Court

The Federal Court of Australia is holding a briefing on human rights on Friday 7 July 2000 from 2pm to 3.30pm at the exhibition gallery at the Darwin Entertainment Centre, 93 Mitchell Street, Darwin. Matters to be discussed include the new role of the Federal

Court, changes to the human rights jurisdiction, access and procedural matters. This briefing will give practitioners the opportunity to learn first hand. Contact 02 9230 8263 to RSVP.

Mandatory sentencing

It is important that members do not forget that mandatory sentencing is still adversely affecting many people in the Northern Territory. It remains the case that people are being imprisoned for minor offences and second and third strike adults are becoming increasingly common. An adult is imprisoned for a minimum of 90 days for a second property offence and a minimum of 12 months for a third offence. There is no discretion. It is too easy just to say: "well they should have learnt the first time" — as practitioners would know there is often a myriad of factors involved in the commission of an offence. The courts presently have no discretion to distinguish between cases and this leads to a system which can never be just. Yes, some cases are so serious that these minimum penalties may be warranted. But many are not. Because of the high clear up rates outside the Darwin area, and the fact that many people in the communities are prepared to answer questions when police approach them. Aboriginal people are already being significantly affected by these penalties. It would be a great shame if history showed that it was not until non-Aboriginal Territorians were being adversely affected by the 2nd and 3rd strike penalties that this law was finally repealed.

TEWLS volunteer roster

Please contact Top End Women's Service on 8941 9989 if you are interested in being on their Wednesday afternoon roster (between 4.30 — 6.30pm). The service attracts a wide range of cases. It is an important advice and referral service to women in the Top End, with phone advice being provided for women outside the Darwin area and appointments for those able to attend at the office.



Melanie Little, President of the NT Women Lawyers Association.

Thanks to Britt Lardelli

Britt Lardelli has resigned after being a NTWLA secretary and committee member for 2 years. We would like to thank her for all her efforts. She is off to Vanuatu for six months as a Youth Ambassador and then will be returning to the NT to live in Alice Springs. Any members interested in becoming Secretary until the next AGM (or longer) should contact the Committee.

Australian Women Lawyers

I was pleased to be able to be in Melbourne when Justice Callinan presented AWL with a print of Mademoiselle Jeanne Chauvin at a function held at the Victorian Supreme Court Library. Mlle Chauvin was the first French woman to be admitted to law and the print shows a lively tutorial session with fellow students. At the function on 26 May 2000 AWL board members attended from most parts of Australia and a large crowd was there to witness the unveiling.

Patron Justice Thomas

Congratulations to our Patron Justice Thomas on her recent award. Her achievements have been outlined in this edition of *Balance*. Justice Thomas contributes widely in the community and it was good to see her efforts recognised in this way.

New committee

Please let us know if you are interested in being on the 2000/2001 committee.

Membership

Please forward your membership renewals to GPO Box 3384 Darwin 0801.

AIJA Conference reminder

Territory practitioners are encouraged to register for the 18th Annual Conference of the Australian Institute of Judicial Administration (AIJA) which will be held in Darwin between 14 — 16 July 2000.

Registration details can be obtained from:

Complete Conferences

PO Box 40645
Casuarina NT 0811
Tel: 08 8985 1909
Fax: 08 8948 3566
E-mail:
women@northernexposure.com.au