

FOR THE PUBLIC GOOD: THE FIRST NATIONAL PRO BONO LAW CONFERENCE

4-5 August 2000 National Convention Centre, Canberra

An open letter from Commonwealth Attorney-General Daryl Williams AM QC MP

I hope the legal community of the Northern Territory will play a major part in the First National Pro Bono Law Conference to be held in Canberra in August.

The legal profession has a long, proud and generally unacknowledged history of providing voluntary legal services to the Australian community.

The Federal Government is committed to ensuring that people who come into contact with the justice system have a range of options for solving their legal problems and to supporting legal aid commissions and community legal services.

But governments -Commonwealth, State and Territory - cannot work alone. The provision of pro bono work by the legal profession has always been, and will always be, an important tool in working together to relieve social disadvantage.

Pro bono work is integral to the legal profession's commitment to the community and is an important means of promoting a sense of community service and professional responsibility, especially among young lawyers.

I am pleased to host this conference to honour and promote the benefits of pro bono work to the legal profession and the community.

Representatives from senior levels of the judiciary, the Law Foundation of New South Wales, the Victoria Law Foundation, the NSW Public Interest Advocacy Centre and the Public Interest Law Clearing House of Victoria, Voluntas, the Australian Law Reform Commission, the School of Law and Legal Studies at Latrobe University plus members of the profession will play a prominent role in the conference.

Representatives from the public and private legal sectors, jurists, legal educators and representatives from the business and philanthropic sector are invited to take part in this historic meeting.

A number of organisations with a particular interest in the provision of pro bono services have offered their support for the conference including the Law Council of Australia, National Legal Aid and the National Association of Community Legal Centres. These organisations are assisting in the development of the conference program and sessions.

The conference aims to acknowledge and publicise the value of pro bono work to the community. It is intended that it will result in innovations to help promote pro bono initiatives at a local and national level.

The Conference will also provide a working forum for all practitioners actively engaged in pro bono and public interest initiatives to meet and share information and skills.

It will examine and encourage best pro bono practice, including better coordination-ordination of existing services and further development and innovation in the delivery of pro bono legal services. The conference will also consider the development of networks and mechanisms to encourage exchange of information and skills and coordination of pro bono initiatives among legal professionals and agencies engaged in pro bono work.

Other issues to be considered include awareness of the range and importance of pro bono legal work to the Australian community and structural impediments to the provision of pro bono legal services. The conference will also examine ethical issues associated with the provision of pro bono services and the approaches to pro bono which are being adopted in other countries.

I have invited a reference group to work on a program for the conference. Working parties dealing with broad topics such as *Pro Bono Network Coordination*, *Innovations in Public Interest Pro Bono*, *Making the Legal*

System Pro Bono Friendly, and *Research and Publication on Pro Bono* have been established. Sessions being considered for the conference include:

- Creating a Pro Bono Friendly Legal System;
- Defining Pro Bono in Practice;
- Co-ordinating Delivery of Pro Bono Services;
- Pro Bono Ethos and Ethics;
- Pro Bono as Professional Legacy;
- Pro Bono at the Bar;
- The Legal Profession in Transition — the Role of Pro Bono;
- Pro Bono Outreach: Matching Needs with Services;
- Managing Pro Bono in Practice;
- Pro Bono: Overseas Approaches;

It is proposed that an implementation group will meet at the conclusion of the conference to evaluate the conference and plan the way forward.

On the social side, I look forward to meeting those attending the conference at a range of functions including a luncheon at the High Court and a dinner at Parliament House.

I hope that the conference will provide a real opportunity for the profession, and the community it serves to focus on the essential role that pro bono plays in assisting Australians to access, and understand, our legal system.

The First National Pro Bono Law Conference will be held in Canberra on Friday 4 and Saturday 5 August. I look forward to seeing many of you there.

Further information on the conference can be obtained from officers in my department. For matters relating to the program, please contact Janet Douglas (02 6250 5868). On administrative matters the contact is Thane Cooper (02 62506418 or e-mail: thane.cooper@ag.gov.au)