

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

NT Women Lawyers Association held its Annual General Meeting on 27 September 2001 at the Office of the Ombudsman in Darwin and elected a new president and committee for the year ahead.

Immediate past president Jacqueline Presbury welcomed and congratulated the new committee after presenting her annual report to members. An edited version of her report is printed below:

This has been a very busy year for the Committee with the focus on increasing paid up membership and lifting our profile in the community.

Membership was down from October 2000 to about 35 members. In April/May 2001 we ran a campaign to increase that number by offering a reduction for the remainder of the current membership (up to 30 September 2001) on condition that the membership for the following year be paid in full. This offer, combined with a prior campaign of reminders, increased NTWLA membership to 72 members as of 30 September 2001.

NTWLA publishes an article in the NT Law Society magazine *Balance* each month which serves to put issues important to our association before the profession. It has also been utilised to keep our members and the profession informed of our activities and achievements.

Australian Women Lawyers

Kate Halliday is continuing as the Australian Women Lawyers Board member. It is important that we continue to be a part of the national organization. NTWLA thanks Kate for her efforts. We also thank Melanie Little who graciously agreed to step in during Kate's absence in Dili, East Timor. Kate was absent for four months working with a local organisation in Dili known as Fokupers (see *Balance* June 2001 p12). She says it was an invaluable experience and no doubt Kate left her mark as a result of her contribution.

AWL is looking at ways of determining contribution from state and territory

associations. At their AGM they will be considering a working paper which suggests a levy of \$5.00 on each member from each state or territory or a 10% of fees collected from each state or territory.

Representations have been made against the individual levy. However, the time has come to consider increasing our own fees which have remained static for some time.

Dame Roma Mitchell Memorial Debate

NTWLA held a public debate to honour Dame Roma's life with the apt topic: "Do we need a Bill of Rights?" A reception was held afterwards in the Supreme Court foyer. The feedback from participants was fantastic, with many people suggesting we make it an annual event. The debate was advertised in the *NT News* under public notices. It was great to see such a positive response from people outside the profession. It certainly had the impact of lifting the profile of the profession as a whole.

Law Week

Our main contribution to Law Week was a fund raising Quiz Night at Shenanigan's. It was the first event on the Law Week calendar. The amount of \$520.00 was raised. It was agreed by the committee to donate \$500.00 to Kate Halliday's expenses in Dili. Kate declined, however, and instead the processes are in place to donate it to Fokupers, the association in Dili where Kate voluntarily worked.

Mentoring

Due to requests from younger members of the profession a mentoring program was considered at by the committee. An open invitation was made but we had no further response. Maybe it needs revisiting.

Judge's Reception

Justice Sally Thomas, patron of NTWLA, hosted drinks on the Judges Balcony of the Supreme Court on 15 June. The theme was "Indigenous Women and the Law". There were about 60 people in attendance. The speakers were indigenous women working in



Jacqueline Presbury

legal or legal related areas. It is certainly an area with particular impact on the Northern Territory. Our thanks to her Honour Justice Sally Thomas for sponsoring the event, to the speakers and to the Supreme Court for making the venue available.

WL's national quarterly meeting

Frieda Evans NTWLA secretary attended the AWL's national quarterly meeting in June 2001 in Perth. Her attendance was sponsored by NTWLA. Melanie Little who was filling in for Kate Halliday was unable to attend.

AWL's AGM October 2001

NTWLA has agreed that \$200 is to be contributed to enable Kate Halliday to attend the AWL's AGM in ACT. AWL are contributing \$600. It is suggested that contribution be determined at the beginning of the installment of the new committee on the basis that a lump sum is allocated and that the NT Board representative determine how it is to be applied, or that allowance be made for attendance at the AGM. This is for future discussion.

Jane Mahoney Memorial Library

Jane Mahoney's father, Sir Curtis Keeble, has donated \$300 for the purchase of books for the library. Titles are being determined. Once chosen we are going to purchase some flowers and take a photograph with all those involved (including Donna Dreier as Sir Curtis

Continued over

addressed his request to Donna).

The Law Society has also donated a title *Sheila* by Lloyd Davies. It is an inspirational read.

Finances

We sponsored the Dame Roma Memorial Debate at a total cost of approximately \$1,200. However, set off against this was the gold coin donation and the raffle which raised about \$400. The Quiz Afternoon raised \$520 and as previously stated \$500 of this has been earmarked for donating to Dili.

Thanks

Thanks must go to the committee and particularly to those who put in a huge effort to ensure that NTWLA remains an active and vibrant association. Thanks must also go to members generally. Special thanks to her Honour Justice Sally Thomas and the NT Law Society for their support of the Association.

I am standing down after two years on the committee, one as president. I wish the new president and committee well.

New Committee

The new committee includes the following representatives:

President, Sandra Robinson, Hunt & Hunt

Vice President, Kate Halliday, TEWLS

Secretary, Frieda Evans, Supreme Court

Treasurer, Sally Gearin, William Forster Chambers

Committee Member, Jenny Devlin, NT Legal Aid Commission

Committee Member, Jo Tomlinson, De Silva Hebron

Committee Member, Sylvia Tomazos, De Silva Hebron

Committee Member, Megan Lennie, Hunt & Hunt

Public Officer, Kathryn Ganley, Office of the Ombudsman

Vice President Kate Halliday will also continue as the NT representative to the Board of Australian Women Lawyers (AWL). Kate was offered sponsorship by AWL and NTWLA to attend the AGM of AWL but was unable to attend due to the sudden demise of Ansett. On this occasion Kate will attend by telephone.

DEFENDING THE ENVIRONMENT

The Environmental Defender's Office (NT) has been in operation since 1996. It is located in Darwin and was created in response to a need identified in the Keating government's Access to Justice reforms for specialist public-interest environmental law community legal centres. It is mainly funded by the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department under its Community Environmental Legal Program.

The Office is constituted as an incorporated association and is managed by a committee drawn from its membership. It is part of a national network of EDOs established in each capital city in Australia (plus one in North Queensland).

The role of the Office is to provide a range of legal services, including legal advice and information, representation, research into and comment on policy and law reform issues, and education about environmental law. Services are generally provided without charge, although the Office does seek to generate income from some of its activities.

The Office employs a solicitor, Tim Prichard, and an administrator, Sally Lineton.

"Environmental law is a huge and burgeoning field which touches upon almost every other area of law," said Tim. "The fascinating thing about my job is the variety. From defending uranium protestors to commenting on proposed environmental impact assessment legislation, advising

community groups and individuals about planning and heritage law, gene technology regulation, native title, mining, pollution and waste management, protection of endangered species, greenhouse, landclearing, the list is almost endless.

"Our object is to help people to protect the environment through the law.

"We are also active in seeking improvements to the law. Here in the Territory we are behind the other jurisdictions in many respects. For example, we badly need freedom of information laws, third party appeal rights in planning cases, improved heritage and environmental impact assessment laws, effective landclearing controls and better regulation of mining, to name a few. Importantly, we also need to provide for better enforcement of environmental laws and mechanisms for members of the community to take action where authorities are unable or unwilling to do so," said Tim.

"As a community organisation we want to ensure there are adequate opportunities for public input into decisions which affect the environment, such as decisions about zoning, assessment and approval of development proposals, management of natural resources and commercial use of wildlife.

"The benefits of involving the community in these decisions are apparent not only from a community and an environmental point of view, but from a commercial and governmental perspective as well," he said.

"Ultimately we all have to share the same environment so everyone should be able to have a say in what we do with it."

The EDO is open from 9.00 to 5.00 Monday to Friday. Tel: 8982 1182, Fax: 8982 1183, edont@edo.org.au. **New members welcome.**



Committee members at the Environmental Defenders Office AGM held at Darwin Community Legal Service on 26 September 2001. Tim Prichard is second from left.