

A whole lot more for your practicing dollar

As the practicing year comes to a close and a new one begins, members are quite likely to be asking what they get for their practicing certificate dollar.

The answer: "a whole lot more".

Whilst I don't pretend that what follows will be the most riveting read, it is guaranteed to enlighten.

Apart from the annual renewal of practicing certificates, in itself an intensive month, distributing information, receiving all documents, checking for compliance and issuing and delivering certificates, most legal practitioners do not conduct business with the Society very often and are most likely to contact the Society when coming to or leaving the jurisdiction.

In the main, communication from the Society to most of you takes the form of the monthly magazine *Balance*, facsimile reminders about Continuing Legal Education seminars and for a relative few of you, to answer a complaint.

Or you may be one of an increasing number of practitioners that are attending the Law Society organised functions. There are eight such functions to take place this year. (The Martin Kriewaldt address at luncheons in Alice Springs and Darwin promise to be stimulating events). These events provide an opportunity to mix, network, exchange ideas and perhaps have a robust conversation or too, oh yeah and some fun.

But the Society is about more than just fun.

Too often overlooked in the functioning of the Law Society Secretariat is the work involved in fulfilling its statutory duties.

While most practitioners may immediately think of complaints handling and the number one item in this area there are a large number of others.

Each is associated with an administrative load usually started

with a telephone inquiry. These include handling Admissions local, interstate and foreign, operating the Continuing Legal Education program, regulating and monitoring the operation of practices not only in the Territory but increasingly in cyberspace, there are monthly council meetings requiring agendas, minutes and of course action, legislation to be commented on, certificates of fitness to be issued, Ethics rulings to be made and liaison with other law societies and legal organizations in other jurisdictions to be conducted. In addition the Law Society provides administrative services to the Public Purposes Trust Committee, the NT Council of the Law Reporting and of late the Legal Practitioners Trust Committee and the Fidelity Fund Committee.

Then there are the meetings of the Society committees. They now number 16.

The Society's first strategic planning meeting held in January 1999 marked a sea change in the direction of the Society demanding a shift in emphasis to policy work to be performed in addition to the Society's existing administrative tasks.

This period has seen the Society gain a higher profile in the media and greater relations between the legal profession and the community. Law Week has been reinvigorated and *Balance* has been transformed from a newsletter to a well-read magazine.

The Society often acts as a conduit between the local legal profession and the broader community. An example was the recent Discovering Democracy workshops. Conducted by the Education Department, the Society organised lawyers to speak at the seminars attended by teachers.

Such events assist in a tiny way the



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perception of practitioners in the wider community.

In addition to the aforementioned is the flurry of activity prompted by the President of the Society. The current workhorse often has ideas termed as President Inspired Projects or more fondly by the Secretariat as PIPs. Their only guarantee is that they require a mountain of work.

The 13 reports of the Society's planning committees distributed at the Annual General Meeting demonstrate the substantial achievements of the 2001-02 and cement it as the Society's most active council since the Law Society's inception in 1968.

Rather than slow down this year it seems the President wants to ratchet the work load up a notch.

Given the demands faced by the Society in relation to the national move for uniform legislation for the legal profession, the President is right in expecting there will be much to be done.

Aside from the national arena there are many other things requested of the Secretariat. Such as a handbook outlining how a practitioner goes about setting up their own practice, there are pleas to change the Legal Practitioners Act to allow electronic transfers in relation to trust accounts and long-term solutions to the Professional Indemnity Insurance to be considered.

It is your Society and your profession, so get involved and get your money's worth.①