

# Braham and Wood, their thoughts

In last month's *Balance*, the Attorney-General and the Shadow Attorney-General spoke about their year in politics. This month *Balance* asked Independents Lorraine Braham and Gerry Wood to outline their views on justice issues. With the Legislative Assembly make-up of ALP 13, CLP 10 and Independents 2, both could one day be in a position to change the legislative-scape in the Northern Territory.

One of my major concerns is community safety, especially for women in Central Australia.

One statistic starkly highlights the problem – that Aboriginal women in Alice Springs are 41 times more likely to suffer domestic violence than women elsewhere in Australia.

The problem of violence against Aboriginal women presents challenges to many community sectors, and not least the legal community.

Earlier this year, I proposed a motion in Parliament on violence against Aboriginal women.

The Labor government made minor amendments to the motion, but it received unanimous support.

The government has recently responded with a pilot program of new hospital screening procedures aimed at detecting victims of domestic violence and referring them to support services.

I am pleased to see that my suggestion of a media campaign aimed specifically



Above: Lorraine Braham, Member for Brainting.

at Aboriginal communities is being developed.

But I have been waiting in vain for the results of the government's review of the "no-drop" policy – where police are supposed to pursue assault charges against an alleged offender, even if the victim decides to withdraw the charges.

It appears to me that police officers are not using this discretion often enough, and perhaps stronger support is needed to encourage them to do so.

The Chief Minister said during parliamentary debate that an independent consultant was reviewing the no-drop policy and determining whether it should be modified to make it more effective.

I'd like to know the results of that review.

On a more positive note, I commend the government on the new Unfitness to be Tried legislation which is aimed at protecting the community from random and unprovoked acts of violence from offenders who for reasons of physical or mental impairment, cannot stand trial in the ordinary way.

Government needs to be reminded constantly of the impact of crime on victims and the community generally. ①

There's been a lot of talk about steep learning curves in the past year, and as far as legislation and the parliamentary process go, I've been on one too.

As Chair of Committees, I feel I should be fairly familiar with the intent and content of new bills that come before parliament.

But the pace with which the Labor government has presented legislation – not just amendments but new laws – has been relentless.

There've been almost 100 bills in the past 12 months.

I've often resented the occasions when the government has chosen to deal with the bills on urgency, because it's left even less time to come to terms with them.

I had been hoping that the pace might slow a bit over the next year, so that more attention could be paid to individual bills, but I notice that the



Above: Gerry Wood, Member for Nelson.

latest budget contains funding for more staff to INCREASE the speed of legislative reform.

The drafting of laws is a mystery that is

still revealing itself to me: the particular format and language, the formality of the language, the repetition and the minute detail.

Minders and officials who've offered briefings have been patient, but perhaps their patience is running out – recently a message came back to me that I could have a briefing as long as I didn't ask any "silly questions".

(I presume that asking what is, and why have, a conjunctive "or" is a silly question.)

I think that highlights one of the problems facing the legal profession and the wider community – if a layman confronts the justice system, it's foreign and complicated and not easily explained. ①