

Renouf heads up National Pro Bono Resource Centre

Former Territory lawyer Gordon Renouf has been appointed the inaugural director of the new National Pro Bono Resource Centre.

The former NAALAS director and DCLS coordinator has been undertaking work for the Australian Securities and Investment Commission in Indigenous consumer issues.

His new appointment will see Mr Renouf use his considerable experience in access to justice, consumer and law reform issues.

Launched by the Federal Attorney-General Daryl Williams in August the National Pro Bono Resource Centre will aim to promote the delivery of high quality pro bono legal services across Australia.

It seeks to identify and overcome barriers faced by practitioners in providing pro bono work and improve mechanisms for linking clients and communities in need with pro bono services.

The Centre has been established by a consortium of organisations led by the Public Interest Advocacy Centre and its core funding will be met by the Commonwealth.

"It will be an independent national organisation managed by a widely representative Board," Mr Renouf said. "The Centre will be also supported by a broadly based Advisory Committee."

The Centre will not duplicate the work of existing pro bono schemes, rather it intends to undertake activities that support the pro bono efforts of schemes, firms and individual practitioners.

In particular the Centre has no role in referring clients to appropriate pro bono service providers or in providing legal advice.

"There are plenty of lawyers currently providing pro bono services, both directly to the public and through various matching schemes," Mr Renouf said.

"We intend to work to make pro bono easier for firms and more accessible to clients.

"There are a number of obstacles to high quality pro bono – these include financial barriers such as filing fees, transcript and interpreter fees, limited access to expert support in areas where the pro bono lawyer is not a specialist and concerns about legal or commercial conflicts of interest.

"The Centre will be able to provide national coordination of efforts to address issues such as these."

The Centre will also promote the sharing of information about good practice in pro bono with a Best Practice Handbook for Managing Pro Bono law.

The handbook will include practical 'how to' advice for practitioners on issues such as promoting a pro bono culture, models of pro bono practice, risk management and quality assurance, budgeting and record keeping issues, and the availability of expert support, disbursement assistance and fee waivers.

"There are many effective pro bono activities being undertaken in Australia and internationally. I hope the Centre can identify and promote good ideas for improved pro bono practice," Mr Renouf said.

A key activity of the Centre will be identifying ways in which parts of the community that have poor access to legal services can be matched with pro bono legal services.

Mr Renouf is particularly interested in ways in which pro bono service providers can develop partnerships with particular disadvantaged communities to provide a broad range of assistance over a longer term.

"We can't get away from the fact that there are significant numbers of clients with meritorious cases in areas such as family law, criminal law and administrative law who do not have access to the advice or representation they need," he said.

"But not every legal problem involves

litigation and not every lawyer who wants to undertake pro bono work is a court room specialist. There are a whole range of skills possessed by lawyers that, applied creatively, could be used to produce long term improvements in the circumstances of disadvantaged communities."

The Centre is currently recruiting two additional staff and hopes to attract a secondee from a law firm in the near future.

Until established in its own premises the Centre is located in the Public Interest Advocacy Centre in Sydney and can be contacted on 02 9299 7833 or by email at grenouf@piac.asn.au ①

NOTE: Mr Renouf will be in Darwin from 18 to 24 October and is keen to speak with anyone interested in pro bono issues.

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