

# Setting goals for 2003

Just when members of the Secretariat thought it was safe to crawl out from behind the reams of paper generated as a by-product of its workload, the Council of the Law Society holds another Strategic Planning Meeting.

Surprisingly, for all the unpleasantness of the October weather, the 13 members entered the arena on Saturday 2 November armed with new ideas and a level of excitement that has re-energised the organisation for the coming practising year.

In the past this weekend event has been reserved for the first part of the new year but the new Council decided it wanted an edge and gave itself three extra months to achieve its objectives.

Among the new projects identified was alternative dispute resolution. As the emphasis on resolution by engaging in alternatives prior to litigation increases, the Society has dedicated resources to the development and implementation of a strategy in relation to ADR. Input from members on how the Society could best assist them in this area would be gratefully received.

Another clear focus arising from the meeting was the need to convince the community of the value of the legal profession.

Rather than chipping away at this problem, a long-term strategy for selling the profession will be developed. It will be no mean feat to change public perceptions about lawyers but it could be worse.

I believe the Society has better odds than other industry organisations that represent for example real estate agents, journalists or God forbid, used car salesmen. In the main the profession has much to skite about. Most importantly, the vital role the profession plays in a civil society.

Most practitioners do more than deliver a specialised service to their clients and often quietly go about plying their skills to help community, sporting and other community groups.

Another identified need was the requirement of the Society to widen its membership base and carry out research on the satisfaction level of members.

These initiatives come in addition to the high priority tasks of identifying



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further income for the Society and exploring strategies to reduce Professional Indemnity Insurance premiums in a hard market.

Another issue requiring urgent attention is the future of the articles of clerkship program in the Northern Territory with the imminent introduction of national admission competencies. The Society has commissioned a report on this topic and will be analysing the possibility of enhancing the current arrangements with PLT style courses.

There is so much to do ...and there is now three extra months to do it in. ①

## Regulation of the NT Profession

Although inquiries to the Society have remained high, it is expected that the number of complaints received by the Law Society this year may be slightly down on previous years.

Up to the middle of November, the Society had received 105 inquiries and investigated 52 complaints in the 2002 calendar year.

This compares with 97 inquiries and 72 complaints investigated in 2001 and 135 inquiries and 70 complaints in 2000.

In line with previous years the main areas of complaint are in the area of costs and delay.

Ethics Committees were convened on three occasions in 2002 after prima facie cases against the practitioners were found. Two of those complaints were withdrawn prior to hearing. A third Ethics Committee was due to be convened this month.

During 2002, the Law Society Council resolved to charge one practitioner with professional misconduct before the Legal Practitioners Complaints Committee and to charge a further person with practising law without a current

practising certificate, contrary to Section 22 of the Legal Practitioners Act.

An appeal against a Law Society decision, involving a number of complaints was finalised with the Legal Practitioners Complaints Committee dismissing a number of the complaints. The remainder of the complaints were withdrawn by the complainant.

This year also saw two "strike offs" of former practitioners Bill Somerville and Jonathon Nolan, from the Supreme Court roll after LSNT actions brought against them.

The Society is in the process of developing a new complaints data base system to allow improved collation of data and the use of that information in enhancing professional standards among practitioners in the Northern Territory.

The new system is expected to be operational in the New Year.