

FERAE NATURAE

Times are a changing. To plot for survival in this climate the Law Society Council endured a Saturday planning meeting holed up in the appropriately named Monsoon Room as a tempest brewed outside.

From this intensive session emerged the direction for the Law Society for the coming year and beyond. The priorities for the Society in 2002 have been outlined in the identification of 13 major issues.

The immediate result has been the establishment of 13 planning committees and a month-long schedule of lunch time meetings to set the directions for each of the objectives for the year.

The wholesale amendment of the Legal Practitioners Act has been given the highest priority for the Society. The lawyers among you tell me that anyone who has attempted to steer a course through the LPA will find the exercise frustrating and end the task with more questions than you started with. The number of patch jobs on the Act over the years has created anomalies. This, coupled with the changes to practice nationally, present a real challenge for the administration of the profession under the Act. The task of combing through the Act, identifying the problems and finding solutions has begun in earnest. The planning committee would be pleased to hear from the profession in relation to problems they have encountered in dealing with the Act.

The reform of the complaints system has been a long-stated priority of the Society. While much work has been accomplished in this area, there is still much to achieve. The upgrade of internal procedures is well underway. The planning committee aims to provide the profession with new by-laws to be considered at the AGM in September. In addition the Society has analysed the operation of the three-tiered system currently in place involving the Law Society, the Legal Practitioners Complaints Committee and the Supreme Court. The committee will formulate a submission outlining improvements to the entire system.

Professional Indemnity Insurance in the Northern Territory is affected by a myriad of factors which all add up to increasing premiums. The Law Society has set a two-part strategy aimed at securing the best possible deal for the NT profession for the next year and into the future. As pressure increases from the national arena for big firms to opt out of state and territory schemes, the Society has taken steps to explore the establishment of a joint scheme for the smaller jurisdictions. In the short term the planning committee will work with the brokers to achieve the lowest possible premiums for practitioners.

A review of **the investment of Law Society funds** was considered timely and good practice management. A team of three will spearhead this exercise with a view to maximising return with minimum risk. The planning committee will also look to identifying additional income streams for the Society.

As national competency standards for admission are being adopted around the country, the Law Society is looking at issues relating to **the admission of legal practitioners in the Northern Territory**. The Law Society supports the adoption of those standards but is looking at the practicalities of meeting those requirements in the Territory context.

The Law Society will seek to work with **the Northern Territory University** with a view to an external review being conducted of the degree obtained from the law faculty in reference to accreditation.

Following the top six, comes seven other important projects. **Two public issues** have been identified as of concern to the legal profession of the Northern Territory. They are **public liability** and the **mandatory detention of asylum seekers**. The council will shortly develop public positions on both these subjects and input from the profession would greatly assist.

The maintenance of local practice in the Northern Territory is a subject of concern for practitioners faced with the push toward national and uniform practice. At the Federal political level the desire to move to uniform practice



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may manifest itself in the adoption of the practices of the largest state. While this may be desirable, there are practicalities that this planning committee will review from the point of view of the legal services available to and the protection of the Northern Territory public.

In terms of pressing issues the location of **the Law Society premises** is fast approaching. The current lease arrangement on NT House is due to expire in March 2004. This planning committee will explore the options for where the Secretariat could reside after that date.

The management of **the fidelity fund** has been a priority for the Society. The Council will now take all steps to bring this project to fruition. This planning committee will also explore any options that may exist for securing the financial viability of the Society.

A solid year-long program for **Continuing Legal Education** for the Northern Territory profession has been produced in this edition of Balance. The program will be supplemented, from time to time, with additional speakers. Please note that CLEs will routinely be held on the third Wednesday of the month. The Society has also committed to providing videoconferencing of the CLE to practitioners in Katherine and Alice Springs.

Other projects include the **upgrade of the Website and IT facilities at the Secretariat** together with the provision of **information brochures** for both the profession and the public.

Feel free to contribute to any or all of these issues and tasks.