

AGM news and a final report from Gabrielle

On Friday 26 August 2005, I attended the Supreme Court Library to celebrate the life of Jane Mahoney who died tragically in 1999, and the new additions to the Jane Mahoney Collection. The intention of this section of the Supreme Court Library is to foster knowledge in the areas Jane was interested in, Women, the Environment, Children and Human Rights in the Northern Territory Legal Profession and enable practitioners to read more widely. I spoke a little about Jane's life and her impact on the people who knew her when she was living in Darwin and working in the legal profession here. Jane was a gentle and unassuming person with a highly developed sense of personal and professional integrity. She was sorely missed by those who knew and loved her. She was a great loss to the Darwin legal fraternity, to the small community of Mandorah where she lived, and to the wider community, generally. The event was well attended. Jack Karczewski QC, Nathan Crafti and Peter Tiffin were especially welcomed. Also, there were some enthusiastic CDU students who were lucky enough to have a brief but very personal tour of the Supreme Court afterwards.

I attended "Sundowner Drinks" at the Charles Darwin University by the Law Students' Association on 7 September 2005. About 20 to 25 students attended and I shared some of the history of NTWLA and AWL with them. Thank you to Clare Sturm for organising this event and the law students of CDU.

Lastly, the Annual General Meeting was held on Friday 9 September 2005 in the ground floor conference room of the Department of Justice. My report to the meeting appears separately in this edition of Balance. There were twenty or so members who attended the meeting. All the new committee members were elected unopposed. Many of the members stayed on and enjoyed the refreshments very kindly sponsored by the Chief Executive Officer of the Department of Justice, Richard Coates. Many thanks to the members who attended, especially, Barbara Tiffin

who chaired the election of the new committee, and Richard for his generosity.

AGM Report

Most legal practitioners in the Northern Territory would be familiar with the existence of the Northern Territory Women Lawyers Association Inc (NTWLA) but not what the Association is all about.

The objects of NTWLA are:

- * to provide a common meeting ground for women lawyers;
- * make suggestions and work for the reform of the law and the administration of the law, particularly as it affects women and children;
- * to work for the advancement of women; and
- * to participate as a body in matters of interest to the legal profession.

Over the last two years, my focus has been, among other things, to create opportunities for women lawyers to meet and support each other, and to inform the membership of issues pertaining to the objects of the Association. One of the consistent issues for the profession over the last two years on the national and local level has been the consideration and adoption of the Model Equitable Briefing Policy by law firms and government legal services.

NTWLA enjoyed another successful year. When I became President two years ago, NTWLA had 27 members. The membership has reached almost 50 members (there are 46 paid up memberships and 4 honorary memberships). Also, I have received fourteen nominations for positions on the NTWLA committee, and nominations for all executive positions. I feel very comfortable in the knowledge that I am relinquishing the role of President at a time when interest in NTWLA is peaking, prospective committee members are keen to take up their roles and the membership is still growing.



NTWLA President, Gabrielle Martin

Over the last year, the recognition of women in the law in the Territory has continued to increase on that of the previous year.

Early in the 2004/2005 year, NTWLA congratulated the newly appointed Queens Counsel, Suzan Cox QC and Raelene Webb QC. They represent the first two women QC's ever to be appointed in the Northern Territory. There have been several appointments of women to senior positions in the law in the same period. Cathy Spurr, Managing Partner of Halfpennys Solicitors was named the winner in the Business Woman of the Year, Westpac Small Business category.

There are about thirty barristers who have chambers in the Northern Territory. Five of this number are women and they are Raelene Webb QC, Sally Gearin, and Judith Kelly of William Forster Chambers, Lyn McDade of Edmond Barton Chambers, and most recently, Georgia McMaster of Myilly Point Chambers.

I would like to believe that the activities of NTWLA in the last two years have had a small part to play in this increase in the upward mobility and recognition of women in the law.

The Northern Territory Women Lawyers had several successful events in Alice Springs this year. These included a dinner for Justice Murray and Magistrate Little and Patrons Drinks. Dr Nanette Rogers was the guest speaker for that event. She spoke eloquently and passionately about her early days as a legal practitioner in

nt women lawyers

Sydney. Another event was drinks held in honour of Acting Justice Martin and his wife Lorraine in February 2005. I wish to acknowledge Povey Stirk Lawyers' generosity in their support of NTWLA in Alice Springs over the last two years.

NTWLA held a number of successful events in Darwin. The Chief Justice's Dinner at Hanuman in November 2004 was extremely well attended. The Chief Justice spoke revealingly about his life and times growing up in Adelaide and he graciously withstood the good natured heckling from some senior members of the profession.

In January this year, Darwin saw the hosting of the Annual Judges' Conference and invited women judges to join them for dinner at Pee Wees restaurant. The event was well attended by Territory women lawyers and gave them an opportunity to meet with the judges.

The Patrons Drinks held on 21 July 2005 was another well attended event for Northern Territory Women Lawyers. Raelene Webb QC spoke about her years leading up to becoming a solicitor and her times as a barrister. Raelene's presentation was very well received.

NTWLA celebrated the life of Jane Mahoney with drinks at the Supreme Court Library in August 2005. Jane's father, Sir Curtis Keeble, wrote to me and included a very generous donation for the Jane Mahoney collection in the Supreme Court Library. The drinks celebrated recent additions to the collection.

The first ever NTWLA event to be held at Charles Darwin University was on Wednesday 7 September 2005. I met with law undergraduates and other students on that occasion. It was well attended. I wish to thank Clare Sturm for organising the event.

As part of my Australian Women Lawyers duties in 2003/2004, I attended a face-to-face meeting in November 2004 in Adelaide. The second face-to-face meeting was held in May in Darwin 2005 and the Board had the opportunity to meet with Territory women lawyers. There were several social opportunities for the Board and members expressed their pleasure in being able to meet in Darwin for the first time. I would especially like to thank Sally Gearin for organising drinks at William Forster

Chambers, and Colin McDonald QC, Head of Chambers, for hosting drinks for the Board and making them feel so welcome.

NTWLA participated in the collection of statistics on appearances of barristers in the Supreme Court for Australian Women Lawyers (AWL). Those statistics will be reported on by AWL before the end of 2005. I wish to thank the staff of the Supreme Court for their assistance in the collection of those statistics.

With the passing of the new *Associations Act*, the NTWLA Constitution had to be redrafted. A sub-committee was formed which consisted of Heather Ross, Frieda Evans and myself. Consequently, after many sub-committee meetings, a new Constitution was drafted. It was passed at a Special Meeting in May 2005. I wish to thank those members who attended that meeting to vote for the new Constitution and especially Frieda Evans and Heather Ross for their valuable contribution in the process of drafting the new Constitution.

I would like to thank the 2004/2005 Committee who were Sally Gearin (Treasurer), Jodie Mather (Secretary), Frieda Evans, Sharon Krause, Sarah Thompson, Judith Dikstein, Clare Sturm and Helen Nicholls. I would also like to say a very warm thank you to Melanie Little SM and the Patron, Justice Sally Thomas for their great assistance, generosity and support in organising the Patron's Drinks events and their continued support of NTWLA over the last two years.

I would also like to thank Richard Coates for allowing NTWLA the use of the facilities of the Department of Justice over the last two years and his generosity in providing for the refreshments for this AGM.

Lastly, I must thank the extraordinary effort, good nature and willingness of my secretary, Danielle Scrimgeour, without whom, NTWLA would not have functioned so well over the last two years.

Before I write my last few words as President of NTWLA, I am reminded of the words spoken by Dame Roma

Mitchell, the first woman to be appointed to the Supreme Court in South Australia. Dame Roma was always outspoken about equality. She said in her *Phillip Hughes Oration* at St Michael's Collegiate, Hobart in 1993, that she and her contemporaries had been all too aware of the prejudice against them in their chosen professions because they were women. They believed that if they ignored the prejudice it would go away, determined that they personally would not be submerged in their efforts to succeed. "I think that we were right for our time in adopting the maxim "softly, softly catchy monkey", but I also think that that time has passed." And later, "There is a need for affirmative action, not to give preference to women over men in employment, but to ensure that women do not suffer detriment by reason of gender."

With that sentiment, I wish the new NTWLA committee all success in their new endeavours in carrying out the objects of the Association over the next twelve months.①



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