

CATS Committee

By Justice Trevor Riley.

As someone mentioned to me recently, it does not seem that long ago that we were pleasantly surprised when the doors to a shopping centre automatically opened as we approached. Now we walk through such doors without thinking, knowing they will automatically open. I would be surprised (and injured) if they did not.

If you pause and think for a moment, our world is changing rapidly and often without us realising it. The telex machine came and went in the blink of an eye as did the so-called automatic typewriter. Everyone now has a mobile phone. Arthritic grandparents communicate by means of text messages. My 84-year-old mother communicates by e-mail. Voice recognition is effectively upon us.

The dramatic (and yet sometimes unnoticed) changes apply to every aspect of our lives. Of course they also apply to the courts and in that area we are desperately trying to keep up. In an effort to ensure that we do so some years ago the Court established the Court and Technology Strategy Committee (so named I suspect to give it the catchy acronym CATS). The committee consists of representatives of the Supreme Court, the Magistrates Court, the profession, the Department of Corporate and Information Services and courts administrators. It has been around long enough that we are now working on our second 5-year plan.

The early focus of the committee was the use of video conferencing in the courts. In this regard the Northern Territory was at the forefront. We were amongst the first to use the technology for taking evidence from remote locations intra-Territory, interstate and internationally. We were quick to employ it so that prisoners were not brought in from the gaol on arraignment days. We have, of course, used it extensively and for a widening range of applications ever since. Leaving aside the ongoing problems we have with Alice Springs, the video conferencing facilities in our courts are very good.

The committee has also been involved in such significant projects as the establishment of the websites for the Supreme Court and the Magistrates Court. Supreme Court judgments and sentencing remarks are now publicly available on the website. The website is being developed as an educational facility. A Supreme Court sentencing database has been developed and is being progressively made available to the profession. The Committee had significant input into the creation of the new Court 6 which, thus far, has performed admirably. The Committee facilitated the introduction of wireless



hotspots which were used extensively by the media in a recent high profile case. Those hotspots remain available for the profession. The capacity for the court to record the evidence of children in accordance with the requirements of the Evidence Reform (Children and Sexual Offences) Act 2004 and to edit and replay that evidence in the course of a subsequent trial has been addressed.

Some of the issues that are presently being considered and addressed by the Committee include moving towards the introduction of an E-court, the creation of a Work Health database and the prospect of video-recording the evidence of all witnesses in criminal matters. As we move forward the Court needs to ensure that we maintain a continued capacity to communicate with all other arms of government and with other courts throughout Australia. In this regard national standards are becoming increasingly important.

There are many issues to be addressed and we are endeavouring to ensure that the courts in the Northern Territory remain up-to-date. If any member of the profession is aware of any issues that need attention or of any ideas that may benefit the courts in the Northern Territory through better use of technology, I would be pleased to hear of these.

Missing Will

Any person or firm having knowledge or possession of a Will of Bruce Vivian Shaw of various addresses in Western Australia and the Northern Territory who died on 26 March 2005 in Brisbane, Queensland, please contact:

Ellison Moschella & Co, Solicitors,
Mr Simon Pattison, on (07) 3221 8655 or
by facsimile (07) 3221 6568