

Why the Gouldian Finch?

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I read that the Gouldian Finch was staging a comeback from their status as “endangered.” The finch is a Territorian, very colourful and enjoys hanging out with its mates having a drink at a waterhole. In this health and wellbeing issue of *Balance* the finch is a powerful symbol of Territorian resilience and the notion of celebrating collegiality and overcoming the challenges of practising the profession in this often harsh landscape.

You will see in this edition of *Balance* a number of articles about professional conduct and trust accounts. It is hoped that we can regularly feature articles about the regulatory work of the Society.

Mental Health Breakfast

I acknowledge the great support of the Attorney-General and the Department of Justice in co-hosting the Mental Health Week Breakfast. Approximately 75 attended, and we were overwhelmed with the interest for the event and the appreciation expressed afterward. Given this success the Society will aim for a similar function next year and continue to explore the Alice Springs events calendar.

Planning day

The new Council undertook a planning day on 29 October 2011. The Council underscored the need for a Communications Strategy that ensures members and the

Community are aware of all the hard work that goes on and can see the Society performing its functions. The Council also agreed the Committees for 2011/12. The Council will continue to oversee the Committees to ensure they are best equipped to further the objectives and inform the work of the Society.

The Council has taken some steps along a strategic planning process which will culminate in a Strategic Plan to see the Society into 2015. The urgent need for the Council to engage in visionary thinking was crystallised by two things:

- The announcement of the host jurisdiction/s for the national legal profession
- The CEO of a law society in Southern Africa telling how she risked her life in a protest where 18 people were killed – fighting for the independence of the judiciary

The profession’s self-regulation evolved as a mechanism to maintain standards and protect the independence of the profession, which in turn underpin the independent judiciary. This is a fundamental principal of civilized society that we ought not to take for granted. This independence is in the interest of all citizens. But the push by legislators to have a tighter grip on regulation in the name of consumers is an international trend – which we will not be able to keep at bay. With change on the horizon it will be all too easy to lose our way if we don’t

have clearly articulated objectives.

CEOs from law societies around the world converged on Adelaide for the annual conference of International Institute of Law Association Chief Executives (IILACE). One of the key take home messages from that gathering was that the issues facing law societies are the same. Those countries which have already federated their societies, talked of the same challenges – how to balance the regulator and membership functions – how to better deliver to members and to gauge success. And of course the cloud.....

On the home front the big news is that hot on the heels of our new President we welcomed the new Attorney-General, the Honourable Rob Knight. Within days of the announcement the Society met with the new A-G. We were encouraged by the warmth of the reception and the enthusiasm with which he has taken on the work of the portfolio.

The Society also welcomed the appointment of Her Honour Sally Thomas as the new Administrator. The Honourable Ms Thomas gave the annual Menzies Oration which focused on the link with health and crime, echoing themes that resound in recent policy developments.

In the short time of Peggy’s presidency she has issued three media releases, with 100% strike rate. Topics included the new Attorney-General, Youth Justice Review. We are endeavouring to ensure those releases are posted

to the website in a timely fashion.

Some of the other issues that have been tackled in the last few months are the Alcohol Reforms. The Society raised concerns regarding the absence of a requirement for a BAT notice to be served on the recipient. Additionally the Society pressed for assurances that legal representation will be allowed before the Tribunal particularly in instances where the Northern Territory Police or other parties are legally represented or legally trained.

There has also been success in seeing some fairly offensive provisions in the *Housing Act Amendment Bill* removed. The Bill proposed Housing Safety Officers with greater powers than police but without any specialist training or oversight. The amended Bill has removed these provisions.

The Society welcomed the financial closure on the new prison. The Society has long rallied for the prison to have the capacity to deliver training and rehabilitation programs and the poor conditions at Berrimah were never going to be able to deliver.

On 4 August 2011 I joined other members of the Business Council at a long overdue meeting with the Chief Minister. The focus of that meeting was how to get industry and business working closer with Government on the 2030 vision for the Territory. The Chief Minister confirmed that at least in part the thinking behind the Cabinet reshuffle was the recognition of this issue.

Child Support

On 18 October 2011 I attended the Northern Territory Child Support



Megan Lawton took part in the National Ride to Work day

Stakeholders Engagement meeting. A key discussion point was "clients" of Medicare, Centrelink and Child Support making assumptions about information sharing as a result of the merger into the new Commonwealth Department of Human Services. There are clear policy reasons why personal information cannot be shared across the agencies and importantly there is a need to encourage clients to advise changes in circumstances to all agencies – to avoid being hit with debts that are difficult to dispute later.

Opening of the Legal Year and Law Week

Planning is well underway for OLY 2012 and some creative juices are flowing around Law Week. We are investigating a targeted approach to community involvement rather than leaving these things to chance.

Website

Our website is continuing to be updated, with plans afoot for a major overhaul in the New Year. We are always happy to hear from members about what they want from the site. Clearly it is a portal for members and the community to find out about the Society and engage with the Society's functions. We are hoping to move towards online CPD registration and to keep information about firms and practice areas up to date to minimise such calls to the Society. We have also had reports of difficulties possibly associated with the browser and we are happy to hear about these (so we can take action).

These are but some of the issues on the Society's radar. I look forward to keeping you updated and informed.

Until we meet again ●

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