

# In and out of weeks and almost over a year

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Welcome to 2017. In some ways it's difficult to believe that we're back at the start of another year so quickly. I hope that everyone had a wonderful time over Christmas and has settled back in after the holidays.

The Society was busy right up until the Christmas break and has been a hive of activity in 2017, as the year begins to take shape. In November 2016, shortly after the annual general meeting the new Council met to critically analyse past performance and to set plans and goals not just for the year ahead, but with a slightly longer view over the next three years. I thank Clare Martin for once again facilitating the conversation at the strategic planning day with great effect.

It is an important fact that the 2016/17 Council remains extremely diverse. The Council has representation from the legal assistance sector, the private profession, government and the corporate sector, as well as a collective experience across many practice areas, including criminal law, family law, civil litigation, commercial law, legal policy, corporate law and administration and governance. It is extremely well-placed to fulfil its functions and serve the members.

I thank outgoing Northern Territory Young Lawyers (NTYL) president Hugh Bond for his service to the Council. Hugh has been an outstanding president of the NTYL and during his two years on the Council he has been an important voice for the issues and challenges that affect graduate clerks and young and junior legal practitioners in the

Northern Territory. I wish Hugh well and look forward to working with the NTYL's new leadership team this year.

At the strategic planning day, the Council discussed the Society's vision around supporting and enhancing the legal profession in the Northern Territory and advancing access to justice. The Council is committed to being accessible and accountable to members and the importance of continuing to develop in areas such as:

- Transparency in decision making.
- Communication and strengthening member engagement across the Northern Territory, including in the regions.
- The enhancement of services, such as in access to CPD opportunities, Territory-wide.
- Governance and succession planning for the Council.
- External stakeholder engagement, particularly having regard to the significant changes in the composition of the parliament.
- Advocacy, including own agenda advocacy, as distinct from responsive advocacy.

The Society is continuing to update the website and has installed a direct contact function to all of the Councillor profiles. As members will know, latest news, updates, media



releases and submissions are also regularly posted on the website.

Against the backdrop of new leadership at the Supreme Court and the Northern Territory Government, there are a number of exciting challenges and opportunities for the legal profession in 2017. The Society will be kept busy as the government implements the law and order policies that it was elected on. This includes a wholesale review of the youth justice and care and protection of children legislation, the establishment of an Independent Commission Against Corruption and significant law and order reforms such as establishing specialist and therapeutic courts and the abolition of many mandatory sentencing laws.

A number of consultation papers have already been released and the Society will continue to actively engage in consultations with the government on behalf of the legal profession. Additionally, the final consultation paper for the *Australian Solicitors Conduct Rules (ASCR)* will soon be completed. As with the uniform law, the Society has taken a long-term view of the ASCR and it is anticipated that consultation will take place throughout the year. The question of whether to adopt the ASCR or not is an important one for the legal profession and the Society will issue a request for comments and input from members as soon as practicable, so keep an eye out for that.

At this time of year, I'd like to pause and make a number of acknowledgements and updates:

- I thank the Society committees and other volunteers, who provide their time and expertise in considering issues and consultation papers all year around. The standard of the Society's submissions is set by this contribution and is for the benefit of the legal profession. Many committees have already met in January and I look forward to being part of another successful year in committees in 2017.
- CPD in the calendar year commenced with a presentation on pleadings given by Master Luppino in Alice Springs on 10 January and in Darwin on 17 January. It is not often that practitioners are able to hear practical tips, views and handy dos and don'ts from the gatekeeper of the pleadings and the large audiences at both seminars greatly appreciated this opportunity. The Society is extremely grateful to Master Luppino for making himself available to give the presentations.
- As has become a regular fixture in Darwin at the beginning of the year, the Start at the Top Family Law Conference was held in Parliament House on 19 and 20 January. As with previous years, the 2017 conference was attended by delegates from around Australia, including many members of the Federal Circuit Court of Australia and the Family Court of Australia. The 2017 conference was a tremendous success, both professionally and in promoting collegiality, which is also so important in modern legal practice.
- I'd like to thank the Family Law Committee, chaired by Society Councillor Sally Bolton, which produces the conference with the support of the courts and the Secretariat. The Society's new membership and events coordinator Erin Key did a magnificent job in facilitating the arrangements and coordinating the conference, especially so soon after she started work with the Society. I'd also like to thank Judge Peter Cole for his long-standing commitment to the conference and his energy and drive in working with the Family Law Committee to produce the program and organise the conference once again and so successfully.
- Over the holidays, the Society was also involved in several topical discussions in the media. At the end of 2016, the presidents of all of the Australian law societies wrote an open letter to the Prime Minister and Attorney-General regarding the steady erosion of funding to community legal centres and the looming funding cliff on 1 July 2017, where some \$35m, the equivalent of 30% of funding will be withdrawn from the sector.
- At the same time as the open letter was sent, the law societies coordinated a targeted national media campaign that called upon the federal government to commit to properly fund community legal centres in the 2017 budget. Community legal centres are already chronically under-resourced and it is plain that any further cuts to their already strapped budgets will have a devastating impact on the centres and on the community.
- The Society was also active in the media in relation to youth justice issues; both in terms of the publication and reporting of youth justice proceedings, as the Northern Territory is the only jurisdiction in Australia where juvenile courts are completely open to the public and make no restrictions on reporting proceedings, as well as in the considerable public debate about youth