

Omphaloskepsis

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This is my final President's column for Balance, as my third consecutive and final year as President comes to an end at the AGM on 15 November 2017.

I would like to take this opportunity to say a few thank-yous, do a bit of navel gazing and also a bit of crystal ball gazing.

Over the past three years, the Society has made great efforts to improve services to members, enhance regional engagement and develop communications strategies and stakeholder relationships. The challenge has been for the Society to strike the right balance between advancing these broad goals, fulfilling its statutory responsibilities and enhancing its own governance frameworks.

I think that the Society has been effective in doing just that and I am proud to reflect on where the organisation has come to over this time. I would like to thank the legal profession of the NT for the support that has been given to me as President. My experience has been that the work of the President is the sum of many parts and I am grateful for the wide, open, constructive and collaborative way in which the profession at large has engaged with me.

I am equally indebted to the staff at the Secretariat and the members of all of the Councils that I have

worked so closely with as President. I acknowledge the importance of all of these relationships individually and collectively, but I would like to make a special mention of Candice Maclean. As a Councillor and a volunteer, including the Vice-President between 2012 and 2016, Candice's commitment and contribution to the Society has been immense. I thank Candice for her support, guidance and friendship, which I could not have done without.

I also acknowledge the Society's regional members. Through my work as President, I have gained a real appreciation of the additional challenges of regional legal practice, brought about by factors such as distance, isolation and resourcing constraints. It has been wonderful to have met and worked with this special group of lawyers, who persevere through these difficulties in pursuit of higher principles such as the benefit of their clients and the benefit of the legal profession.

In my view, one of the most important advancements over the past three years has been the Society's increased support for Territory-wide local legal practices. I am proud to have been a member of Councils that have continually re-affirmed and actively backed measures to support the sustainability of the legal profession throughout the NT, so that it can in turn provide legal services to the entire community.

For example, in making decisions about PII, the factors taken into account by the Council included the need to maintain the viability of the scheme of insurance in accordance with the *Legal Profession Act* and the need to ensure that all legal practices are able to obtain PII at a reasonable price. The Society has worked hard to achieve consistently competitive and affordable premiums for practitioners and thereby support local legal practices, particularly small and regional practices. These types of decisions have been complemented by enhanced internal governance, as the Society has established policies that guide certain regulatory functions and give effect to consistency, fairness, transparency and accountability.

The Society has also worked hard to strategically compete in the CPD market, so as to deliver high-quality CPD that is widely accessible and of value. The significant investment that the Society has made in technology is now enabling CPD to be delivered more broadly and to wider audiences.

The Society has continued to raise awareness and promote measures to enhance diversity and equality in the legal profession. The profession's uptake of member support services, such as those provided through the EASA, is one indicator of the developing awareness of the importance of mental health and wellbeing.





Over the past three years the Society has also been required to represent the views and values of the Territory legal profession in communications and advocacy. The Society has established itself as an important non-partisan and counterbalancing voice in support of fair and just laws, the integrity of the justice system and the integral role that the legal profession plays in achieving access to justice and upholding the rule of law.

As a constituent body member of the Law Council of Australia, the Society has played a leading role in supporting and promoting major initiatives such as the National Attrition and Re-engagement Study, the Legal Aid Matters campaign and the 2017 Justice Project. As a member of the Making Justice Work coalition, the Society has made important contributions to the '6 Asks' to Make Justice Work for Territorians and continues to publicly call for effective, evidence-based law and order policy as a better means of reducing crime, recidivism and imprisonment rates.

In addition to public advocacy, the Society has continued to work constructively with stakeholders from within government, the judiciary and academia on behalf of members about a wide range of matters relating to legal practice, court resourcing and legal education.

In 2017, the Society reset its Strategic Plan to 2019 and the renewed goals allow future Councils to build on this work and to respond to emerging challenges. I am confident that the new strategic plan will enable the Society to effectively progress its own agenda and continue to successfully promote the interests of the legal profession.

I am also confident that the Strategic Plan will ensure that the Society is well-placed to respond to national developments in legal practice. For instance, it is important that the NT continues to be closely involved in the discussions about the uniform law. It is also important for the Society to keep pace with the advancements in innovation and technology in legal practice.

The Society must also maintain a place as a leader in the strategies to achieve diversity in the legal profession; the Bilata Legal Pathways Program and the National Model Gender Equitable Briefing Policy, amongst others, so

that the profession and thereon the judiciary become increasingly reflective of the community they are each there to serve.

The legal profession in the NT of course remains proudly self-funded and self-regulated. The simple fact is that this model requires the healthy rejuvenation of the Council. As legal practitioners, the challenge we have is to play a part in contributing to and shaping the direction of the Society.

The Society is where it is today because of the crucial volunteer support that the Territory legal profession has always given. We should look at the roles on the Council and committees as point in time commitments for us to make in the way that is right, when the time is right. For the model to function effectively and for the legal profession to continue to prosper, healthy succession through the Council and committees is necessary.

The years I have spent on the Council have been challenging and rewarding. It has been a privilege to serve as a Society Councillor and even more so to have been entrusted to hold the position of President for three of those years.

It is with much gratitude that I sign off for the last time and wish the next Council every success in continuing the extremely important undertaking of supporting and advancing the legal profession in the NT.