



How's your workplace?

MARIA SAVVAS President, Law Society NT

I've been working as a practitioner for almost 20 years. As a junior lawyer, my enthusiasm for the profession and a supportive workplace got me through long days and weekends at work. Occasionally I would fumble my way through matters which I was underprepared for and be on the receiving end of a well-deserved lecture from judges about the importance of being prepared. Despite that embarrassment, I considered myself one of the lucky ones. My employer was understanding and supportive and my experiences with the judiciary were generally good. Some of my colleagues endured different experiences with their employers and the courts. They struggled with their workloads and an unsupportive or bullying employer. Others endured the trifecta—excessive workloads, an unsupportive employer and run-ins with the Court. Many had the sense to move on to a different employer, often interstate, while others decided to leave the profession entirely.

These issues remain ever present in our profession, and no doubt occur in other workplaces. The issues are complex and a 'one size fits all' solution doesn't, in my view, work. The expectations and needs of employers, practitioners and the Courts vary. What one person describes as bullying in the workplace, whether in a Court room or the office, others describe as constructive criticism or a learning opportunity.

It is not uncommon to regularly read about bullying in the workplace across Australia, including judicial bullying. The recent publicity about the conduct of some judicial officers within the Territory and nationally is of considerable concern to the legal profession. A cutting remark is often overlooked and excused on the basis that even judges can have a bad day. It's the repeated act of being unreasonable which causes a risk to the health and safety of practitioners that simply cannot be tolerated by the profession. For many practitioners, the courtroom is their workplace where they spend several hours every day. Practitioners are entitled to feel safe and supported in their place of work. The Society is determined to support the profession and continue to take up these issues where appropriate and provide members with assistance. Such assistance may be in the form of

escalating complaints to the head of jurisdiction, developing relevant CPD programs, or simply actively listening to any complaint.

As you would be aware, the Society has been working with the heads of jurisdiction and other stakeholders to develop a proposal for the introduction of a Judicial Commission in the NT to deal with complaints about the conduct of judicial officers. The Society is engaged in ongoing discussions with representatives from the Department of Attorney-General and Justice about this proposal. In recent communications with the Attorney-General, we were informed that legislation to create an NT Judicial Commission will be introduced in early 2020. I congratulate the Attorney-General for supporting this initiative. I also extend my thanks to Chief Justice Grant and former Chief Judge Lowndes and Chief Judge Morris for their strong and courageous support for the establishment of a Judicial Commission.

I realise that the establishment of a Judicial Commission is not a complete solution, and that we must as a profession, continue to actively listen to each other in order to understand the full extent of what is happening in each other's workplaces and to come up with more solutions. In order to have an accurate and reliable picture of what is actually happening in workplaces, including in court rooms, and to enable the Society to continue to advocate for its members, we have invited the profession to share their experiences and views on this issue. Please feel free to contact me or any of my fellow Councillors.

I also remind members that LawCare provides free and confidential counselling services to all Society members.

Serving on Council continues to be a challenging and rewarding experience. I recognise that there is still a lot of work to be done to progress issues such as workplace bullying within the legal profession.

This year the Society has focused on delivering its strategic goals and implementing planned objectives. The Society launched its Health and Wellbeing Program and I'm proud to say that this initiative has

been well-embraced by the profession. The program was conceived by Council as a recognition of the need to bring about a general awareness of mental health and wellbeing issues faced by the legal profession all year round.

The establishment of the Law Reform Advocacy Committee has seen the Society become proactive in the area of law reform with a number of submissions made to NT Government of our initiative. Combined with efforts of the Society's Royal Commission Response Sub-Committee, significant advocacy has been undertaken in the area of youth justice.

As the sole statutory body responsible for regulating the profession, the Society recognises the need to respond efficiently to regulatory complaints. The Society has increased resources within the Secretariat in order to increase its capacity to resolve regulatory matters in a timely manner.

The Society continues to regularly engage with members in regional areas to ascertain their needs. With three Alice Springs Councillors, the Council is up-to-date with the experiences and issues experienced by members in Alice Springs and this greatly assists with formulating strategies to address any issues.


The Legal Practitioners Fidelity Fund has been adversely affected by declining markets and the Society has, in recent years, been under pressure to reduce its expenditure from the Funds Management Committee. Over the past three years the Society has made cuts to its budgets. This year Council has made difficult decisions to reduce staffing levels and re-locate premises.

We are now turning our focus towards forward planning for the Society and establishing a new strategic plan for the benefit of the profession and to ensure the long-term sustainability of the Society. We will continue our focus on advocating on issues such as inadequate legal funding and holding the government to its commitment to abolish mandatory sentencing. We remain committed to advocating for the full implementation of the Royal Commission's recommendations for the protection and detention of children.

I have immensely enjoyed contributing to the work of the Society and working with the Councillors and Secretariat. I thank members of Council and the committee members for volunteering their time to support the profession. I also thank the members of the legal profession and judiciary for their encouragement and ongoing support of the Society. ■

Contact Maria

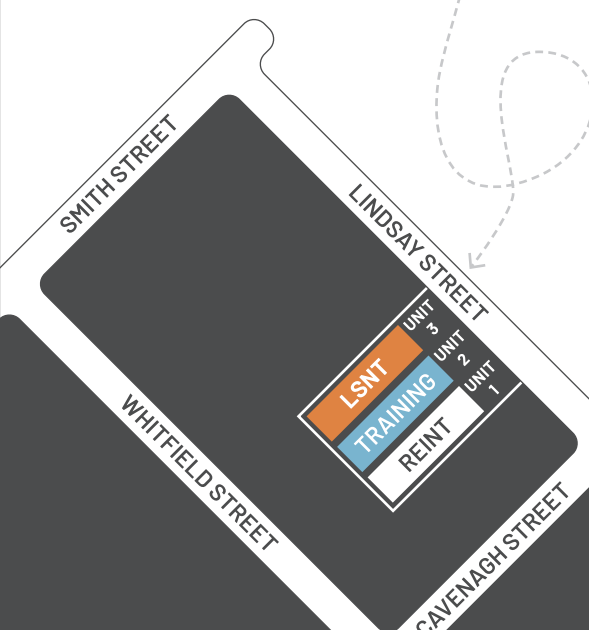
I can be contacted through the Society or via email: maria.savvas@savvaslegal.com or on 0418 810 491



We're moving...

In November to:
3/6 LINDSAY STREET, DARWIN NT, 0800

Further details will be provided to members via email and the *Practitioner* e-newsletter.



Law Society NT Members'

Christmas Drinks



Members of the legal community are invited to join the Society for some festive cheer, bubbles and canapés.

DARWIN
5-7 pm, Friday 6th December 2019
Billabong Room, Novotel
100 the Esplanade, Darwin City
RSVP: [LSNTxmasDWN19.eventbrite.com.au](https://www.eventbrite.com.au/e/lsntxmasdwn19)

ALICE SPRINGS
5-7 pm, Thursday 12th December 2019
Poolside, Mecure Resort
34 Stott Terrace, Alice Springs
RSVP: [LSNTxmasASP19.eventbrite.com.au](https://www.eventbrite.com.au/e/lsntxmasasp19)

