



Clayton Utz reception to mark its pro bono commitment Monday 22 October 2007, 5:30pm Level 28, Riparian Plaza

**The Hon Paul de Jersey AC
Chief Justice**

I am very pleased to add my respectful commendation upon the firm's 10 years' serious commitment to pro bono work.

Two hundred thousand hours of voluntary work amounts to almost 400 hours per week, or ten lawyers working full-time, on the basis of a 40 hour week. I note the Chief Executive Partner's estimate that pro bono work nationally accounts for 2.5% of the firm's total legal work.

Lawyers are perfectly entitled to charge fees commensurate with their qualifications and expertise. But the reality is many people consequently cannot afford to access the legal services necessary for the resolution of their problems.

Public service lies at the heart of the professionalism of a lawyer. That has two primary aspects: first, being generally available and prepared to deploy one's legal talent in aid of those seeking those services; and second, recognizing nothing short of an obligation to assist those with a good cause but without the financial capacity to pay for those services.

Access to justice concerns not only what happens at the courthouse, but extends beyond that – to the provision of legal advice and other assistance.

We acknowledge serious limitations on the accessibility of civil justice in the courts, and we continually look at ways of enhancing that access. But there is a broader, usually anterior limitation on access to justice, and that falls to be addressed in the solicitor's office and sometimes barrister's chambers.



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Actually taking on a client, with all the travail that may involve, in the expectation of no financial recompense, but with the assurance the client's legal position will be properly explored and presented, is I think the ultimate expression of the true commitment of a legal practitioner to the ideal of public service.

The large nationally based firms attract a measure of sceptical comment, often I believe ill-measured, on the basis they are blinkered by material motivation. Last Friday, I had the advantage of reading the Clayton Utz 2007 pro bono report entitled "Community Connect". It demonstrates a genuine, comprehensive, well coordinated commitment to pro bono work, producing substantial individual and community benefit.

From my perception of community attitude, and I hope I do not presume in thinking it is reasonably well-informed, members of the public generally regard the legal profession as expert and ethical. If people were more broadly aware of pro bono endeavours of the proportion summarized in that 2007 report, that public regard would be even more markedly one of approval and gratitude.

I am extremely proud of the way the Queensland profession has risen to the pro bono challenge, especially over the last decade. Encouraging this thrust has been a persistent theme of my relationship with the profession over that period, and I am grateful for the profession's supportive response.

This evening, I particularly and warmly commend Clayton Utz upon its embrace of the pro bono initiative, and all those individual lawyers within the firm who have actually done the work.