

QPILCH WALK FOR JUSTICE
Brisbane, Friday, 15 May 2009

Your Honours; QPILCH Coordinator, Tony Woodyatt; supporters and friends of QPILCH.

Who was it who said, "I'd like mornings better if they started later"? It wasn't the Queensland Attorney-General who rang me yesterday to apologise for missing this year's QPILCH Walk for Justice. He tells me that he is an early riser, very fit and a keen supporter of QPILCH. He has a prior commitment this year which he could not break, but he assures me he will be here next year.

To everyone here who did make it, and those who have already left to start their working day, congratulations on completing Brisbane's 2009 Walk for Justice.

Today is the second time Public Interest Law Clearing Houses in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide have walked to raise funds and awareness for PILCH services. The year, QPILCH took up Justice Margaret White's suggestion to carry placards so that onlookers might appreciate what the Walk is about. Tony Woodyatt comfortably asserts that the signs are within prescribed size limits and thoroughly legal! That should set up the defences under s 22 and s 24 *Criminal Code*! Seriously though, you have, literally, taken steps – many steps – towards increasing access to justice in Queensland – and beyond. This is an international legal movement. The 5th annual London Legal Support Walk will be held on Monday. Last year, 3,000 people participated in the walk around London's legal landmarks, raising £360,000.

The Queensland legal profession has established QPILCH to coordinate pro bono legal services and to bridge gaps in the civil law services provided in this State. QPILCH refers important legal matters to law firms and barristers, and provides direct legal services, with the support of its members, to the most vulnerable in our community: the homeless, refugees, those hopelessly in debt, disadvantaged groups and self-represented litigants. The funds raised from today's walk will directly support those disadvantaged men and women to access legal services through QPILCH's programs.

The Supreme and District Courts in Brisbane have over the last year directly benefited from QPILCH's self-representation civil law service. In the Court of Appeal alone, four appellate litigants were assisted by this service in 2007-2008, and QPILCH, through its homeless persons' legal clinic, also instructed senior and junior counsel who appeared pro bono in the high profile case of *Rowe v Kemper*.¹

Perhaps that is why the contingent from the Supreme, District and Magistrates Courts, I am absolutely delighted to say, is the largest of the many large teams walking this morning.

¹ [2008] QCA 175.

But it might be because the courts' team has been organised this year by my associate, Jodi Gardner, a great QPILCH supporter. It is no coincidence that last year when she worked at Clayton Utz, it had the largest team in the QPILCH Walk for Justice.

Many of you have not only walked and raised money for QPILCH today, but you provide your services and support to QPILCH clients: vulnerable individuals who would otherwise be without legal assistance. Those clients are what this walk is about. Thank you for your leadership in recognising that the privilege of a successful legal career comes with the responsibility of undertaking pro bono work.

My executive assistant, Andrea Suthers, who has walked today in the courts' team, recently gave me a cutting from *The Australian*. It noted that the 20 law firms appointed to do legal work for the Victorian government over the next four years through Victoria's revamped legal services panel have been appointed on condition that they provide pro bono legal services equal to 5 to 15 per cent of their government fees. Encouragingly, 18 of these firms have committed to the full 15 per cent.

Regardless of such incentives, I encourage you to maintain your commitment to pro bono work. It not only helps the client, it maintains public confidence in the legal profession, and it makes you feel a whole lot better about your own life.

Again, my congratulations and thanks. Keep that QPILCH sponsorship rolling in. Enjoy your well-earned breakfast, guilt-free. And remember, if you can be pleasant until 10 am, the rest of the day will take care of itself!