

# The Public Interest Law Summit

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To celebrate its first decade of work and the generous support from a wide range of people and organisations, the Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC) hosted a Public Interest Law Summit on 12 June 1993 at the Metcalfe Auditorium of the State Library of New South Wales.

PIAC was established at the initiative of the Law Foundation of NSW as a non-profit legal and policy centre, to undertake policy-orientated litigation and test cases. In line with its charter, PIAC's work seeks to advocate the public interest, transcending the interests of individual litigants and promoting those of the community at large, with particular reference to disadvantaged or marginalised groups.

The Summit was designed to focus on a reorientation or redefinition of the 'public interest' and on the extent to which economic, social and political factors inform public interest work. The American jurist, Justice Cardoza, argued some years ago that 'the final cause of law is the welfare of society. The law that misses its aim cannot justify its existence.' There can be no legitimate dispute that law and its practice should be directed towards the creation of a just social order. Tied to this exercise is an obligation on human

rights and public interest lawyers to interpret and anticipate the public interest and so to equip themselves for their work to transform society effectively and responsibly.

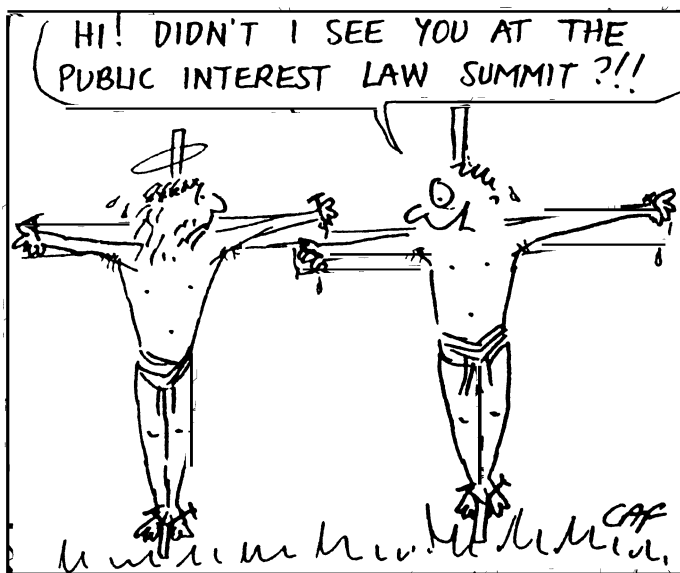
Against the background of the challenges and demands which confront PIAC over the next ten years, keenly

change; our inevitable adjustment to these changes will require that we undermine old notions of the public interest, shift boundaries and constraints imposed by laws and legal procedures and shed an insular reliance on agendas which serve an individual rather than a collective need.

The work of public interest lawyers and advocates is primarily dependent on the lawyers' relationship with social movements and groups which they serve and, in some instances, which they have spawned. Organised social activist groups provide the political initiative and support necessary to challenge unjust laws and create and defend progressive legal practices; this critical relationship determines how public interest lawyers function within the legal system. The Summit reminded us that it is the

collective social, political and economic activism *outside* the legal system that generates legal activism. Through channels of consultation like the Summit, we at PIAC will continue to look to those groups to chart our course and to ensure that we remain on track.

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depicted by keynote speaker Julian Disney, delegates and speakers at the Summit were invited to shape the public interest and, indirectly, the content of and strategies for PIAC's work. As we enter a new decade of work, and the last decade of the 20th century, we face a period of substantial political, social, economic, cultural and technological