

Complaints: many caused by lack of communication

A prompt and adequate response to complaints made about legal practitioners is among the responsibilities of the Law Society.

Depending on the outcome of the investigations, complaints can be determined by the Society or the Complaints Committee.

The Society has been processing many outstanding complaints. This year, over 110 complaints have been dealt with. However, a common reason for complaints appears to be a total breakdown of communication between client and practitioner.

I believe the incidence of complaints could be considerably reduced by the following: confirmation by letter after initial interview of the work to be undertaken; the fee to be charged and the scale (if any) on

which it was based; the manner and frequency of the raising of accounts; the consequences (if any) of non payment of accounts; the giving of realistic time limits for completion of the work; providing updates to the client on the progress of the matter.

None of the above are particularly innovative, but the provision of each to a client should mean a considerable diminution of complaints.

The Executive Officer is receiving about five written complaints and about 15 telephone enquiries a week. His time is valuable.

Hopefully, compliance with these recommendations will allow him to undertake tasks more beneficial to Society members.

CLE via satellite

The Queensland Law Society provides continuing legal education to its members in more remote locations by satellite dish.

The Society is investigating the possibility of tapping into that facility and using the resources of the Northern Territory University.

Programmes are distributed well in advance and questions from practitioners are answered during transmission.

Watch this space for developments.

Barrett retirement

Dinny Barrett, the resident magistrate in Alice Springs, will reach the statutory retiring age in August.

He has been in Alice Springs for some 11 years.

During that time, he has dealt with high profile coronials including Chamberlain and Sandby.

He has been outspoken about alcohol and its effect on criminal behaviour in Alice Springs.

The Society thanks him for his service to the community and hopes to pro-

vide an interview with him in a later edition of *Balance*.

Membership renewal

Membership renewal is due on 1 July. We are currently compiling a register of services to members.

Considerable discounts for goods and services will be available to members who produce a membership card.

Whilst \$62 of the membership fee is passed on to the Law Council as a capitation fee, you are urged to support the Society by renewing your membership.

Application forms and details of member services will be forwarded to members in late June.

TPA seminar

The General Practice Section of the Law Council is conducting a twilight seminar on the Trade Practices Act and Fair Trading Legislation.

With the growth of litigation in these areas, it is important that practitioners keep abreast of these developments. Please register through the Society.

SC decisions summarised

Future issues of *Balance* will include a summary of recent unreported decisions of the Northern Territory Supreme Court.

This should go some way to assisting practitioners keep in touch with what's happening in the courts.

ENGAGED

Not any more. The Society's telephones have been fixed so that when you dial 815104 you will not get an engaged signal. You should get through on your first try.