

User pays applies to A-Gs from now

The first of July marked the implementation of a user pays system in the federal Attorney-General's department.

The system is being implemented in three stages, the last of which will be that some legal services may be provided to government departments by the private sector.

In February last year the Attorney-General announced that his department would charge for the provision of services to other departments and agencies from 1 July this year.

Agencies such as Telecom and Australia Post, who are already charged, will continue to be charged and will continue to be able to seek their legal services either from the department or from the private sector.

The user-pays arrangements will be reviewed in 1994 and, subject to that review, existing clients of the Attorney-General's department may be free to engage private sector lawyers for a range of legal services.

The Attorney-General's department, however, will be the sole provider of

legal services in relation to: (a) constitutional matters; (b) litigation suits by or against the Commonwealth and, inter alia; (c) the conduct of unique or major matters in which legal agreements are required to be entered into by the Commonwealth.

The Department will remain the sole external provider of: (a) matters on which legal services are provided to ministers or departments in any area of dispute between Commonwealth departments and agencies; (b) questions of statutory interpretation affecting more than one Commonwealth department or agency or relating to the expenditure or receipt of public monies; (c) matters having national security implications, and; (d) Government to Government work, both domestic and international.

Under the present regime (and subject to the 1994 review), from 1 July 1995 commercial work may be undertaken by private firms.

This includes leases, conveyancing, arbitration, commercial contracts, property and general advisory work.

Tax agents to access bank data

The Privacy Commissioner has given banks and other financial institutions clearance to give information about interest earnings to tax agents to help with the preparation of tax returns.

The Minister for Justice and Consumer Affairs, Michael Tate, announced the ruling in Hobart last month.

Senator Tate said financial institutions should satisfy themselves that the tax agent does, in fact, act for the customer about whom the information is sought.

"An inquiry by a tax agent is intended to ensure compliance by a customer with taxation obligations, and the information obviously is not being used to make an assessment of the individual's financial history or standing," he said.

The Privacy Commissioner has issued a Fact Sheet (No 6) which explains the latest direction.

Interested practitioners should phone 008 023 985 for a copy of the Fact Sheet.

A child's dying wish

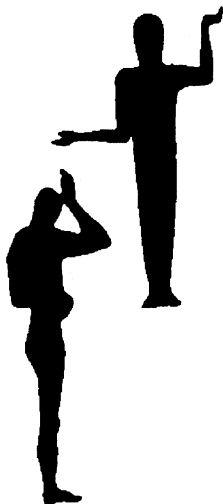
Dear Editor,
We have been asked to assist Craig Sherlock who is seven years old and suffering from terminal cancer. It is one of his wishes to be included in the Guinness Book of Records with the largest number of business cards collected by one person. We would be grateful, therefore, if you would circulate your members and request that they send one of their business cards to:

Craig Sherlock
36 Selby Road
Carshalton
Surrey SN1
LONDON UK

MIDDLETONS SOLICITORS
Townsville, Queensland

CAPTION COMP

No prizes, but here's the task: give our Society logo a caption. The logo is based on a sculpture which was commissioned to open the old Darwin Supreme Court when it was new. It was called *The Judge and The Judged*. More recently, it has become better known as *Bill and Ben*.



What you must do is come up with a (preferably printable) caption for them. Submit it to the Society prior to 20 July and we will print the best one in the next issue of *Balance*. Entries must be accompanied by the practitioner's name. For anonymity, enclose a small incentive with your entry.