

Keeping 'abreast' of trends in courtroom procedures

The latest edition of the Victorian Bar News Journal features a lively excerpt from an unnamed Victorian newspaper, in which George Beaumont QC and the Nursing Mothers Association bra, sorry, spar, over the question: **Should women be allowed to breastfeed in courtrooms?**

Sue Byrne of the Nursing Mothers Association said: "Courtrooms are obviously places where quiet and concentration are very important.

"The most effective way to calm a hungry baby is to feed it.

"Breastfeeding is as natural and appropriate in a courtroom as it is anywhere else a baby is.

"Those uncomfortable about public breastfeeding need to acknowledge they have a problem, not the mother of the baby.

"As breastfeeding mothers, we know we are giving our infants the best possible start in life and we need not be put off by those unable to see breasts as anything but sexual objects.

"Breastfeeding must not be a 'behind closed doors' activity."

Mr Beaumont's response was as follows: "The essential question is: what does the community expect of its courts?"

"Parties must perceive that their cases will be dealt with in a manner whereby they are not interrupted or subject to other distractions.

"Consider a person eating a Big Mac and drinking beer while waiting to give evidence if he is hungry and it is his normal lunch time; the use of the courtroom as a forum for debate by waiting parties.

"Obviously, all of the above are inconsistent with the due and proper administration of justice. Breastfeeding is no different."

In a further 'tit for tat' and with tongue firmly in cheek, the eminent QC goes one step further in the law journal by raising the question: **Should Silks be allowed to beat their breasts in courtrooms?**

The QC's answer is a resounding "yes".

"The essential question is: what does the client expect of its Silk?," he asked.

"Clients perceive that their cases will be dealt with by their Silk in a manner whereby the opposing side is frequently interrupted and subjected to as many irritating distractions as the Judge will allow.

"Where possible, the Silk should eat a Big Mac and drink plenty of beer while waiting to cross-examine op-

posing witnesses. If the Silk is hungry and it is his normal lunch time, then he should go and eat at his favourite restaurant.

"The courtroom is ordinarily used by Silks as a forum for debate and to annoy the opposing parties.

"Obviously all of the above is inconsistent with the due and proper administration of justice but breast beating by Silks should be considered something different: it is a hallowed tradition of the Victorian Bar."

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Register of Asian languages

A register has recently been compiled of law students with language skills in Khmer (Cambodian), Lao and Vietnamese.

It contains details of the students' academic records to date, as well as their written and spoken language skills.

Where appropriate, there is an inclusion indicating the students' access to a computer which will print in the script of the appropriate language.

The register is an initiative of the Australia- Indochina Legal Cooperation Committee (AILEC), which is an advisory committee to the Federal Attorney-General.

It was co-ordinated by the Centre for Legal Education in Sydney.

Students on the register are now available for translation work.

Any lawyer who would like access to this register should contact Robert Watson, Research Officer, AILEC Secretariat, Attorney-General's Department, National Circuit, Barton, ACT 2600. Phone: (06) 250 6787. Fax: (06) 250 5929.