

BY PRESIDENT
TERRY GARDNER

OFF BALANCE

Welcome to the Law Society Council for 1995/96

As a result of the elections held at the annual general meeting of the Law Society on 29 August 1995 the Executive and Council of the Law Society comprise, myself as President, Ms Diana Elliott, Vice President, Ms Jan Trier, Secretary, Mr Jim Moore, Treasurer, Mr Max Horton, Alice Springs Representative and Ms Donna Drier, Mr Peter Tiffin, Ms Eileen Terrill, Ms Samantha Miles, Mr Chris Fanning and Mr John Stewart, Councillors.

I would like to congratulate all members of the Executive and Councillors on their election and welcome the new members to Council.

I also thank all members of the Law Society for allowing me another term in office.

I can assure you of my best endeavours in properly representing the views of members.

Over the last two years, Neville Henwood, as President and Immediate Past President, has been the Society's representative on the Law Council of Australia.

It has been during that period that the policy on the move to a national legal services market was developed by the Law Council of Australia and Neville took on the responsibility of presenting the views and on occasions, the concerns of this Society in regard to proposals put forward by the Federal Government, the Trade Practices Commission and other Law Societies.

Although the policy paper has been presented to the Federal Government there are many matters raised in the paper still to be resolved and a great amount of work to be done to ensure a smooth change to a national profession.

It was with this in mind that Neville agreed to be nominated to fill a vacant position on the Executive of the Law Council of Australia.

Elections were held on 23 September 1995 and unfortunately for the Northern Territory and I believe for the Law Council of Australia, Neville was unsuccessful.

On behalf of all Northern Territory legal practitioners I thank Neville for his work on the Law Council of Australia.

Ms Claire Manock has now joined the Law Society as Member Services Officer.

Claire who is originally from Luton in the United Kingdom, has a background in journalism, marketing and public relations.

I welcome Claire to the Society and know that you will all be hearing from her in the near future.

It is disappointing to note that notwithstanding the amount of effort put into giving members the best service that our limited resources are able to supply, membership of the Law Society is down on last year.

Unlike some other jurisdictions, membership of the Society is voluntary and we have prided ourselves on the high percentage of legal practitioners who were members of the Society by choice rather than statutory obligation.

If you are aware of a legal practitioner who is not a member of the Society please urge him or her to join as the strength and credibility of an association such as ours relies on all Territory legal practitioners being members.

Lawyers call for uniform Court Rules

Australian courts should develop uniform rules and procedures to complement the national basis on which the legal profession will soon be operating, and to produce a more efficient justice system, retiring Law Council President, Stuart Fowler told the Australian Legal Convention today.

Mr Fowler told more than 400 lawyers that as the legal profession was now ready to operate on a national basis, it was logical and reasonable for courts to adopt uniform rules and procedures, so that lawyers and their clients would find themselves in familiar territory no matter which court they were appearing in.

Mr Fowler also told delegates that the profession's increasing competitiveness could lower the costs of legal services and consequently deliver benefits to consumers.

However he warned that if lawyers had to cut corners to remain competitive with other lawyers, and indeed non-lawyers, then professional standards could be threatened.

Mr Fowler said that rather than obsessively pursuing a purist model of competition, the profession should aim to offer the community good quality competitively-priced legal services. These services could best be provided by qualified lawyers.

"I do not believe our 'social-trustee' professionalism needs to be sacrificed. When I look at the thousands of hours which lawyers contribute to the reform of the law and the development of public policy then I am confident that our professionalism remains strong. We must ensure that it does."