

BALANCE

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A BETTER PERSPECTIVE – NEW ATTORNEY GENERAL

Attorney General and Chief Minister Denis Burke has committed to improved relations between the government and the legal profession.

Mr Burke recognised that a “fairly strong adversarial relationship” has existed between government and the profession in the past, and blamed difficult issues such as voluntary euthanasia and mandatory sentencing. “I think its time now to get our relationship on a much better footing, see each others strengths and weaknesses and appreciate the perspective where we both come from,” he said.

Mr Burke takes up the position of Attorney General for the second time in his political career.

“I understand some of the things that would be important from a professional level as compared to an outsider looking in and that takes some time to appreciate and this time I think I have a far better perspective of the importance of the Attorney General’s role in supporting the profession of the Northern Territory,” he said.

Mr Burke fully endorsed the comments of the newly appointed Supreme Court Judge Trevor Riley who, on appointment to the bench in February this year, called for mutual respect between the executive and the judiciary (see page 5).

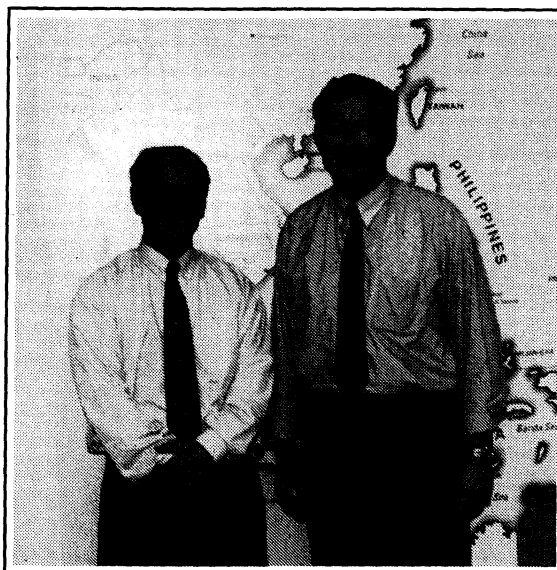
“Mutual respect means just that, it means an understanding of the role both the executive and the judiciary carry on behalf of the overall constituents. I think as long as we both recognise we don’t have all the answers, then we can have a fairly productive relationship,” he said.

Mr Burke recognised there had been disquiet in the profession about the appointment of silks.

“There are procedures in place for the appointment of Queens Counsel and I will be following them,” he said. After a successful 25 year military career, reaching the position of commanding officer of the 2nd cavalry regiment, Mr Burke entered politics in June 1994.

He was sworn in as the Northern Territory’s Chief Minister on February 8 this year and took on the role of Attorney General when he announced his Cabinet line-up the following day.

In his maiden speech to parliament in February Mr Burke outlined the credentials he brings to the top job from his career in the military.



First Law Officer meets the President

“The Army teaches you duty, loyalty, honour and country. These are values that should be a prerequisite for a career in politics,” he said.

“Taking hard and fast decisions is part of military training as is the necessary consultative process with specialist advisers. In the Army you are taught that you cannot know it all. Such teachings I know will be useful in this new job,” he said.

He outlined his political dislikes of socialism, authoritarianism, paternalism and isolationism. He nominates no single role model but at times of conflict turns to the Rudyard Kipling’s verse *If*.

Mr Burke, 50, and his wife Annette, who is the Mayor of Palmerston, have two boys.

Despite the demanding commitments of the role of Chief Minister, he signalled that the profession will see the first law officer at functions when ever possible.

In a rapidly changing national legal services market, Mr Burke pledged support to justice in the Northern Territory.

“We have to discharge justice in circumstances that are unique in Australia and the delivery of good justice in those circumstances should be something we can continue to work hard to achieve,” he said.