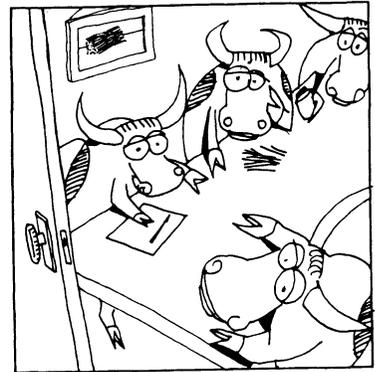




On Thursday 13 November 2003 Phillips Fox Solicitors (Perth) held an early Christmas Party for Darwin clients at Buzz Cafe in Cullen Bay. Bettina Mangan, Alison Hagan, Rebecca Pope, and Reinis Dancis from Phillips Fox hosted guests including Jason Hodgkinson (Allianz Australia Insurance), Steve Southwood QC and Michael Grant.

## The Muster Room



### Farewell

A fond farewell to Parliamentary Counsel Victoria Aitken, who is headed for the Solomon Islands on a one-year secondment. She will be missed.

### Movers and Shakers

After finishing as Chief Justice Martin's Associate, Jodi Mather has recently started work at the DPP. ①

## TEWLS Aboriginal Women's Outreach Project cont...

evidence.

In family violence cases the injured female will generally be the sole or key witness. However, the prosecutor facing the pressure of the long court list may not have time or make time to even meet the witness let alone get to basics such as advising about the court layout or procedure, going through the evidence, arranging an interpreter or arranging vulnerable witness facilities. The remote courtroom will generally have no vulnerable witness facilities, which is also a problem. However, there are possibilities which could be explored, for example a makeshift screen between the witness and the accused. The NT Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions has an excellent Victim Support Unit with Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff who travel extensively, but are not sufficiently resourced to support the work of the prosecutors in remote courts on most circuits.

The ALSs also bear the pressure of the long court lists and the high costs of providing remote legal assistance. Based on my observations, I would say the ALSs in general provide an efficient and quality service to their remote clients for the funding they

receive, which is inadequate. The difficulty they face in assisting their clients in family violence matters is that for obvious reasons of profession ethics they are unable to represent both parties in a family violence matter. ATSIC has responded to this dilemma by funding Aboriginal Family Violence Legal Prevention Units (FVLPUs). We are fortunate to have three FVLPUs in the NT but there are still big gaps in coverage. TEWLS is funded under this program and there are units in Katherine and Alice Springs. There needs to be FVLPUs working alongside the Aboriginal Legal Services wherever Indigenous communities are dealing with family violence.

Police training has improved but there is room for further improvement. In our experience, police too often appear to lack adequate understanding of the dynamics of family violence. This causes frustration for them and a lot of problems for the communities they are based in.

Another problem we face is the general lack of support and programs for families experiencing violence in remote communities. There are no counseling, mediation, or perpetrator

programs such as anger management. Substance abuse programs are few and far between. There is no short or long term emergency accommodation. This also reduces options available for appropriate sentencing. The members of Wadeye Palngun Warnangat (the Women's Association) told us this year that they do not want women and children flown out to shelters in town and they do not want men sent to prison. On the other hand it would not be easy for Wadeye or any community to deal with violent offenders themselves if these options were removed. Government needs to engage with communities over these issues. Possibilities for greater community involvement in the process of sentencing, for example circle sentencing, need to be explored.

Steps are being taken in various ways to address the above problems. Progress is slow and uneven but we hope it continues. TEWLS would like to applaud the stronger stance against violence being taken in the last couple of years by governments, the legal system and most significantly by Aboriginal leaders and communities themselves. ①