

# Good cricket all round

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The theme of Law Week this year was 'Achieving Justice'. It was an apt title for the week, especially given the legal profession's active role in calling out the growing justice gap as the major contemporary challenge for the justice system. The keynote address was delivered by former High Court Chief Justice, Hon. Robert French AC, who spoke about access to justice as a condition of the rule of law.

One of Mr French's post-judicial appointments is as chair of the steering committee of the Law Council of Australia's Justice Project, a national review into the justice system in Australia. With a reporting date of November 2017, the Justice Project will make evidence-based recommendations as to the measures required to improve the justice system by making it fairer and more functional.

Given that the Justice Project will focus on people facing significant social and economic disadvantage who cannot achieve justice, it comes very close to home for the Northern Territory.

It was a special privilege for the Territory legal profession to have Mr French visit Darwin and Alice Springs during Law Week. His attendance was widely appreciated and I thank him for his insightful address on these important issues. I also thank the Commonwealth Shadow Attorney-General, Hon. Mark Dreyfus QC MP, who made time to attend the function in Darwin and address the audience.

Access to justice is a priority issue for the Australian legal profession and it has been important for the Society to

play a role in keeping the conversations going on legal assistance sector funding, as well as diversity and equality. Despite recent successes in these areas, there is still a lot more to achieve and as individuals, firms and agencies in the law, we can all play a part in the collective effort. As a start, the Society urges all members to:

- Support the Legal Aid Matters Campaign and sign the petition at [legalaidmatters.org.au](http://legalaidmatters.org.au).
- Sign up to the Law Council's equitable briefing policy and diversity and equality charter at [lawcouncil.asn.au](http://lawcouncil.asn.au)

Law Week was also a great time for the Society to launch the *Protocols for Lawyers Representing Children* which, like the *Society's Indigenous Protocols for Lawyers*, should prove to be an invaluable reference tool.

The protocols originate out of real life stories told by children in care and protection proceedings. They encompass primary practical, legal and ethical issues for lawyers in the care and protection jurisdiction and call for two key requirements for effective representation: good communication and passion.

The protocols were approved by the Council on 7 April 2017. They were launched by Sally Bolton, chair of the Society's Family Law Committee at the Law Week lunch in Darwin and are available for download from the Society's website. The protocols are the culmination of a significant body of work undertaken by a wide range of people



and organisations over some length of time and I thank everyone who was involved in this important project.

Law Week is also the time for the Society to say thank you to the sector's volunteers. This year, the Give Happy, Live Happy celebration of volunteers was held in National Volunteer Week. The Society could simply not function as successfully as it does without volunteer support in the many and varied forms that it takes. Thank you to all of the volunteers for your ongoing work and commitment, for the benefit of the legal profession.

For the justice system to be fully functional it must be accessible to the entire community and not just those in the major centres. One of the Society's major focusses has been on the additional challenges faced by regional practitioners and their communities. This year, for Law Week, the Katherine Courthouse held an open day that included a moot presentation, public information sessions and a barbecue. I acknowledge the driving efforts of Judge Armitage and Chief Judge Lowndes in taking Law Week to Katherine and making the open day a great success.

Also, this year for the first time, the Junior v Senior Lawyers Great Debate was held in both Darwin and Alice Springs. As always, the debates were a much anticipated and entertaining battle of creative skill and wit, as the teams argued about whether lawyers will be exterminated by technology.

I thank the co-presidents of the Northern Territory Young Lawyers (NTYL) for their hard work in hosting the debates and for helping to unite the Territory-wide profession in Law Week. It is also great to report that at the Alice Springs Law Week dinner, the NTYL held an extremely successful fundraising drive that will assist two Alice Springs young lawyers in competing in the Golden Gavel in Darwin later this year.

And of course, a Law Week highlight for many is the annual President's XI v Chief Justice's XI cricket game and family fun day. In a shift from the usual order of things, this year the game was played at the beginning of Law Week and on Mother's Day.

Members may recall that before he joined the Court, the Chief Justice took an active involvement in the composition of the President's XI and a keen interest in the match tactics and outcome. This year, for the first time the Chief Justice led the charge to wrestle the trophy out of the hands of the profession; the "Chief Judas" sledge may have been heard once or twice out in the field.

The competition out in the middle was as healthy and friendly as ever and in the end, the President's XI won the game by 33 runs. Congratulations team, that's back-to-back and a mighty effort. Thank you to all of the spectators and families who shared in the festivities and the players from throughout the profession, the judiciary and courts administration who came down and had a go. It is what the collegiate spirit of the day is all about. Finally, special congratulations to Dan Thomas from NAAJA in Katherine, who took out the Player of the Match award; well done Dan.

There were many more events and activities in Law Week and I thank everyone who was involved in the week this year, for helping to make it a huge success. I also thank the Society Secretariat for all of the hard work in planning, coordinating and supporting Law Week, especially Erin Key and Yvette Buffon.

That has been a lot of thanks and acknowledgements, but it is been an active and successful time, made possible by the contribution, support and efforts of many.

Outside of Law Week, the Society has been busy with the usual day-to-day business. The new video-link technology has successfully improved the delivery of CPD. CPD seminars have been video-linked out of Darwin for some time now and more recently, CPDs have been streamed by presenters out of Alice Springs into audiences in Darwin, which is an equally important aspect of the use of the technology. The Society is still looking forward to further improving the technology, so as to further enhance the Territory-wide delivery of CPD to members.

The Society has recently established regular meetings with the Chief Judge of the Local Court, specific to matters and issues flowing between the profession and the Local Court. These meetings compliment the established meetings the Society has with the Chief Justice. The Society has also established a periodic meeting with the Vice-Chancellor of Charles Darwin University.

As the financial year and the practising certificate renewals period closes, the Society's focus is shifting to the consultation on the draft new Constitution and of course the preparation of the annual report.

As always, I look forward to keeping the conversations going with members about all of these issues and the many other issues of importance to members and the Territory legal profession.