

# APLA website : [www.apla.com](http://www.apla.com)

Tim Homewood, Melbourne

Towards the end 1997 it was decided to bring in an outside consultant to assist with the administration of the APLA web site (<http://www.apla.com/>). Over the last few months I have been conducting a thorough review of the web site in close consultation with APLA representatives. This review has resulted in a number of changes to the look, the content and the functionality of the site. These changes were implemented in September and can be seen when you visit the web site.

## The Look

When you log on to the new site you will immediately notice changes to the layout and navigation tools. To reduce download times, and simplify navigation, we have created one navigation bar based on text links, rather than buttons. These links will take you directly to areas of interest, removing the need to go to a separate members page to log in.

## The Content

The existing content on the site has been expanded and now includes a number of additional areas:

- information about Special Interest Groups
- upcoming events organised by APLA
- an online version of Plaintiff, commencing from issue 28 (August 1998)
- a comprehensive list of links to online resources, including resources relating to specific areas of law, and a place where members can list their own home pages
- APLA media releases.

## Functionality

A particular emphasis of the site will be on the provision of current information. The above content will be updated on a regular basis. Some information, for example press releases, will be posted to the site as it becomes available. New features of the site can be seen on the "What's New" page.

Another consideration has been the interactive elements available on the Internet. The online tools to perform various tasks, for example joining SIGs, have been expanded, simplifying the steps you need to go through.

In addition, a search page has been provided which allows you to search all the pages on the APLA site for keywords.

## The Future

The future of the web site depends on the input from members. APLA provides a unique opportunity for members to share resources in areas of particular interest. The power of these resources will increase as more contributions are made. Every page provides a link to the webmaster at APLA. I encourage you to visit the site and send me your suggestions. ■

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# APLA in the news

## Floodgates open for the water litigants

By NATALIE YOUNG

Lawyers are urging people injured by the recent contaminated water scare to join in a class action against Sydney Water.

Hundreds of individuals and businesses have been ringing lawyers in Sydney to get information about their legal rights.

On Wednesday law firm Slater and Gordon commenced an extended class action in the Federal Court claiming substantial damages from Sydney Water for all those individuals and businesses who are ill or out of pocket following the contamination scare.

According to the Australian Plaintiff Lawyers Association, of which Slater and Gordon is a member, class actions are not the unwieldy monsters that people fear but a cost effective way of enabling people to enforce their rights.

"Class actions are not a ploy by law firms to clog up the courts," said APLA's national policy manager, Mr Simon McGregor.

"They actually save court time and reduce costs by dealing more efficiently with groups of similar claims" he said.

The Slater and Gordon partner running this week's class action, Mr Andrew Grech, said the purpose of these actions was to allow those who could not afford justice to have their day in court.

"Actions like these allow ordinary people - small businesses and individual consumers - to get access to

court without the risk of losing their home or having to put up substantial amounts of cash," Mr Grech said.

Both economic loss suffered by businesses and illness suffered by individuals can be compensated in the same class action, Mr Grech said.

Advertisements in metropolitan newspapers placed by Slater and Gordon will soon appear to advise aggrieved people how they can obtain information about their legal rights.

According to Mr Grech, Slater and Gordon's telephone lines have been clogged for days.

But APLA would like to see those responsible for causing the damage take some of the responsibility for giving the public this information.

"Advising people costs money," Mr McGregor said.

"APLA would like to see responsible organisations take a more active role... and advise consumers of their rights if they are injured. The reality is this doesn't usually happen, so the cost of providing information on how to access justice is borne by the plaintiff lawyers".

According to Mr McGregor, half of possible class actions do not materialise, so the lawyer's costs in providing information are not recoverable.

A spokesman for Sydney Water said the class action claim has been received and is being considered by the company's lawyers and insurers.

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## Best insurance

Richard Ackland (*Herald*, August 7) has obviously heard only half the story. Perhaps if he spoke to accident victims and people who represent them rather than just to the insurers he would have written a more balanced article.

It takes two parties to settle a case. More often than not it is the insurer which stands in the way of settlement, leaving the

accident victim no choice but to go to court.

Further, it is well known that since the amendments to the Motor Accidents Act 1995, which significantly curtailed compensation available for pain and suffering, the number of claims has declined quite sharply.

Minor claims have practically been eliminated.

Mr Ackland should understand that green slip insurance is not another tax. It is insurance and probably the cheapest and best available because it provides unlimited cover for injuries caused by negligent driving.

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