

Attorney-General's welcome to ALRAC 2006

ALRAC
2006

The Attorney-General, The Hon Philip Ruddock MP, recorded the following message for the opening of the Australasian Law Reform Agencies Conference 2006.

Firstly, may I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land—and pay my respects to their elders, both past and present.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, it gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to the 2006 Australasian Law Reform Agencies Conference and to beautiful Manly.

Unfortunately, I cannot be with you in person. I am meeting in Darwin with my state and territory colleagues for the SCAG meeting. For those of you unfamiliar with this somewhat curious acronym, it stands for the Standing Committee of Attorneys General. And, at the top of its agenda, is an issue very close to my heart—that is, law reform and the harmonisation of laws within Australia.

As most of you would know, under the Commonwealth *Constitution*, Australia has a patchwork of sometimes inconsistent Commonwealth, state and territory laws. Almost 50 years ago, Sir Owen Dixon, a former Chief Justice of the High Court—and one of Australia's most respected jurists—noted and lamented the situation when he said:

'In all, or nearly all, matters of private law there is no geographical reason why the law should be different in any part of Australia. Local conditions have nothing to do with it... Is it beyond us to make some attempt to obtain a uniform system of private law in Australia?'

The Australian Law Reform Commission—which is hosting this conference—was established in 1975 to try and help make sense of this complexity and provide advice to government on ways in which the laws could be made more uniform.

Perhaps the most recent example of their success in this area is in evidence law. Recently, the Commission—in conjunction with the New South Wales and Victorian Law Reform Commissions—completed a review of the uniform Evidence Acts applying in a number of jurisdictions. The review found that the legislation is generally working well. It also provided a strong impetus for a truly national regime—while the review was in progress, a number of other jurisdictions indicated they would be joining the scheme.



Of course, the Commission's brief is not limited to looking at ways of harmonising federal, state and territory laws. The Commission, like other law reform agencies, also plays an important role in assisting governments to identify problems and find solutions. Law reform commissions have the luxury of taking the longer, and wider view—examining, not only what is happening within their own borders, but at trends which are emerging world-wide.



I am, therefore, pleased that so many international guests are here today bringing with them their own perspectives and experiences. I'm sure the conference will provide an excellent opportunity for sharing knowledge and ideas, particularly on issues which have a global dimension—including the rapidly evolving and dynamic fields of changing technologies, the environment, human rights and geopolitics.



I would like to congratulate the Commission on organising this conference and wish you well in your deliberations.

