

PRESIDENT'S PAGE

Peter Semmler QC, APLA President

Our inaugural National Conference at Noosa Heads in October was a huge success. The papers presented were of the highest standard. They were of immense practical value to lawyers acting for plaintiffs in this country. There were several American speakers, including Howard Twigg, President of the 55,000 member Association of Trial Lawyers of America, whose contributions widened the horizons and excited the imaginations of the 300 attendees.

Perhaps the most important purpose which the conference served was to focus the enthusiasm which APLA has generated amongst plaintiff lawyers throughout the country. The conference delegates not only benefited from the papers which were presented. They also gained from meeting other plaintiff lawyers, and exchanging information and ideas. The conference enabled practitioners who act for plaintiffs, many of whom are professionally or geographically isolated, to understand that problems in plaintiffs' cases are not unique and that solutions which can be shared with others are available.

The conference was the catalyst for the formation of two further Special Interest Groups, namely the Chemical Injuries Group and the Workers' Rights Group. As to the latter, the need for concerted action by lawyers who act on behalf of workers to prevent the further erosion of their rights to compensation has never been more urgent. The need is certainly not being fulfilled by the various Law Societies and Bar Associations

APLA has recently made detailed submissions to the Heads of Workers Compensation Authorities (HWCA) regarding the interim report to the Labour Ministers Council on national consistency in Australian workers compensation, opposing moves to a national compensation scheme and opposing the abolition of workers' common law rights. APLA also stressed the need for some inquiry into the general efficiency of workers' compensation authorities throughout the country. Unfortunately the threats to the compensation rights of workers in this country are coming not only from Canberra. In recent weeks further restrictions on compensation rights have been announced by both the Victorian and New South Wales governments. APLA will oppose these proposals as well.

APLA is also presently preparing submissions to the Australian Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee Legal Aid Inquiry. The state of legal aid in this country is nothing short of disgraceful. We are in the process of preparing

arguments about the urgent need for a proper system of legal aid, particularly for personal injury and public interest litigation.

One of the reasons why our inaugural conference was so successful was because it was so well organised by Yarran & Baxter. APLA is most fortunate to have that firm now working for us full time carrying out the responsibilities of the Executive Officer, replacing Therese Bateman who was unable to continue due to other professional commitments. Inquiries regarding any of APLA's services or functions should be directed to John Peacock on (02) 9415 4233.

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