

President's Page

1997 will be a challenging year for APLA. A new round of restrictions on the rights of accident victims is underway. In Victoria, changes to the Accident Compensation and Transport Accidents Act have further restricted the rights of accident victims in workplaces and on the state's roads. In Queensland, the new WorkCover Bill and in Western Australia the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation Amendment Bill threaten to do the same to the rights of work accident victims in those states.

In New South Wales, in response to pressure from the medical profession and the medical defence unions about the cost of professional indemnity premiums, the government has instituted an inquiry to consider "Health Professional Liability Reform". On top of the agenda is a proposal to cap general damages in medical negligence cases in New South Wales. There are also indications that the government is considering transferring all personal injury cases to the District Court, thereby further downgrading the status of such claims. If such a proposal is not effectively opposed, seriously injured citizens will be denied access to the superior court of record in New South Wales. Its civil jurisdiction will principally be the preserve of corporations.

Our association's recent rapid growth in membership is a sign of these troubled times for personal injury lawyers and a response to the rising repression of the

Peter Semmler QC

rights of accident victims in this country. APLA enters 1997 with over 600 members. A new Membership Directory will be available soon. This will enable members to be easily identified and will enable plaintiff lawyers to exchange information and ideas.

Communication between members is further facilitated by the increasing use of email in our association. APLA's email address is apla@mpx.com.au. Contributions to the APLA Update should be sent via email if possible. We are also investigating the viability of an APLA worldwide web site. Bill Madden in Sydney is coordinating this project. The potential benefit to plaintiff lawyers and to APLA as an organisation of such a site is readily apparent from the success of the web site maintained by the Association of Trial Lawyers of America. (www.atlanet.org/atlanetmm.html).

However, APLA's success depends not so much upon technological innovation as upon input from its members. I would encourage all of you to contribute to our campaigns to stop the erosion of accident compensation rights, to share your knowledge and experience with other plaintiff lawyers by contributing to our expert database and the APLA Update, and by participating in the seminars which are organised by APLA throughout this coming year.

Peter Semmler QC is the National President of APLA.

1997 National Conference To Be Held at Hyatt Coolum

The outstanding success of the 1996 APLA National Conference at Noosa has made the choice of dates and venues for the 1997 National Conference a subject of keen interest to members.

The dates and venue to note in your diary are: Thursday 30 October to Sunday 2 November 1997. Hyatt Regency Coolum, Sunshine Coast, Queensland.

After careful consideration of various options in Queensland, the Hyatt Coolum was chosen for its combination of facilities, availability and the popularity of the Sunshine Coast.

The 1997 conference will be jointly chaired by Peter Carter and Ron Pearce. The conference program is being developed over the next couple of months by the Conference Committee which includes Roland Everingham, Diana Farah, Paul Alvaro and Sukhwant Singh.

APLA National Office

For membership enquiries, accessing or contributing to the Expert Database, contributions to the APLA Update and general information please contact us at:

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Call for Papers

Suggestions from APLA members of suitable topics and presenters for the 1997 National Conference will be considered by the Conference Committee. Please send your suggestions to:

John Peacock, Executive Officer, APLA, GPO Box 2568, SYDNEY NSW 2001. Fax (02) 9415 4310 or email apla@mpx.com.au.