

Commission to the Federal Court as required under the High Court's *Brandy* decision. This reorganisation reinforces the Government's commitment to a strong and independent human rights body.

Making people aware of their responsibilities to protect and promote human rights is as important as protecting those who are subject to discrimination. By balancing education and prevention with investigation and conciliation, the Human Rights and Responsibilities Commission will be more effective in ensuring a fair society.

Under the Bill the Attorney-General will have the power to approve an intervention by the new Commission in court proceedings which involve human rights or discrimination issues. The Commission will not have a power to recommend the payment of damages or compensation following inquiries into certain types of complaints under the renamed Act.

The Bill had not been passed by the Senate at the end of the Winter sittings.

Closure of the Darwin Office of the Administrative Appeals Tribunal

From 1 July 1998, the Darwin Office of the Administrative Appeals Tribunal will be closed and all matters originating from the Northern Territory will be dealt with in the AAT's Brisbane Registry.

The AAT will continue to conduct circuits to Darwin and Alice Springs as it currently does.

The effect of these changes is that, to the extent that "reviewable decisions" are made, the notification of review rights provided to persons under s. 27A of the *Administrative Appeals Tribunal Act 1975*

may need to be amended, to reflect the changed arrangements.

The contact details for the new arrangements are:

Administrative Appeals Tribunal
GPO Box 9955
BRISBANE QLD 4001

tel: 1300 366 700 (toll free)

Administrative Decisions Tribunal Legislation Amendment Bill (NSW)

The Administrative Decisions Tribunal Legislation Amendment Bill was introduced into the New South Wales Legislative Council on 28 May 1998 and passed without amendment on 3 June 1998. The legislation relating to the Administrative Decisions Tribunal is expected to commence in 1998.

The Bill is the second stage of legislation conferring jurisdiction on the tribunal.

As well as increasing both original and review jurisdictions on the tribunal, the Bill contains several significant amendments to the *Administrative Decisions Tribunal Act 1997*. First, it provides that the president of the tribunal will be a Judge of the District Court. The Bill also provides that the President can simultaneously hold office as a member of another tribunal. Members of other tribunals may be appointed as members of the Tribunal as well. The Bill also contains a number of other consequential amendments.

The New South Wales Attorney-General, the Hon J W Shaw QC MLC, has announced the appointment of Kevin O'Connor as a Judge of the District Court of NSW and President of the Administrative Decisions Tribunal of NSW. Judge O'Connor has

previously held positions as Chairperson of the Commercial Tribunal of NSW, federal Privacy Commissioner and Deputy Secretary for Policy in the Victorian Attorney-General's Department.

Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Bill

On 8 April 1998 the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Bill and consequential legislation were introduced into the Victorian Legislative Assembly. The Act commenced on 1 July 1998.

The Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Bill establishes the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal. The Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal:

- amalgamates a number of existing tribunals;
- administers a new jurisdiction involving retail tenancy matters;
- administers extended monetary limits in the Small Claims Tribunal and the Residential Tenancies Tribunal; and
- performs disciplinary functions currently exercised by several licensing authorities within the Department of Justice.

The Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal is divided into a Civil Division and an Administrative Division.

The Civil Division encompasses the Anti-Discrimination Tribunal, Domestic Building Tribunal, Guardianship and Administration Board, Small Claims Tribunal and Residential Tenancies Tribunal. A new jurisdiction hears disputes arising under the Retail Tenancies Reform Act.

The Administrative Division deals with matters generally heard by the Administrative Appeals Tribunal as well as the disciplinary functions currently exercised by the Credit Authority, Estate Agents Disciplinary and Licensing Appeals Tribunal, Motor Car Traders Licensing Authority, the Prostitution Control Board, and the Travel Agents Licensing Authority. It also hears applications for review of decisions made by the Business Licensing Authority.

The Attorney-General's Second Reading Speech (Hansard p 972) states that the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal will:

- improve access to justice for all Victorians including the business community;
- facilitate the use of technology (such as video link-up and interactive terminals), consequently improving access to justice for Victorians living in both metropolitan and rural areas;
- complement measures to increase alternative dispute resolution programs by providing a range of procedures including mediation and compulsory conferences to help parties reach agreement quickly;
- streamline the administrative structures of tribunals, thereby improving their efficiency;
- develop and maintain flexible, cost-effective practices;
- introduce common procedures for all matters, yet retain the flexibility to recognise the needs of parties in specialised jurisdictions; and
- achieve administrative efficiencies through centralisation of agency functions, improvement of