

Country lawyer champions workers' rights

Broken Hill solicitor and APLA member, Paul Keady, is the winner of the Law Society of New South Wales' 1997 People's Choice Award for pro bono work. Paul has witnessed significant retrenchments in the mining industry over the past fifteen years, leading to an active interest in fighting for the rights of mining workers.

Paul has contributed significantly in defending unfair dismissals and seeking workers compensation for injured workers.

Since I have been in Broken Hill, there have been massive retrenchments in the mining industry. I've seen the workforce shrink from about 4000 directly employed to 700, Paul said.

It's a very hard environment. A lot of men work a mile underground, are put into a cage, and dropped into pitch darkness. Men who have been working in these sorts of conditions for 30 or 40 years invariably end up with health problems such as bad backs and necks. More men have been killed in the Broken Hill mines than were killed in Vietnam.

Paul, a partner at the firm Buckworth Keady and Chalker, has worked tirelessly for little or no charge during the past eight years for workers of a major mining company in Broken Hill, the Barrier Industrial Council, and the Construction Forestry and Mining Employees Union. He was also Chairman of the Save the Broken Hill Jail campaign and has had a lot of involvement with the Aboriginal community.

Pro bono work can be enormously rewarding, especially when you're dealing with the disempowered. It's very satisfying to give these people some sort of legal recourse he said.

President of the Barrier Industrial Council, Mr Edward Butcher, nominated Paul for the Law Society of NSW's People's Choice Award. Mr Butcher praised Mr Keady for his quiet generosity and community spirit:

He does a lot of voluntary work in our community and has earned the respect of many people. The amount of time he puts into

community work is extraordinary - I don't know how he does it.

I believe if others in the legal professions took a look at the example set by this man, the world would be a better place. As for the people who have lost their jobs, they cannot speak highly enough of this man, for the way he has given his service to them, Mr Butcher said.

One of the men helped by Paul, Mr Neville Dennis, 39, of Broken Hill is one of the many grateful for Mr Keady's support. Mr Dennis, a father of two, was retrenched after 22 years working at the mine.

Nothing has been too much trouble for them (Paul Keady and his wife, a partner at the firm). He gave us free legal advice, explained what our rights were and took the case to court. ■

An article by **Paul Keady** will appear in the next edition of Plaintiff.

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