

The year ahead

Peter Carter, APLA National President



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The new year rings in a number of important changes to APLA's operations.

The Yaran and Baxter secretariat contract expires in mid February and we are now moving from a contracted support configuration to one with our own office and our own staff.

This change of administrative direction was inevitable once the pattern of our growth became clear after our first conference in 1995. As inevitable and exciting as this may be there are many challenges in at once dealing with issues concerning premises, staff and duties all in a financial environment of restraint.

Our current member services officer, Jane Staley will assume the role of executive officer. Jane will be supported by a clerical staff of one.

The shift to an APLA structure presents an excellent opportunity to develop an administrative organisation commensurate with our anticipated size (2000 members by the year 2000) and the services and projects which members need. We must seize this chance to put into place appropriate long term strategies and efficiencies - and indeed are financially compelled so to do.

As foreshadowed on Hamilton Island, it will be necessary to curtail expenditure in the policy and media area for at least the first half of 1999. Regrettably the part-time media officer position, currently occupied by Eva Scieerlink (and previously by Rebecca Kay), has been closed down from January. Simon McGregor will continue in his role as policy/campaign manager but on a reduced basis.

These changes will have an effect on APLA's ability to influence decision makers over a range of federal issues upon which we have had some success in recent months. Hopefully the measures need only be temporary until other decisions improve our overall operational performance.

The reduction in campaign strength at

national level is balanced to some extent by branches committing their own resources to state personnel filling media and campaign roles. Dr Hannah Middleton has been very successfully engaged by the New South Wales branch since September and the Queensland branch has recently advertised a similar position. It appears likely that the Victorian branch will create a similar role in the lead up to the Victorian election in 1999.

The 1999 membership directory will be published electronically on the APLA web site, rather than in printed version. This will allow a deferral of a significant expense. The electronic version will allow members to download address details of all other members into their own address books and databases and with more and more members having e-mail capability, provide for easier internal communications.

Membership fees will increase in 1999. The National Council on Hamilton Island resolved to increase annual fees for ordinary members to \$300. This is effective from January 1999 for all new members and renewals. Increases will also apply to other classes of membership.

It should be noted that this is the first membership fee increase in the five years of the Association's operations and represents a 4% rise in fees for each of those years. Given the increase in the quality and number of member services over that time I hope members will appreciate the modest nature of the rise and the continued value for money, which your investment in APLA, continues to represent.

This year also sees the introduction of our *Certified Firm Scheme*. Under this scheme the Association will certify firms all of whose eligible practitioners (solicitors or barrister/solicitors) are APLA members. The certification of member firm status will permit those firms to use the APLA logo on promotional materials, advertise-

ments and letterhead.

The scheme has already been trialed in Queensland in the latter part of 1998 with considerable success. It is seen to have benefits both to the Association, in terms of brand recognition among the public and to the firms who choose to join by being prominently associated with that brand. All members will be circulated with the application and details of enrolment fees shortly.

In 1999 the Association will also seek to develop its already considerable support from allied industries in terms of increased sponsorship and strategic alliances. There are a number of sections of industry who supply services and goods to the legal profession and with whom APLA is well placed to develop mutual relationships. We will seek to expand the areas in which APLA can establish these relationships in coming months.

Also this year, under the editorship of Geoff Coates, efforts will be made to improve the presentation of our publication flag ship, *Plaintiff*.

Overall, this year will be one of modest growth, improvement in service delivery and fiscal restraint.

Your energy and commitment will be needed as much this year as before.

We continue to be an association where the major contributors to our success are the members themselves. I would therefore encourage you to become engaged in the Association's activities, to participate in your state affairs on branch committees, in campaigns and in other capacities.

The Association and our constituents - the otherwise voiceless public - will continue to need your support throughout 1999 and into the new millennium. ■

Peter Carter, President