

Mapping the road to justice

APLA members share a vision of a more just society in which people are fairly compensated for negligently caused injury and loss. When insurers blame the victims of negligence and their lawyers for seeking fair compensation, and when governments propose legislation that will limit this compensation, we see the injustice and seek to challenge it.

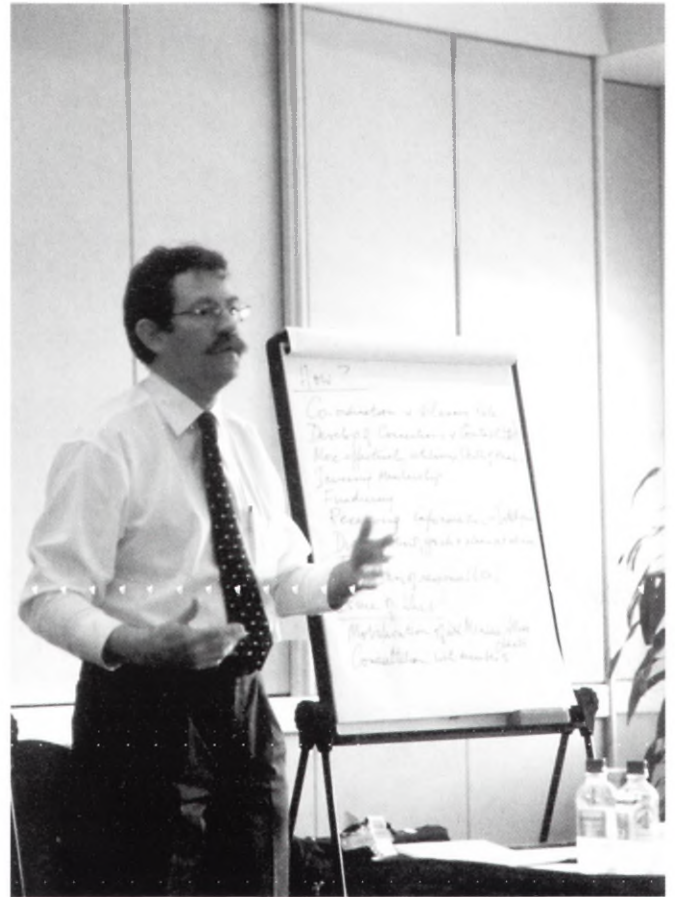
Before APLA was founded in 1994 there was no voice to challenge the powerful interest groups of insurers and corporations. Since that time APLA has engaged in the policy debate, both in the public arena and behind closed doors, to champion the rights of the injured and disadvantaged.

We have fought many battles on behalf of every person who works, drives, uses public spaces, trusts in a professional – in short all Australians – so that if they should ever need compensation for injury or loss, their right to access it will still exist.

We feel righteous indignation and deep despair at the misinformation and purely economic arguments put forward by powerful interest groups. APLA gives us an opportunity to harness this indignation into a force to resist and to bring the policy debate back to focus on the victims of negligence and the prevention of injury, rather than on the economic interests of those who have the ability to improve safety and the responsibility to fairly compensate when they fail.

This remains a huge challenge for APLA. Over the past two years APLA has undergone significant growth, but we still remain a relatively small organisation. We must therefore harness our limited resources and work together to achieve our goals.

With this in mind, the Council of APLA has undergone a strategic review of the organisation to clarify APLA's focus and to build a stable and efficient structure to allow us to continue our work into the future. In March 2000 the Council met in Canberra and, with the assistance of an independent facilitator, underwent a strategic planning session. That meeting resulted in the development of a number of strategies for the future direction of APLA.



APLA strategic thinking session facilitated by Damien Smith.

The strategy that has probably received most attention since that time was the commitment of the Council to make APLA a "truly national organisation". This has involved a strong commitment from all states and territories to the future of APLA with a vision to make it a strong national body that has the capacity to assist all members with policy matters, information, liaison with government, and practice management. The Council and Executive have been taking major steps since March 2000 to try and promote the strategy. At their annual meeting in October 2001, they reviewed the success of the strategy which has thus far centralised all finances, strengthened our secretariat with the employment of new staff members, and standardised processes relating to entry of contacts, staging of events, and all other financial activities.

Hand in hand with this strategy have been a number of other important programs that are constantly under review. Briefly those programs are as follows:

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– APLA plans for the future

(a) Initiating a National Signature Program

Part of APLA's mission is to prevent injury through safer products, workplaces, and other environments. As many members will be aware, the Council committed APLA to a School Bus Safety Campaign around the nation to lobby schools, parent groups, and governments for the introduction of a number of safety measures in school buses. Council is also considering other possible national signature programs designed around education and assisting the community.



(b) Communicating Information to Members

Council recognised that members need to be informed of APLA's policies and activities so that all members can make a

meaningful contribution to the organisation. The Council has been focused upon ensuring that there is a means for better communication of information to members through a redesign of the web site, improvement of the email list servers, and a planned prepublication email of *Plaintiff* magazine within the near future. The appointment of our Branch Liaison Officer and Membership Officer will also assist in this strategy.

(c) Developing a Succession Plan

It was Council's view that it was essential that we maintain knowledge and expertise within APLA, but that is was also vital to renew the leadership of the association with new representatives on committees and Council. Further, it is important that we ►



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Phone (02) 9959 5004 Fax (02) 9929 4592 Enquiries Dr Ron Thomson
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APLA Councillors Ian Brown, Tom Goudkamp (APLA National Treasurer), and Audrey Jamieson at the National Council meeting

have a program to ensure that the office bearers of the organisation are the best possible people to carry out those roles. Recently a specific Committee was formed to address these issues.

(d) Developing a National Pro-active Lobby Role

Never before has this strategy been so important. Recently there have been major campaigns in Victoria, Queensland, and

very recently in NSW. The issues are broadly the same across the nation and we have seen from experience that the tactics and arguments to diminish individual rights are also very similar. Council is working with the APLA branches to ensure that we capitalise on the knowledge and resources of the whole association.

(e) Developing a Knowledge Base

Because of the campaigns, lobbying activities, law reform activities, and other programs involving many APLA members, it is the Council's view that there must be a means of retaining and disseminating that information. Our President, Rob Davis, has already assisted in this strategy through the development of CDs containing much of the documentation. This matter is currently under review by Council with a view to trying to incorporate the information through the website to make it more readily available. Only members will be able to access such information.

(f) Enhancing and Identifying New Revenue Sources

APLA's future lies in having a strong financial foundation. Membership is important as part of that financial strength and there will continue to be a focus on increasing membership. This strategy also looks beyond membership and plans to develop other income streams such as donations, advertising and sponsorship, and CLE.

As can be seen, there is plenty of activity within APLA. We are fortunate to have a Council of Directors and dedicated Branch Committees who have a common vision centred upon the need to promote civil justice and access to justice. There is no doubt, however, that much work lies ahead. ☐

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If you have any questions about APLA's strategic direction, or would like to get more involved in APLA's work, please contact the Executive Officer, Jane Staley.