

Peter Burt

It may seem unusual to have a Queenslander write a profile of one of Victoria's leading plaintiff lawyers. However, Peter Burt is a regular visitor, having attended four of the five National Conferences held in the Sunshine State. This fact alone speaks volumes for Peter's deep commitment to APLA.

In recent times Peter has had the opportunity to further demonstrate his passion for issues affecting plaintiff lawyers and their clients. As President of the Victorian branch of APLA, he has made a significant contribution to the high profile public liability debate, appearing on national television, radio and in the print media.

He has also lobbied State and Federal politicians extensively to ensure the views of APLA are adequately represented in any public discussion on the issue.

The public liability debate, driven in large part by the self-interest of the insurance industry and their political mouthpieces, has been greatly enhanced by the commonsense and logical contributions of key APLA members such as Peter and his colleagues Rob Davis and Tom Goudkamp.

This is not the only occasion in which Peter has had the courage to stand up to the government on issues of national significance. Indeed, at a time when some politicians seem to be doing everything they can to paint our profession in the worst possible light, we could do worse than to remind ourselves of the example shown last year by Peter's involvement in the Tampa Case.

Peter represented Eric Vadarlis, the solicitor who challenged the Federal Government's attempts to imprison and forcefully remove asylum seekers from the Tampa.

Justice French of the Federal Court was moved to note in that case '[t]he

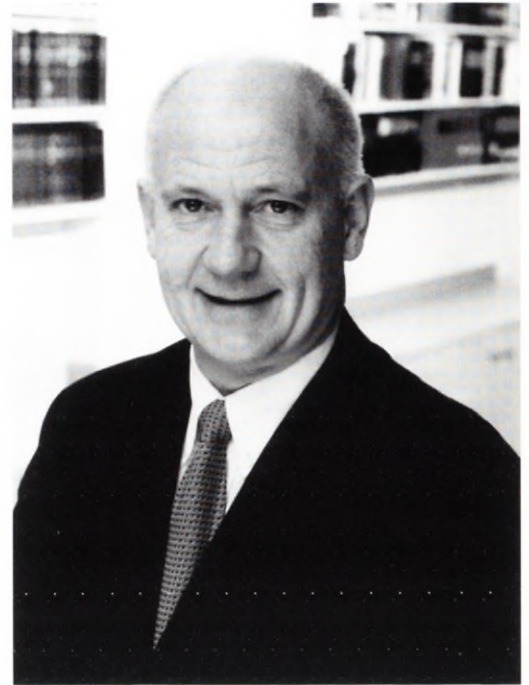
counsel and solicitors acting in the interests of the rescuees in this case have evidently done so *pro bono*. They have acted according to the highest ideals of the law. They have sought to give voices to those who are perforce voiceless and, on their behalf, to hold the Executive accountable for the lawfulness of its actions. In so doing, even if ultimately unsuccessful in the litigation they have served the rule of law and so the whole community.'

That Peter felt strongly enough about this case to commit his time on a *pro bono* basis speaks volumes for his sense of fair play and a fair go for all – characteristics not obviously embraced by the government of the day.

When he is not devoting his time to his activities as President of the Victorian Branch of APLA, Peter runs a thriving personal injury practice at the law firm Riordan & Partners, which has offices in Shepparton and Melbourne. Peter has been a partner of the firm since 1982 and in this time has developed a reputation as one of Victoria's leading transport accident compensation lawyers.

His achievements in this field include acting in one of five cases in 1991 that defined the meaning of the expression 'serious injury' in Victoria's *Transport Accident Act* 1986. He also acted for Dave Shepherd, whose case resulted in a special amendment to this Act.

His mastery of the accident compensation jurisdiction was recognised further afield in 1999 when he travelled to South Africa to give expert evidence at the Satchwell Commission of Inquiry into



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transport accident compensation laws.

Peter's commitment to the plaintiff's cause is not restricted to membership of APLA. He can be found each year in late October holding court with a dedicated group of plaintiff lawyers discussing the challenges that lie ahead for us individually and as a profession. These strategy sessions often run late into the evening leaving participants blurry-eyed the following morning.

Some people say that when they first meet Peter it is a sobering experience. Others say the sobering up experience starts about twelve hours later. Either way, he is a true champion of APLA who works tirelessly, often without fanfare or reward, for the benefit of the membership as a whole, and at times to the detriment of his own practice. ■

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Presentation details should be sent to

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apla Diary

12 & 13 June 2002

North QLD Litigation at Sunrise Tour
Cairns International and Jupiters Townsville, QLD

ENQUIRIES: Darren Moore 07 3236 1528

13 June 2002

NSW Litigation at Sunset

Motor Vehicle Accidents Compensation – Update

Law Society of NSW

ENQUIRIES: lbalchin@apla.com.au

13-14 June 2002

Medical Negligence Conference

Brisbane Marriott QLD

ENQUIRIES: tdickson@apla.com.au

19 June 2002

VIC Litigation at Sunrise

Workcover Workshop

Metropolitan Hotel, Melbourne VIC

ENQUIRIES: lbalchin@apla.com.au

24 June 2002

August Plaintiff Copy Deadline

Theme: Advocacy

CONTRIBUTIONS: lhayward@apla.com.au

23 August 2002

October Plaintiff Copy Deadline

Theme: Law of the Sea

CONTRIBUTIONS: lhayward@apla.com.au

17-20 October 2002

APLA National Conference

Hotel Grand Chancellor

Hobart TAS

ENQUIRIES: tdickson@apla.com.au

*Every effort will be made to keep to the descriptions above, however, some changes may occur. Please contact APLA for more information on any of the events listed on **PHONE (02) 9698 1700.***

2002 APLA National Conference

17–20 October ■ Hotel Grand Chancellor ■ Hobart



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FOR MORE DETAILS ON THE CONFERENCE SEE PAGE 47

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