

Welcome and farewell

This is my first President's Page for *Plaintiff*.

May I start by acknowledging the honour of acting as APLA president this year. I will try to fulfil the trust bestowed upon me by the appointment.

You have elected an active and impressive council and enthusiastic state committees. I am certain they will discharge their responsibilities admirably and provide both leadership and service in the next (almost certainly difficult) 12 months.

Elsewhere in this issue, tribute is paid to the two-year presidency of Rob Davis. May I add my own expressions of admiration for what he achieved for injured people and for APLA, especially during the tort reform campaign. I am in awe of his commitment of time and energy, to his own financial detriment, to enable those achievements. Rob, we are truly grateful.

We also farewell Bill Madden, for the time being at least, from *Plaintiff*, the New South Wales Committee and National Council. Bill's contribution in each of those spheres - and generally - has been nothing short of remarkable. We will miss that contribution enormously and sincerely thank him for it.

I also must thank and pay tribute to the retiring state presidents and national councillors. You have all made a substantial contribution and will be missed.

THE FUTURE OF APLA

This is a critical time for our association.

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With assaults on the rights of injured people continuing, so too must our fight in defence of those rights. The struggle must encompass public debate, political lobbying and, where necessary, support for challenging unjust laws in the courts. We commit to these objectives.

But of course, as we all know, there are other injustices in our society that deserve attention. The government's disregard for those who have come to our country as refugees in boats, challenges to other fundamental civil rights, like the right to silence and the presumption of innocence, encroachments on the separation of powers and the independence of the judiciary, and the perennial issues of poverty and indigenous health, confront and affront us all.

With the enactment of laws limiting injured people's rights to sue comes a correlative impact on the practices of our members. In some cases, lawyers who are enthusiastic APLA members will lose their jobs. Others may become disillusioned, and still others may feel they do not have the financial wherewithal to remain members or to sign up their employed solicitors as members. We have already seen some impact in this area.

Yet it is critical that we strive to maintain and, if possible, increase our membership to provide the funds to continue the battle for the injured and the to-be-injured who have no-one else to speak for them, and to provide the level of service and continuing legal education that you have come to expect from us.

And perhaps we must expand the role of APLA to address some of these other fundamental issues of concern.

Perhaps in adversity then, comes this opportunity. Maybe APLA should



embrace a wider manifesto, change its name and objects, and, in so doing, open itself up to a wider catchment of potential members. Perhaps it should seek to position itself as the pre-eminent civil rights body in Australia, and forge alliances with other groups with similar ideals. Maybe it's time to be called the Australian Lawyers Association, the Australian People's Lawyers Association, or the Australian Civil Justice Association. What do you think?

This debate has commenced in earnest at APLA Council level, but requires the input of all our members. Passionate views from all sides have been forthcoming. Please tell your National Council and state representatives what you think. Perhaps you have an altogether different vision for the association. All possibilities are open for discussion. This debate will probably come to a vote at the National Conference in Cooloom in October. Please try to get there.

While this is likely to be a challenging and difficult year, it may also be an exciting one. Building on our achievements to date, it may be the making of the association. Stay with us. Help us. Be involved.

The future of APLA (or ALA or ACJA) is yours to determine. **PL**