



Doing what is right, not popular

By Simon Morrison

Alliance activities over the past couple of months have broadcast our commitment to our mission – justice, freedom and the rights of the individual – very publicly.

Hosting Major Dan Mori's series of public lectures across the nation gave us a great chance to tell the world why we exist.

Major Mori is a lawyer of immense strength who passionately follows what is right as opposed to what is popular. Contrary to public opinion that David Hicks' predicament is of his own making, Major Mori succinctly convinced his audiences of the shameful abrogation of Hicks' basic rights. Protecting these rights is particularly important given the current political climate in this country.

TORT REFORM

A primary objective for us is to lobby governments to wind back the 2002 tort reform changes that have so severely undermined injured people's rights. Having vigorously put our views in discussions with politicians in most states and, more recently, with the Commonwealth attorney-general, we believe that we are having some impact in terms of demonstrating the injustices and damage caused by these reforms.

Once we have finalised the data collection currently underway, we will move into the second phase of the

objective – putting core solutions to governments around the country to correct the current imbalance. The incredible profitability of the insurance sector means that there is no better time to strike our message home.

WORKERS' COMPENSATION

Given the communiqué signed by premiers and chief ministers in October to harmonise workers' compensation in the states and territories and, more recently, the High Court ruling in the *Work Choices* case, it is timely for us to turn our attention to playing a key role in any potential changes in this important area of practice. With activity gathering pace in Tasmania, the ACT and South Australia, it is critical that we get involved.

Despite assurances from the prime minister that the Commonwealth does not intend to encroach on traditional state powers, we believe that it will inevitably move into the area of workers' compensation before too long. Historical attempts to seek uniformity have sadly been done on a 'lowest common denominator' basis, potentially disadvantaging a huge number of workers in this country.

NATIONAL CONFERENCE

I am pleased to report that the 2006 national conference was an outstanding success on all fronts. It was very encouraging to hear members speak of their renewed passion and enthusiasm generated by much of the content at the conference.

Giving the Civil Justice Award to a politician – the ACT chief minister, Jon Stanhope – was, for some, an interesting move. In this day and age,

when politicians rarely make decisions of conviction but tend to react to populist views, it is refreshing to see a politician who doesn't flinch from principle and truly stands up for what is right, not what is popular.

Our special guest from the US, Tom Vesper, brought the house down as well as an energy to the conference that reminded us why we as lawyers fight for the rights of our clients.

THE NEXT SIX MONTHS

In addition to pursuing the second phase of our tort reform objective, we want to continue our push to develop our newer areas of practice, notably in the fields of criminal law, human rights, industrial law, and immigration.

The Alliance's CLE program continues to be a major strength, and we will keep developing this important area.

The practice support survey, which will be sent shortly, will provide critically important data to help our members improve the efficiency of their practices.

From February to June is a busy time for our state branches, with Queensland, NSW, Victoria, South Australia and the ACT all convening their conferences.

I wish all of our members a very merry and safe holiday break, and look forward to working together to achieve great things in the new year. ■

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