

A healthy organisation

By Eva Scheerlinck



I thought it would be quite fitting to include an appeal of my own in the appeals edition – an appeal to support our organisation.

The Lawyers Alliance has around 1,500 members across Australia to draw on, and we need your support to make this organisation as effective as it can be. Although the most obvious way to get involved is by helping out at a committee level, many more activities can be undertaken to support the organisation by accessing networks, driving policy initiatives, and of course financial support.

Former Labor leader, Mark Latham, estimated that out of a membership of 75,000, the Labor Party would have only '7,500 "real" members around the country'.¹ Those are the active members who attend meetings and conferences, assist with formulating policy and the like. Latham's figure represents 10 per cent of the total membership.

If that is representative of an active organisation, then the Lawyers Alliance is in a strong position. Over 5 per cent of our membership is actively involved on our various committees at any one time. When you take into account our members who attend and write papers for conferences, research and write articles for *Precedent*, or submit case notes to the *Australian Lawyers Alliance News* e-bulletin, our membership by any standards is active and healthy.

But there are many more ways in which our members support this

organisation, and can give their time and resources to make us a stronger and more effective force.

The South Australian branch has recently had to dig its heels in against more legislation from the South Australian government that will further erode the rights of injured workers. Led by SA president, Tony Kerin, an appeal was launched to establish a fighting fund in order to effectively educate not just the government, but also the opposition and the general public, of the damage this legislation will do. In less than a week, local members raised funds to fight this unjust and retrospective legislation and got behind their branch to work collaboratively to make a difference.

We also have a large number of members who assist us in writing submissions to government inquiries. The quality and number of our submissions rely on our membership's expertise and their willingness to contribute. Apart from the recent Comcare submission, our members are currently helping us to work on submissions on a range of diverse topics, including workers' compensation, a charter of rights, compensation for the Stolen Generations, victims of crime (QLD), the Commission of Inquiry into Child Protective Services (NSW), as well as a review of privacy in Australia.

The Australian Lawyers Alliance also has a number of members who actively assist the executive in securing valuable meetings with members of

governments, oppositions and other interested parties around Australia, both in the states and territories, and federally. The importance of lobbying in achieving our goals should never be under-estimated. We recently had four members fly at their own expense from around the country to Sydney for a meeting with the people conducting the Comcare inquiry for the federal government. Their generosity and expertise allowed the Lawyers Alliance to be represented in what was a very worthwhile hearing.

At the end of the day, we all have a vested interest in seeing the Lawyers Alliance succeed in achieving the objectives set out in our mission statement. We all benefit when our membership is being heard, and of course our clients also benefit when we make a difference. There are many ways in which you, too, can become actively involved in our organisation. My appeal is that you do. ■

Note: 1 Julian Fitzgerald, *Lobbying in Australia, You Can't Expect to Change If You Don't Speak Up*, Rosenberg Publishing, 2006, pp51-2.

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