



# President's Report

**YOUNG LAWYERS ARE MEETING CHALLENGES TO THE PROFESSION AND ACCESS TO JUSTICE.**

**W**ith lots on the agenda in 2010, the Young Lawyers' Section (YLS) wasted no time in meeting the challenges presented in the first half of the year, including funding for legal aid, human rights law reform and tackling depression.

The YLS is focusing on diversity in the profession in 2010. Young lawyers have greater diversity of experience and background than the profession traditionally, with novel and varied approaches to problem-solving. Diversity is important because it is essential that the legal profession is representative of the community we serve in order to deliver access to justice for all.

## LEGAL AID MATTERS

Lawyers know that maintaining rights for all Australians to access justice is something worth fighting for. That's why members of the profession, including many young lawyers, rallied before the County Court on 28 April to demand increased funding for legal aid.

The legal aid system provides legal representation for those less well off, to ensure that everyone in the community gets a "fair go". All Australians have a fundamental right to access legal advice and services, regardless of means. The past 15 years have seen major cutbacks to legal aid funding.

The Victorian government announced an additional \$49.9 million for Victoria Legal Aid (VLA) over two years in the 4 May Budget. Then the federal government announced an additional \$92.3 million over four years from 1 July, as well as a one-off \$7 million for legal aid commissions. While we applaud these announcements, more funding – and more consistent funding – is required to protect the legal rights of the most disadvantaged Australians.

We welcome greater partnership between the state and federal governments and look forward to negotiations on a national partnership agreement on legal assistance services, which aims to achieve significant reform in the way legal assistance services are provided in the future.

## NO HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

In December 2008, the national human rights consultation was launched to inquire into the protection and promotion of human rights and responsibilities in Australia. The community responded in significant numbers, with 35,000 people making submissions, including a submission by the LIV with contributions from the YLS. The YLS Law Reform Committee focused on human rights, including the Victorian Charter of Rights, in both 2008 and 2009.

On 21 April, federal Attorney-General Robert McClelland announced the government's response to the national human rights consultation report. Briefly, the government rejected a human rights Act and instead plans to introduce a human rights framework. In addition, the government issued a standing invitation to international rapporteurs to visit and examine Australia's compliance with our international human rights obligations.

While we welcome the new framework, the rejection of a human rights Act is disappointing for those who support legislative protection of rights. The consultation submissions were overwhelmingly in favour of an Act, with 87 per cent of the 33,356 who expressed a view registering their support, according to a 23 April article in *The Age* this year.

Injecting human rights discourse into public discussion helps to ensure that we remain vigilant about our rights so that Australia is a great place for all to live. The YLS will continue to be involved in the review of the Victorian Charter by government next year, and the human rights framework review in 2014.

Check out our website to join the YLS committee, at [www.liv.asn.au/younglawyers](http://www.liv.asn.au/younglawyers).

## TOWARDS BETTER PRACTICE

The Community Issues Committee (CIC) is hosting a Towards Better Practice seminar on 21 July with tips to combat depression, stress and anxiety.

Visit our website to find out about this CIC event and to get involved with the YLS. Everyone is welcome!

[www.liv.asn.au/younglawyers](http://www.liv.asn.au/younglawyers)

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The YLS Community Issues Committee put together a film fundraiser to benefit Tarwirri, the Indigenous Lawyers and Law Students Association of Victoria. The night featured a series of short Indigenous films and a panel featuring Indigenous barrister Munya Andrews and RMIT's John Harding.