

# Victorian conference report

Once more the Victorian APLA Conference saw all roads leading to the Cumberland at Lorne.

First, the statistics.

With 136 delegates compared to 83 last year - representing a growth rate of 63% - the organising committee plainly got something dramatically right. At current growth rates, the entire global population will be in attendance at the Victorian APLA conference sometime late in the millennium!

Victorian plaintiffs have suffered the greatest diminution of rights under the Bracks governments since the Kennett Government's 1997 WorkCover 'reforms'. As a corollary, plaintiff lawyers' work has diminished markedly.

Nonetheless, the state APLA conference saw delegates and guests in record numbers. Whether this was due to the renowned steely optimism of the plaintiff lawyer community, a desire to ascertain how, exactly, one is now to earn a living, or a practical need to obtain CLE points, remains unclear.

The conference would obviously not be possible without sponsorship, and Lennon & Hyland, Dolman Bateman, Evidex, and ipac securities, all long-time APLA supporters, again generously supported the event. On the Thursday evening before the conference started, the State Committee had the pleasant task of dining with the

sponsors as a mark of thanks for their continued support of APLA.

The conference proper ran from Friday morning to Saturday afternoon, and the speakers' topics were regarded by delegates as uniformly relevant and timely, and the speakers themselves were similarly the subject of high praise by attendees. Of particular note, perhaps, were Julian Burnside QC, the keynote speaker; John Cain, the LIV Chief Executive Officer; Paul Chadwick; and Jack Forrest QC.

The WorkCover and TAC Panel sessions were particularly well attended, the sole criticism being that they could well have done with being longer than scheduled.

While APLA National keep the results of delegates' feedback sheets confidential, it would be remiss not to report here the remarkable 100% score given by delegates to the relevance, compelling nature and timeliness of Julian Burnside's keynote address concerning the treatment of asylum seekers in this country.

The highlight of the Saturday dinner was the awarding of Civil Justice Awards to two stalwarts of plaintiff law and the rights of plaintiffs in Victoria: John Price of Maurice Blackburn Cashman, and Paul Mulvaney of Slater & Gordon. Both John and Paul spoke graciously upon their receipt of the award.

In all, the 2004 APLA Conference was an undoubted success from all perspectives - educationally, socially, and professionally. For this, thanks are due to the organising committee of Geraldine Collins, Clara Davies, Simon Garnett, Alex Watson and Kim Alderson, APLA Conference Manager, as well as to Jake Kilby, APLA's Marketing Assistant, who was obliged to step into the breach when APLA was without a

Marketing Manager for the seven weeks leading up to the Conference. Clara Davies' success in drumming up fundraising for the conference is also noteworthy, continuing her habit of handsomely exceeding expectations in this regard. ■



Angela Sdrinis relaxes with some friends after delivering her paper on ComCare.



APLA Victorian Branch President, Simon Garnett, with Law Institute of Victoria CEO, John Cain, who opened this year's conference.

Smiles all around at the conference dinner.



**John McPherson** is a partner at Arnold Dallas McPherson, Bendigo, and an accredited person injuries specialist. He once won a prize for being the first registrant for APLA's National Conference, and is an experienced conference-goer.

**PHONE** (03) 5441 4588 **EMAIL** johnm@ardmc.com.au