

# Signing off

By Simon Morrison



**I**t is with great pride that I write my final president's page for *Precedent*.

I thought it fitting to reflect on the events of the past year to see how we have fared as an organisation.

The year began with a very successful medical law conference in Sydney. The event is fast becoming the master class of medical negligence CLE in the country. We farewelled Bill Madden, who has worked tirelessly as the SIG chair in this specialised area of practice. Although big boots were needed to replace Bill, they more than arrived in the form of David Hirsch, who has taken to the role with gusto. David's extensive experience as a medical negligence litigator, coupled with his skills as a great communicator, have generated significant opportunities for reasoned dialogue between the Alliance and medical insurers for balanced reform in this important area.

The 2006 National Conference was one of the best yet. We were fortunate to host Tom Vesper from New Jersey in the US, a board member of the American Association of Justice (formerly ATLA) and one of America's leading trial lawyers.

In my first three months as president I completed a national tour, meeting government, judicial and Law Society officials to lay the groundwork for the

Alliance's tort reform campaign. The campaign focused on winding back civil liability legislation nationally, and raising awareness of the implications of the proposed national workers' compensation system.

A major breakthrough in this area occurred recently at the NSW conference, when Justice Ipp conceded that tort reform had gone too far.

Following on from our CEO's great work with the Criminal Defence Lawyers Association of Victoria, our strategy this year has been to make inroads into our 'newer' areas of practice such as criminal law, human rights, immigration and industrial relations.

In line with this strategy, we seized the opportunity to host Major Michael Mori on his recent Australian tour and help him to communicate the injustices faced by David Hicks at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

I am grateful to all of our members and staff who put in countless hours to pursue this cause; in particular, Julian Burnside QC and Tom Percy QC, who both agreed to sit on the panel overseeing the processes to which David has been subjected.

This was a defining moment for the Alliance. Against some significant criticism from various political quarters, we stood firm in upholding

basic human rights and the rule of law, no matter how unpopular or controversial this stance may have been.

As I sign off, I want to thank the Alliance board for its unwavering support as the core leaders of the organisation. I welcome Ian Brown as the next president. Ian is a lawyer of great repute in my home state and, as a founding member of the Alliance, is one the most experienced campaigners I have ever met. I also thank all the branch presidents and committee members who have done the 'hard yards' in their states.

I want to express my particular thanks to our CEO Eva Scheerlinck for her work in running the organisation's day-to-day operations. Eva's commitment is what makes us the success we are. She has led a truly talented staff who continue to perform for us.

It has been a privilege to be your president this past year. I look forward to watching the Alliance go from strength to strength. ■

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