

Strength in numbers

By Eva Scheerlinck



There are many advantages to being part of a professional association, and one prominent reward is the collective voice. The collective voice is a powerful tool in the quest to influence those who make decisions.

With around 1,500 members, the Lawyers Alliance has proved itself to be an effective collective voice for plaintiff lawyers, whether in the media or in a submission to government.

However, sometimes our message can be strengthened when we work together with other like-minded organisations. In the recent *A Fair Go for Injured People* campaign in NSW, for example, the Lawyers Alliance worked with the Law Council of Australia, the NSW Bar Association and the Law Society of NSW.

In other areas of public comment, the Alliance has received prominent coverage across Australia's media a number of times in recent months. A number of press releases and a report on the legal situation of David Hicks, as well as an anti-death penalty message at the time of Saddam Hussein's execution, has helped the Lawyers Alliance to build its public profile in the area of human rights.

The result of this coverage saw Lawyers Alliance president Simon

Morrison, president-elect Ian Brown and myself speak at rallies aimed at freeing David Hicks, while more recently, ACT member John Purnell SC spoke at Parliament House.

The message we took to the public certainly had an effect, as it was only through the pressure of growing public opinion that the government finally acted for David Hicks, a move that has recently seen Hicks' return to Australia.

We have also been lobbying both the federal government and the opposition on a national level. In March, Simon Morrison and I travelled to Canberra, where we met attorney-general, Phillip Ruddock, the office of deputy opposition leader, Julia Gillard, Democrats deputy leader, Andrew Bartlett, and the office of Greens senator, Kerry Nettle.

At these meetings we made representations on tort reform and the national workers' compensation scheme, as well as the pressure being put on Comcare by the Optus Toll decision. Also discussed was the added pressure tort reform was putting on Medicare and Centrelink, as well as David Hicks' then legal situation.

At a state level, our committees continue to lobby governments through meetings and submissions, to keep our membership's concerns at the

forefront of any debate we need to be involved in.

Collectively, our voice promotes our message to those who need to listen – those who make decisions – as well as raising consciousness and publicising what we stand for to the community at large.

Finally, in keeping with the theme of this edition of *Precedent*, the Alliance's offices are going green (or greener, at any rate!) To this end we are reviewing all of our administrative processes, ensuring that we use biodegradable cleaning agents, reducing our consumption of energy wherever we can, switching to 100% recycled paper wherever possible, and talking to our building's management about instigating additional recycling schemes. This edition of *Precedent* is printed on recycled Australian-made paper, and we have dispensed with the petrochemical seal on the cover and the usual shrinkwrapping in favour of recycled envelopes. ■

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