

Starting out

By Ian Brown



It is with equal parts trepidation and excitement that I commence my term as national president of the Australian Lawyers Alliance. I look forward to the next 12 months with great enthusiasm at the enormous job ahead of me, and I am ready to get to work.

The first thing I must do is congratulate Simon Morrison for the outstanding job he has done, the invaluable handover he has given me and the big shoes he has left for me to fill. Members may not appreciate the amount of work and personal sacrifice Simon has made over the past 12 months and I am extremely pleased, not to say relieved, that he has agreed to continue to work with the Alliance in its core battles against a national workers' compensation scheme and to achieve tort 'deform' rollback.

As both lawyers and Australians, an issue at the forefront of all our minds is the looming federal election. Should the Alliance play a role in the election and, indeed, in politics generally? I believe the answer to be a resounding 'yes'.

The Alliance is unequivocally a politically non-aligned organisation. We provide expert legal opinions on public policy issues that affect not just lawyers, but the legal rights of all Australians. It is from this perspective that the Alliance will continue to speak out on human rights abuses, unfair trial processes, restrictions on both the

freedoms of speech and of information, the general erosion of the rights of individuals and of access to justice.

The Alliance's commitment to promoting and protecting freedom, justice and the rights of the individual is at the heart of our fight for the rights of our clients and potential clients.

With any election comes an increased focus by political parties on issues that might not otherwise be given prominence. The media is undoubtedly the prism through which these issues can be magnified. I am committed to continuing the Alliance's outstanding lobbying efforts which, over the past 12 months, have seen several trips to Canberra to meet federal politicians. I also look forward to our continued relationship-building with the media, which provides an unequalled opportunity to have our message heard by a much wider audience.

There are many issues of national concern that we will continue to address throughout the year. Workers' compensation and the effects of the *Toll-Optus* decision are at the forefront of the most immediate threats to the rights of individuals that we face. We will continue the outstanding work of Simon Morrison to fight against the imposition of a national Comcare-based workers' compensation scheme.

Our commitment to restoring the rights of the injured, devastated as a result of the tort deform campaign, continues undiminished, and I am very hopeful that the next 12 months will

see further positive developments in this regard.

Over the next 12 months, the Alliance will also focus on developing both our well-established and our new Special Interest Groups – which include immigration, elder law and indigenous issues – through, among other things, the development of policy papers in these areas.

This edition of *Precedent*, with its focus on prisons, gives me an excellent opportunity to highlight my excitement at the Alliance's growth in the field of criminal law. With such high-profile members as Julian McMahon, Rob Sary and of course our WA director, Tom Percy QC, the Alliance is ideally positioned to establish itself as a dominant criminal law commentator. Our recent widely quoted commentary on the detention of Holly Deane-Johns is an excellent example of our capacity to shape public opinion.

It is a great privilege to be given the opportunity to be your president. I am dedicated to the growth of this organisation and will work enthusiastically with the membership, our committees and, of course, our dedicated staff headed by Eva Scheerlinck, to achieve this vision. ■

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