

## What does your role involve?

"As Chair of the Section I am the point of contact and liaison between the Section and the Institute. This can involve contributing to the development of policy of the Institute or the development of a position for the Institute."

## What do you believe are the greatest human rights challenges facing people in general and Australians in particular in the near future?

"I consider that key challenges for Australia are reconciliation, mandatory sentencing and the detention of refugees. Also a broader issue is Australia's position on its obligations under international instruments."

## What has been the most satisfying achievement for you as part of the Committee?

"The Section has made submissions to Government on reconciliation, native title, administrative law legislation, same sex relationship legislation and various amendments to the Equal Opportunity Act. It brings a lot of satisfaction when the Institute and the Section can be relied upon to put a considered view on the development and protection of human rights."

## How can young lawyers get involved with human rights?

"The first step is to become involved. Lawyers can get involved in human rights work through local community

groups, national organisations or international rights bodies.

It is essential to be open to learning from the people you work with. Local knowledge of local issues by local people (whether locally based or in an international context) must guide rights work."

## How can interested people get involved in the Committee?

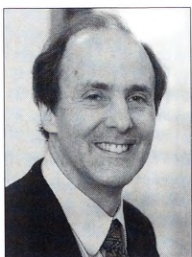
"There are 5 Committees of the section: Administrative Review/Constitutional Law Reform Committee; Human Rights Committee; Migration Committee; Disability Committee; and Health Law Committee.

New members who are able to attend meetings and contribute to the work of the Committees are always welcome."

# interview with chris johnson

## chair of the property & environmental law section

By Eva Brookes, Consultant, Mahlab Recruitment



CHRIS JOHNSON

### Who is Chris Johnson?

This year is Chris Johnson's third year as Chairman of the Property and Environmental Law Section of the Law Institute of Victoria.

Chris has been a partner in private practice for twenty-five years and is a general practitioner specialising in commercial law and property.

### What is the Property and Environmental Law Section?

The Section has approximately 1600 members. It has an Executive, which serves as a clearing-house for alerting practitioners about recent develop-

ments, for example, the impact of the recent collapse of HIH Insurance.

In addition, the Section has a number of sub-committees, dealing with areas such as leasing, liquor gaming & hospitality, planning & local government, property law, probate wills & administration and environmental issues. The sub-committees meet every six weeks and report on areas of interest relevant to their sub-committee, including the latest cases and legislation.

### So what has the Section been recently involved in?

"Interesting things that the Section has recently been involved in include reform of the *Retail Tenancies Act* and the *Gene Technology Bill*. Generally, the Section's involvement consists of making submissions regarding the

proposed legislation to government. The Section also produces a publication called *The Property Law Bulletin*, which appears four times per year. The Bulletin provides practical information for members of the Section", Chris said.

Chris is proud of the success of the Section's Disputes Resolution Committee, which allows practitioners to resolve conveyancing disputes between them in a cost-effective manner. "The decisions of this Committee are binding on the parties and to date the program has been highly successful."

### So why should you join the Property and Environmental Law Section?

Chris believes that "[w]hereas other community groups come from a particular viewpoint, the Planning and En-



Environmental Law Section represents the viewpoints of practitioners acting for plaintiffs, defendants and regulators. Being involved in such a Section allows members to consider the full spectrum of ideas and arguments relating to

their area of practice. In this regard, the Planning and Environmental Law Section is an effective lobby group in the community that has the ability to lobby government from a practical point of view on important issues".

If you are interested in the areas covered by the Section's sub-committees, please contact Peter Lowenstein on 9607 9382. Experience in your area of interest is not essential, but please bring along your enthusiasm!

# raising your legal profile

by Eva Brookes, Consultant, Mahlab Recruitment

We see them, we admire them and we wish we could be them – those high profile, talented and respected lawyers.

As a young lawyer, you may not know where to begin when it comes to raising your profile. Here are some ideas to get you going.

## In your firm

Should you be practising in a law firm, your own firm is an excellent place to begin raising your profile.

### Developing your expertise

Initially, it helps to develop an area of expertise in an area that you are committed to and passionate about, whether this be, for example, criminal, family, planning or commercial law. Hopefully, you will be in a position to practise in your area of preference. Some of you may be working within a smaller firm and therefore be a "Jack of all trades". This is not a barrier to having one main area of expertise, and in one sense, working in a general practice gives you the advantage of finding an area of law about which you are really passionate.

### Gaining trust

A high level of professional respect is gained through your clients and the community being able to rely on you for the most up to date knowledge in your area of expertise and your ability to deliver a high level of service. A great way to gain the confidence of your clients within your firm is for them to see you have the confidence of your supervising partner and that you are trusted with the conduct of their matters. Seek out the trust of your supervising partner by showing initiative and

performing your work at a superior level.

### Update your clients

Your firm is also an excellent medium through which you can conduct in-house information seminars for your clients on the latest legal developments and other issues you are aware of that affect their businesses. Your participation in such seminars puts you at the forefront of your clients' minds when they are considering which lawyer to call on a related matter.

If public speaking is not your strength, firm newsletters are also an excellent way to demonstrate your knowledge and commitment to a particular practice area. If your firm doesn't have a newsletter for your practice group, why don't you start one? Again, write about the latest legislative changes or case law and how this can affect your clients' businesses.

## In the community

### Participate

Joining organisations in the wider community is an effective way to raise your profile amongst both lawyers and non-lawyers. For example, you may consider joining one of the Sections of the Law Institute of Victoria, a community group or a body for lawyers in corporate practice such as the Australian Corporate Lawyers' Association. It is not enough to merely pay your membership and read the newsletters – you need to be committed and set yourself the goal of attending a function at least once a month.

### Network

Through your involvement with these organisations, you will be given the opportunity to network with people from a variety of backgrounds and industries, contribute to publications, present seminars and organise events.

There is an enormous amount of value to be gained from being involved in the community. The most respected and high profile lawyers are those that can relate both to the profession and the wider community, and who are able to bring the two together.

## Personal development

Further study in your area of expertise is a valuable investment when it comes to raising your profile. Your choice of study may be a Masters of Law, or a course focusing more on the practical side, rather than legal side, of your area of expertise such as a Graduate Diploma in Industrial Relations. Studying allows you to constantly update your skills while meeting more people within the community. It also allows you to develop an understanding of the practical side of your clients' businesses.

## Making it work

While these are some ideas to get you started, the final and most important ingredients to making it all happen are your commitment, quality of work and accessibility. You need to be committed to your area of practice, produce a high quality of work and advice, and be accessible to people who wish to make use of your knowledge within the community.