

PRESIDENT'S REPORT FOR 2017 AGM OF NEWCASTLE LAW SOCIETY INC

At this AGM it appears likely that there will be some change to the composition of the management committee. We will wait and see, but at the outset thanks to all who have contributed.

The 2016 Opening of Law Term ceremonies went off well. Although our numbers were up on 2015, once again I thought we solicitors were under-represented both absolutely and as compared to the Bar. After all, we now have 1,000 solicitors practicing in our region! As each of the State Courts in Newcastle proper and some of the Federal Courts refrained from sitting for at least the duration of the ecumenical service, and the overwhelming majority until the conclusion of the ceremonial sitting, it remains a mystery as to why we solicitors were not there in greater numbers.

His Honour Judge Ellis of the District Court presided at the ceremonial sitting. Although 2016 Law Society President Gary Ulman could not join us in Newcastle, he had already been "on the tools" for Newcastle in early January. Gary had rung me and offered to set up a hotline for enquiries by members of the public adversely affected by the new year's storms. In the evening we hosted the usual cocktail function at Crown & Anchor which again was a big success.

As by and large Law Week has seemingly "disappeared" as anything other than a couple of ad hoc events principally in the capital cities, The JusticeConnect (formerly PILCH) Walk for Justice was not held in 2016. The incoming social committee might consider whether to seek to revive it.

The annual networking function organised jointly between NLS and the University of Newcastle Law Students Association was held at Customs House in May 2016. Either

despite or because of the fact that I could not attend on that occasion, it again was well attended. I see no reason to doubt that a similar function will be held in about May this year. Please consider coming along or giving us your constructive suggestions as to how to promote “breaking the ice” as between students and practitioners, or both. The more the merrier!

2016’s Banter with the Bench was a big success, this year at the Maritime Museum. The judicial officers in attendance included Justice R A Hulme of the Supreme Court, together with quite a number of the local Magistrates. Equally the house was full for our annual dinner with our guest speaker, the very charming and entertaining Justice Virginia Bell of the High Court. We have just recently learned that from this year onwards the guest limit will be 120, and so in expectation of somewhat more than that number we at least need to consider other venues; maybe a nostalgic return.

The Local Court Magistrates in particular but in fact all judicial officers who attend our functions invariably express their encouragement and their appreciation of our collegiality and conviviality.

Our annual trivia night was in July and we raised \$2,963 for Hunter Connect, which is an organisation supporting families impacted by autism, Aspergers, ADHD and the like. If you feel so inclined you can make a donation by going to their website which is www.hunterconnect.org.au.

I attended each of the 5 meetings of regional Presidents held in Sydney in 2016. I did a couple of radio interviews to air and offered one or two op ed pieces (but to no apparent effect). Our management committee meets each month except for January.

Our CPD program continues to provide topical, professional and value-for-money seminars, wherever possible utilising local speakers. As you would understand, together with membership subscriptions, CPD is the single-biggest source of revenue. Inroads are being made by various other providers, including presenters of free-of-charge seminars. This is having a significant impact on our overall revenues and our ability to fund things such as our secretariat, the Coolahan Scholarship, and the ability to subsidise our major social events to some extent. Please continue to support NLS' seminars. Once again, an enormous vote of thanks goes to Colin James. We look forward to continued success in 2017. If you're a confident presenter on a topic or you have suggestions for topics or speakers, please let us know through the secretariat.

It has been of significant assistance to us that Sparke Helmore have allowed us the use of their seminar room for the presentation of various of our CPD seminars. We thank them for that and for their hospitality on those occasions.

Our "new" treasurer, Katy Mooney, and our "new" secretary, Rebecca Nelson, made significant contributions in 2016, for which they are to be thanked. Indeed thanks go to all who have contributed whether on the management committee itself or on any sub-committee, or indeed ad hoc. On the social side we have Elsie Grist to thank for the organization. Elise has done a wonderful job.

NLS remains in a reasonably strong financial position. Copies of the 2016 financial report are available here and have been put on our website. Currently we have 317 "full" financial members, and another 52 who have less than 3 years PAE and/or are government lawyers, and a further 16 who are students. Both of those latter groups pay reduced membership subscriptions. With a catchment of 1,000, no doubt we can do better. Please do what you can to encourage your colleagues who are not currently members to join. The management committee will do likewise.

We continue to have as in effect our honorary accountant Jane Beverley of Evolution Business Advisers. We again thank Jane in particular but her firm generally.

As you will have noticed, our policy of necessity namely upping the ticket prices for the major social events continues. By and large the aim is to try to make each event break even. The committee remains of the view that we are trading sustainably in the long term.

To the best of my knowledge we remain one of the few regional societies to maintain its own website as opposed to having a dedicated page as part of the website of LSNSW.

The first meeting of regional Presidents for 2017 will be on Friday 3 March. You should not underestimate the influence which group sometimes can have, such as in relation to the Society's stance on privatization of the LPI. That forum is always interested to hear if there are common or systemic problems affecting practitioners, and resolutions of that forum have often generated action by Council or the President or the CEO. You can do so via our secretariat here.

Finally and as ever, we thank Jen Richards for her unfailing patience and for her dynamism.