

PRESIDENT'S REPORT FOR 2023 AGM OF NEWCASTLE LAW SOCIETY INC

The impact of covid wanes, but perhaps a lingering effect is that of people being less inclined than pre-pandemic to attend gatherings. Since my 2022 report things have remained changeable, with solid attendances at a few events but slender at others.

Regardless of that, for the current financial year to 31 January 2023 we were again in profit (and more than just marginally) and our reserves remain strong. NLS continues to be able to meet its liabilities as and when they fall due. I will not steal our Treasurer's thunder.

In 2022 we were again unable to present our full range of Opening of Law Term ceremonies, but we had about 45 at the cocktail function where we were joined by a number of judicial officers. We thank those involved in the organisation.

The trivia night was in June, again at Souths Leagues, and it was a raging success, with 259 registered to attend, the vast majority of whom did. On this occasion the night was in support of Nova Women & Children, and we raised and donated \$10,000.00. There were 23 significant donors, and a few big bidders at the end-of-night auction, in particular the dynamic duo of Lucy Urach and Jane Hamilton, and also Ash Bithrey/Newcastle Chambers. Thank you to all of them. The Catherine Henry team were the 2022 champions, displacing Roberts Legal. The hard working organisers included Sally Davies and other members of Jenkins Legal, Kate Thomson, Sally Mackay, Rose Laffan, James Bartley and Ashlea Taylor. We thank them for their efforts, which you have seen were well rewarded.

In collaboration with HVFLPA and the Newcastle Bar, in early August we presented a farewell function for (now) the Honourable Margaret Cleary which more than 80 attended. Later than month and in conjunction with the accountants we held a highly-successful networking luncheon at the Fort Scratchley function centre with about 153 in attendance.

In September we held Banter with the Bench with more than 70 in attendance, again including a number of judicial officers.

On the first Friday of November, and in accordance with time-honoured tradition (except for covid years) we presented our annual dinner at the Newcastle Club. This

too was a big success. President of the Court of Appeal Justice Julie Ward was our guest speaker and there were 116 in attendance.

On 11 December 2022 we hosted drinks in honour of the Court of Criminal Appeal which sat in Newcastle the following day. Both the Chief Justice and the President attended the drinks, as well as a number of other judicial officers.

15 December 2022 saw the Coolahan Drinks at the Commo. Whilst a good time was had by all who attended, the numbers were low. We theorise that that was on account of the fact that Phil Lloyd's funeral and wake had been held that same afternoon, (at Ryhope and then Toronto).

Currently we have about 357 financial members (as compared with 414 at the equivalent point in 2021), being 306 "full" financial members, another 51 who have less than 3 years PAE and/or are government lawyers or who are students. That is a reduction of about 14%. Our best guess is that it arises from a combination of covid generally, but possibly also some confusion about renewals around June/July in 2021 and/or 2022. I re-iterate that we have a catchment of 1,000 solicitors in our region. Please do what you can to encourage your colleagues who are not currently members to join or re-join. The management committee will do likewise and continues to actively consider ways to attract more members, not least among some of the bigger firms.

Having said that, we have 5 new membership applications this month.

Except in January, the management committee continues to meet monthly, in alternate months by Zoom but otherwise at the Newcastle Club. That committee in 2022 was James Bartley as SVP, Kate Thomson as JVP, Micah Jenkins as treasurer, Rose Laffan as secretary, and Sally Davies, Sarah Goldfinch, and Ashlea Taylor as "ordinary" committee members, but who as I have already mentioned all made significant contributions in terms of organising events.

In my broken record mode I again remark that this is whilst also attending to his or her own professional practice amongst other things. I record my and your sincere thanks to each of them for the work which they did in 2022.

My current understanding is that all will stand for re-election, but I again announce that every single management committee position will be treated as vacant at this

year's AGM tonight at the Newcastle Club at 5.30pm. If you were intending to come along you should have rsvp'd by now!

On your and my behalf I also expressly thank Lucy Urach for her time and contribution over a number of years (in case I have previously done so in a formal way).

Meetings of regional Presidents were again less in number in 2022 than "normal" with a mix of in-person and video. NLS was represented at each of those meetings. The first meeting for 2023 is scheduled for 31 March 2023. There is developing a practice of having one meeting each year in a region. As I have observed before, you should not underestimate the influence which that group sometimes can have. 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 identify any such issues via our secretariat.

Both last year and this year we have done our best to present CPDs and to collaborate with others doing so locally. Please do support them.

Our good fortune continues in the sense of still having as our honorary accountant Jane Beverley of Evolution Business Advisers. We again thank Jane in particular but her firm generally. As I have suggested before, maybe you can consider referring some work her way?

Once again in 2023, Newcastle will have its own admission ceremony. This year that will be on Friday morning 24 February and I hear tell presided over by the Honourable Chief Justice and held at the Conservatorium. We would appreciate 1 or 2 volunteers to attend outside towards the end of the ceremony to hand out pamphlets which provide newly admitted practitioners with information about the role and function of regional law societies and how to join. Please let us know if you can help.

Penultimately but never least, we yet again thank Jen Richards for her cheerfulness, energy, patience and diligence, the more particularly so in another trying year of pandemic. I re-iterate that the judicial officers and their staff who deal with Jen speak highly of her courtesy and efficiency. It is Jen who has the major responsibility on behalf of NLS for organizing for example the OLT events. Another gold koala stamp!

To conclude on the traditional sad note, we lost several dear colleagues in 2022 including Col Hogan, Warren Perram, Bob Leeman, Richard Taperell, Phil Lloyd and Registrar Kelly Briggs, and they will all be sorely missed.

Gary Fox

21 February 2023