

PRESIDENT'S REPORT FOR 2016 AGM OF NEWCASTLE LAW SOCIETY INC

The 2015 Opening of Law Term ceremonies went off well, although once again I thought we solicitors were under-represented especially as compared to the Bar. 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 Berman SC of the District Court presided at the ceremonial sitting. The newly-installed President of the Law Society of New South Wales, John Eades, was in attendance until the morning tea. Mr Eades had travelled up to Newcastle on the preceding evening and I had a dinner meeting with him.

In the evening we hosted the usual cocktail function at Reserve Wine Bar which again was a big success (despite Greg Wilson's contribution!).

The JusticeConnect (formerly PILCH) Walk for Justice was held on 12 May 2015, but the numbers were quite disappointing. Whereas in the 3 years since we commenced organising that event it had been a big and growing success (with about 90 registered entrants by 2014), in 2015 the numbers fell appreciably to around 50 or so, but mysteriously about 80 for the bbq breakfast! Given that the walk is now the only Law Week event arranged by NLS, please consider participating this year. It is a worthy cause and an enjoyable way to start the day.

What has now become an annual networking function organised jointly between NLS and the University of Newcastle Law Students Association was held at Customs House on 22 May 2015 and was again well attended. We are already in touch with UNLSA representatives in respect of this year's events. Please consider coming along and/or giving us your constructive suggestions as to how to promote "breaking the ice" between students and practitioners.

As ever Banter with the Bench was a big success, this year at Customs House. On your behalf I thanked the owners in person. Equally so our annual dinner with our guest speaker having been Geoffrey Watson SC. Once again the house was full. Even though we may have outgrown the venue, and despite a few hiccups on the night, presently it remains first choice for this function.

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 on 7 August 2015 and we raised \$3,364.30 for Jenny's Place refuge.

With the local Bar we made submissions through the Newcastle Registry of Federal Circuit Court for the conduct of some non-family law work in Newcastle and had a couple of meetings. There was an in-principle commitment by the Court to conduct as a trial 2 separate weeks of hearings in Newcastle. Sadly nothing ever came to fruition and we do not know why. We will continue to lobby for additional work to be done in Newcastle.

I did a couple of radio interviews to air during the year.

Our CPD program continues to provide topical, professional and value-for-money seminars, wherever possible utilising local speakers. Needless to say, 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. Please continue to support NLS' seminars. Once again, an enormous vote of thanks goes to Colin James. We look forward to continued success in 2016. If you're a confident presenter on a topic or you have suggestions for topics or speakers, please let us know through the secretariat.

Both our erstwhile treasurer, Jeremy Kennedy, and our long-standing secretary, Sarah Walker, will retire from the management committee as of today. In each case family commitments have had a bearing. We thank each of them for his and her contributions. Indeed we thank all who have contributed whether on the management committee itself or on any sub-committee, or indeed ad hoc.

NLS remains in a reasonably strong financial position. Currently we have 341 "full" financial members, and another 65 who have less than 3 years PAE and/or are government lawyers,

and a further 15 who are students. Both of those latter groups pay reduced membership subscriptions. It is my understanding that this is in fairly stark contrast to most if not all other regions, even where there is a bigger potential for actual membership.

As reported at the last AGM, 2014 we were lucky enough to secure the services of Jane Beverley of Evolution Business Advisers as in effect our honorary accountant which has made the task of our treasurer rather more simple. The move to modernize the accounting and payment procedures of NLS has been completed. A big vote of thanks in that regard goes to Jane Beverley in particular but her firm generally.

As you will have noticed, the phenomenon of the actual cost of presenting the major social events exceeding the cost charged to the individual has been addressed in the seemingly obvious way; namely upping the ticket prices. The committee remains of the view that we are trading sustainably in the long term.

The 2014 and 2015 financial reports are now on the website.

To the best of my knowledge we remain just about the only regional society to maintain its own website as opposed to having a dedicated page as part of the website of LSNSW.

In 2015 I attended all of the 5 Regional Presidents meetings in Sydney they being in February, May, July, August and October.

The first meeting of Regional Presidents for 2016 was on Friday 12 February, which I attended. 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](#).

We also thank Jen Richards again for her unfailing patience and her dynamism.

Just yesterday saw the official opening of the new NSW Courts building, and I believe that today was the last planned sitting day in the old building. The fate of the old building seems uncertain at best.