

## **PRESIDENT'S REPORT FOR 2021 AGM OF NEWCASTLE LAW SOCIETY INC**

This is a very different report to those of previous years! Needless to say, this year's report about 2020's activities is very much overshadowed by the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. Just as much as that pandemic is likely to have financially affected individual practices, it certainly drastically affected our activities and revenue.

Whilst we were lucky enough to be able to present our usual range of Opening of Law Term ceremonies and functions in 2020 and 6 CPDs early on, that was the end of the section for the remainder of that calendar year. There were essentially no functions or events, no CPD beyond early March presented by us, and only nominal revenue.

As you know, and in line with the decision of the Law Society of NSW to charge nominal membership fees, we determined to do likewise. We had the luxury of solid reserves, and that remains the case. NLS can meet its liabilities as and when they fall due.

Currently we have 414 financial members, being 354 "full" financial members, another 70 who have less than 3 years PAE and/or are government lawyers or who are students. Those solicitor numbers are steady or a little better than last year. With a catchment of 1,000, presumably we can still do better. Please do what you can to encourage your colleagues who are not currently members to join. The management committee will do likewise and is actively considering ways to attract more, not least among some of the bigger firms.

With the easing of coronavirus restrictions, we are optimistic that we will be able to return to something like normal operation this year. The success of the very recent criminal law CPD and OLT functions suggests what is perhaps obvious: that we enjoy one another's company in a social setting!

Reprising 2020, we were led by Justice Stephen Campbell. [What is this strange feeling of deja-vu?]. We had something like 114 at the ecumenical service, 123 at the ceremonial sitting, and 63 at the cocktail function which was again held at the Crown & Anchor and catered by Sprout Dining. Plainly those numbers were

comparatively good, and were satisfying to the organisers, chief among whom were James Bartley and Kate Thompson. We thank them for their sterling efforts.

As I have already said, that was effectively it for 2020 in terms of events. We were very disappointed not to be able to present ingrained events such as the charity trivia night, Banter with the Bench, the annual dinner, and Coolahan Drinks. In theory we could have presented, say, the dinner, as by then there had been some relaxation of social distancing, but it would have meant a limit of 60 guests and we would not have been able to stand and mingle (let alone sing or dance). The committee's view was that that would have amounted to a Clayton's Dinner, and so the concept was dismissed.

The management committee continued to meet monthly, now by Zoom. Apart from James and Kate, that was SVP Matthew Clarkson, Treasurer Sally Davies, and Secretary Rose Laffan, together with Lucy Urach and Karlo Tychsen.

I state the obvious: 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 2020.

My current understanding is that all except Karlo will stand for re-election, but I re-iterate that all management committee positions will be treated as vacant at this year's AGM on Tuesday 16 February 2021 at the Newcastle Club at 5.30pm. If you were intending to come along you would hopefully have rsvp'd by now!

Meetings of regional Presidents were less in number in 2020 and in the main were by video conference. NLS was represented at each of those meetings. I did at least 1 radio interview during the year.

We lost several colleagues in 2020 namely John Edmunds, Eddie Selwyn OAM, and Cathy Piper and they will be missed. Paul Manion too died on 3 January 2021.

Circling back to Opening of Law Term, and straying into 2021, there were gratifying numbers in the end, but that was only after a call to arms and a late rush. I simply note (again) that both Dean Kathy at the cathedral and Judge Ellis at the ceremonial sitting said in a solemn way that those ceremonies are an important marker for each year. This is only one morning in a whole year. Please do continue to attend these events, because if they should falter once then they would probably be irrecoverable.

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. Maybe you can refer some work her way?

In a significant coup for the University Law School and Newcastle more generally, the 2021 annual Newcastle admissions ceremonies will occur on Wednesday 24 February, and at City Hall. A “full bench” consisting of the Chief Justice, the President of the Court of Appeal, and the Chief Judges of both Common Law and of Equity will preside. This year there will be 2 ceremonies, at 9.15 and at 11.15. We would appreciate some volunteers to attend outside towards the end of those ceremonies 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.

In concert between the Law School, the Bar and NLS, a celebratory dinner is to be held on the preceding evening, but number were extremely limited for various reasons not least coronavirus and notice was fairly short, such that this event is fully booked out.

The first meeting of regional Presidents for 2021 is on Friday 5 March, but still by video. 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.

Last but never least, we thank Jen Richards yet again for her cheerfulness, energy, patience and diligence, the more particularly so in this very trying time of pandemic. As I have remarked before 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. Gold koala stamp!

Gary Fox

14 February 2021

