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MEDIA RELEASE

Mapping Pro Bono Research released

The National Pro Bono Resource Centre today released its findings on the legal pro bono landscape in Australia. The report contained in a book titled “Mapping Pro Bono in Australia” has taken three years to complete and provides a snapshot of pro bono in Australia as at the end of 2006. It was launched today by the Chief Justice of Australia, the Hon. Murray Gleeson at a function held at DLA Phillips Fox in Sydney.

The report indicates that structured pro bono in law firms and through professional association and referral schemes has come a long way in Australia in the past 5 years.

Centre Director, John Corker said “There is now a greater expectation amongst the public that larger law firms, those with more than 10 partners (of which there were 91 in the last Census) will have a structured and visible pro bono program.”

“Many of the larger law firms have strongly committed to their pro bono programs and provide considerable support to their lawyers to undertake this work.”

Lawyers demonstrate an exceptional commitment to their profession and the community by providing pro bono legal services. People like to characterise lawyers as driven only by money but the truth is there are thousands of lawyers who take on work every day for free or a significantly reduced rate because they want to help those really in need....

They contribute in an important way by providing access to justice for many who are not eligible for legal aid or for non-profit organisations who assist the poor, disadvantaged and marginalized....

The Centre exists to help lawyers help the neediest of the needy across Australia and to do this alongside publicly funded legal service providers. This report will give everybody a better picture of what the Australian pro bono landscape looks like.”

Constraints and Ways Forward

The report identifies some key constraints on service delivery and identifies ways forward for the delivery of pro bono legal services.

Amongst the constraints are the risk of an adverse costs order in public interest litigation, the difficulty of obtaining pro bono assistance in regional, rural and remote areas and consumer confusion about pathways to service.

Among the suggested ways forward are:

- Greater co-ordination of the delivery of pro bono services and
- Pro bono providers working collaboratively with publicly funded legal service providers to assist disadvantaged people.
- Ensuring the limited pro bono assistance available is directed to the meet the greatest unmet need.
- Better data collection and information sharing.
- Building capacity across the legal profession, in law schools, with corporate and government lawyers and in other professions.
- Supporting aspirational pro bono targets. The Centre launched the National Pro Bono Aspirational Target of 35 hours per lawyer per year in April 2007.
- Lawyers working beyond the casework model of assistance.
- Fostering a green light approach in the court system to facilitate pro bono representation.
- Government upholding its part of the bargain with the private profession by adequately funding the primary legal service providers to the disadvantaged being Legal Aid, Community Legal Centres and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services.
- Government taking specific initiatives to encourage and support the legal profession in their pro bono efforts as the Victorian government has successfully done.

The full report can be obtained at

<http://www.bookshop.unsw.edu.au/bookweb/details?ITEMNO=9780975747926>

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