

Tim White - President

President's Message

I am delighted to have been elected as President of the Law Society of South Australia and look forward to a productive and dynamic year in which my focus will be on boosting the profile, reputation and work of the South Australian legal profession and standing up for the Rule of Law.

The Society has important roles as a regulator of the profession, provider of essential services to the profession, and as the chief advocate on behalf of the profession.

I am hopeful we can improve the perception of lawyers and successfully challenge some of the misguided stereotypes about lawyers by highlighting and acknowledging the good work that many of our Members do that have a positive impact on the State by fighting for the rights of individuals, helping to resolve disputes, facilitating business and protecting the fundamental Rule of Law principles that underpin our democracy.

Some of the key issues I plan to focus on this year include:

Interaction and connection within the profession; and with other professionals

One of my main objectives for 2020 is to improve the interaction and connection between lawyers in SA and other professionals. Who an individual obtains legal advice from in relation to a business or personal matter is often determined by personal relationships. People seek advice from those they know well. Therefore, I intend to host events aimed at assisting Members to build relationships with other professionals.

Expanding legal markets for South Australian practitioners

The 2018 National Profile of Solicitors Report, based on data compiled by the law societies from around Australia, indicates a stagnant South Australian legal market. It revealed that solicitor numbers over the seven-year period prior to 2018 grew by 33% in NSW, 32% in Victoria, 39% in Queensland and by only 7% in South Australia. SA recorded the slowest growth in solicitor numbers in the nation over the period.

Are we content with that disproportionate growth trend continuing in the future? Or do we want to make concerted efforts to attract and expand the legal markets for South Australian practitioners? I am aiming for the latter. This will take time to see the rewards but without concerted efforts to grow our profession in an economically sustainable way, our relevance in the national market place will continue to reduce.

Improving the perception of the profession in the community

Another aligned focus of mine in 2020 is to try and improve the legal profession's credibility and respectability in the community. Lawyers are often targets of adverse media publicity that is not deserved. We need to do more to connect with members of the public and communicate with them more regularly, openly and consistently. We must be more transparent, accessible and relatable to members of the public. That means broadcasting the good news stories and regularly communicating with the public about how lawyers assist people and why they should approach us to resolve their problem.

Assess whether the South Australia joining the Legal Profession Uniform Law is in the best interests of our legal practitioners

The profession each year continues to become increasingly nationally focused. South Australia should embrace the opportunities that a national profession can create. The Legal Profession Uniform Law, which allows solicitors to work across State borders much more readily, was adopted in NSW and Victoria in 2015. It is being implemented in Western Australia in July 2020. The Society will continue to watch the developments in WA and assess if it is in the best interests of the majority of practitioners in SA for us to also join that national scheme.

There will of course be many issues that will arise during the year that the Society will respond to and represent the profession on. Briefly, I expect they will include dealing with the fallout from the ongoing review of the Family Court structure and system; the recommendations of the review of major indictable reform; the roll out of CourtSA in the civil jurisdiction and the commencement of the Uniform Civil Rules; and the evolving and growing space law industry in SA.

I aim to be both visible and accessible and to work with the closely with the Members of the Society's Executive and Council, the staff of the Society and the members of the profession.

It is an honour to be the President of the Society and represent its Members.

To represent the profession as effectively as possible, I want to meet with as many Members as I can, ascertain their views, issues and concerns and do what I can to assist them in the practice of the law.

Tim White
President

January 2020