



50th Anniversary Cocktail Reception

6.40pm Law Society President Ms Pauline Wright to stage to speak

Open

Your Excellency General the Honourable David Hurley and Mrs Linda Hurley;

Attorney General, the Honourable Mark Speakman SC MP;

Former Presidents of the Law Society;

CEO of the Law Society, Mr Michael Tidball;

Members of Parliament;

Judicial officials;

Members of the Law Society;

Friends of the Law and Justice Foundation;

Ladies and gentlemen



On behalf of the Law Society of New South Wales, it give me great pleasure to welcome you all here tonight to recognise the contribution that the Foundation has made to the justice sector in NSW over the last 50 years.

Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land we are on tonight, the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, and pay my respects to their elders both past and present, and to their youth, in whose hands is held our nation's hope for a truly reconciled future. Thank you, Aunty Norma, for your welcome.

Background

Now I want to ask you all to cast your minds back to the 1960s, a time before the creation of tribunals and ombudsmen, before the establishment of legal aid commissions and community legal centres. Australia was enjoying a period of economic prosperity but social change was afoot.

Australia had entered the long-running Vietnam War in mid-1962, leading to widespread protests by the late 1960s. The national referendum of 1967 saw Indigenous Australians included in the census for the first time.

And at the same time, pressure was mounting for change in the legal profession – and a significant research gap existed in law, most evident when compared to the research effort in medicine and other professional disciplines. In late 1964, the Law Society proposed the creation of a Statutory Interest Account – money held in solicitors' trust accounts would be invested, and the interest would be placed in a fund that would be used to advance the public good. Initially hotly debated by lawyers, the proposal met with success in 1965.



The *Legal Practitioners Amendment Act 1967* received assent on this day, 30 March, in 1967 and the then Law Foundation was created.

And as we know, the NSW Law Foundation model was immediately copied in Canada with the Law Foundation of British Columbia being established in 1969, and Foundations in other provinces following. Similar organisations known as IOLTAs (Interest on Lawyer Trust Accounts) were soon established in all jurisdictions across the United States.

Some five decades later, it gives me great pride as the President of the Law Society, to recognise the vision and foresight of our forbearers at the Law Society in creating a Foundation which has had such a significant impact on justice in NSW.

In the 1970s, the Foundation played a pivotal role in establishing the College of Law, replacing the articulated clerk system.

In 1982, the Foundation established the Public Interest Advocacy Centre – we all know the Dalkon shield case and the Railcorp case.

In 1983, the Foundation published *The Pocket Guide to the Law* which sold more than 400,000 copies and set in train a wave of plain language publications including for example *The Law Handbook*, *The Tenants' Rights Handbook* and *The Mental Health Rights Manual*.

In 1990, the Foundation collaborated with the State Library of NSW to set up the Legal Information and Access Centre which is the envy of all other states providing access to legal information in more than 350 public libraries across NSW.



In the early 1990s, the Foundation pioneered the provision of legal information online, establishing the first legal portal, which many of you will remember, called *Foundation Law*. The Foundation also was a key driver in getting court lists and other essential legal information online.

In the mid-nineties, financial support from the Foundation played a crucial role in getting AustLII off the ground – there are now “AustLIIs” in over 50 countries.

Of course research has always been at the centre of the Foundation’s work. In the 1990s, the Foundation examined key issues such as: who litigates and why; what civil litigation costs; and what was the actual impact of prejudicial publicity on criminal jury trials. These research reports remain in demand to this day.

Recently, the Foundation has been working closely with the Department of Justice undertaking analysis of courts and tribunals data to inform the Civil Justice Strategy, but I’m sure the Attorney General will have more to say on this topic.

Whichever aspect of the Law and Justice Foundation you examine, a connection with the Law Society is never far away. The Law Society has always been engaged with the Foundation, with notable past Board members including Trevor Haines, Mark Richardson, Ron Heinrich, David Fairlie, Phillip Madden, Michael Gill and Geraldine Daley.

I myself of course served as Board Member of the Foundation between 2000 and 2007, and I remember the early days of the innovative Access to Justice and Legal Needs research program. That important work includes the internationally renowned LAW Survey, the most comprehensive study of legal need to date in the world.



The Foundation's Grants Program has always provided an environment where initiatives can be trialled and key issues brought to wider attention. Once issues enter the mainstream, policy change often follows. Highlights while I was a Board member include grants for outreach programs targeting domestic violence, research into outcomes for Aboriginal children in out of home care, and legal services for parents of children with disabilities.

Put simply, were it not for the vision of the lawyers in the 1960s, the people of NSW would not have benefited from the Foundation's important work.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, thank you all for attending this important event tonight; and for joining the Law Society and the Foundation in marking the significant contribution a vision born fifty years ago has made to justice in New South Wales.

Of course, as we all know, there remains much to be done and as we recognised in 1967, good justice policy must be based on sound evidence. I wish the Foundation – and the Law Society collaboration with it – all the best for the future.

It now gives me great pleasure to introduce our next speaker, the Attorney General of NSW, Mark Speakman SC MP.