



(L to R) Immediate Past National President, Ian Brown, Immediate Past ACT Branch President, Andrew Freer and Dr Helen Watchirs, ACT Human Rights and Discrimination Commissioner

Delegates enjoying post-conference drinks.

ACT BRANCH CONFERENCE

By Amy Burr

Late June is a busy time for us all, so it was heartening to see so many members at our fourth annual ACT Branch Conference at the Hyatt in Canberra.

Our keynote speaker, Her Honour Justice Hilary Penfold, opened the conference with an entertaining and enlightening insight into her first few months on the Supreme Court bench. We even heard of her commitment to composting!

Dr Helen Watchirs followed with a very informative and concise 'wrap-up' of the first four years of the *Human Rights Act 2004* (ACT). It was most pleasing to hear that she feels her experience as Human Rights Commissioner has been a positive one. Amendments to commence on 1 January 2009 will be sure to further enhance the Territory's unique and valuable legislative tool.

The mid-morning session was devoted to 'nuts & bolts'. Bob Crowe SC provided a very useful paper on the workers' compensation state of connection test, its development and current judicial treatment. Barrister Lorraine Walker discussed the Comcare *Hart* decision, and more recent developments including the 'SRCOLA' amendments and *Wiegand (No 2)*. Psychological injuries are certainly one area where debate continues. Emma Reilly, partner at Moray & Agnew, presented a comprehensive paper on non-economic loss verdicts and provided a very helpful table of ACT Supreme Court judgments for the last two years. Finally, sponsor and long-time supporter, Mariano Rossetto of Furzer Crestani, took us through some key factors to consider when assessing economic loss. His use of hypothetical fact scenarios was most effective.

Following lunch, our former national president, Ian Brown, presented a practical insight into the CTP scheme in Queensland, and what to look out for when the ACT scheme commences in the near future.

Simon Walsh of the Australian Federal Police Laboratory Services provided a review of the basics of DNA evidence, using language and concepts even us non-scientists could understand.

Our final session was devoted to the ever-popular annual case review, presented by Greg Stretton and Andrew Muller. Their preparation and thorough knowledge of the 30-odd cases is always appreciated.

Our conference closed with drinks and a chance to enjoy some live music.

We would like to extend our thanks to our major partners, Furzer Crestani Services and Perpetual, and to our event partners, Ability One, Evidex, Impact Capital, ipac and LawMaster.

The conference would not have been possible without the hard work of the Alliance staff, Maja Maunic and Jessica Younan in particular.

Finally, thanks must go to the local ACT Branch Committee, Richard Faulks and Steven Hausfeld, as well as Mark Blumer for his (now traditional) surprise entertainment. ■

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