

# My mid-term progress report

Six months on, with much more to come



After six months in the president's chair, it is time to give my 'mid-term' progress report.

To my mind, my proudest moment this year came in April with the Federal Government's spectacular reversal of the proposed funding cuts to community legal centres. This followed the campaign I spearheaded on behalf of QLS members, and congratulations and thanks go to all of our members for their support in achieving this victory.

On the eve of last month's World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, I was proud to launch an awareness campaign to give a voice to elderly people who are suffering from abuse. My initiative aims to bring the issue of elder abuse to the surface and destigmatise the shame experienced by the elderly when someone they love and once cared for mistreats them.<sup>1</sup>

The campaign, in the form of a trial encouraging people to disclose suspected elder abuse to their local doctor, has gained national media attention and generated an enormous amount of interest. Implemented with the aid of the Australian Medical Association Queensland, it enlists the help of general practitioners and staff from 315 clinics to look out for the symptoms of elder abuse and assist by referring patients to support services such as the Elder Abuse Helpline and the QLS Find a Solicitor service.

Raising the public profile of Queensland solicitors and the value we bring to society has been a key objective of mine. I have worked hard to develop effective relationships with the media so that our message is heard and our advocacy for good law is brought to the community we serve. This is reflected in the hundreds of media requests I have been able to meet, bringing our message to print, radio and television outlets across Queensland and further afield.

Our formal advocacy has continued unabated, and since 1 January I have overseen and signed off on no less than 44 parliamentary submissions – too many to list here – which seek to create significant legislative improvements.

It takes a village to create change, and I am indebted to the RAP working group for actioning the QLS Reconciliation Action Plan, which will be launched this month. This is a template for change that goes beyond the Society into the profession and the greater community.

I'm particularly proud that my Modern Advocate Lecture Series initiative continues to flourish, as one of its major aims is to develop greater collegiality within the profession. This year's lectures have been booked to excess capacity.

Now sitting firmly within our professional development program suite, the series has received tremendous support from the judiciary and is clearly meeting a need of junior lawyers to acquire knowledge from the law's most learned practitioners. It provides real opportunities to foster collegiality by promoting equity and diversity.

Our continued advocacy for the return of diversionary justice has also borne fruit in the return of the Murri Court, the Drug Court and other specialised services.

The search warrant guidelines, a joint QLS-QPS project instigated last year by immediate past president Bill Potts, were implemented, and are now being looked at as a potential initiative on a federal level.

Working through the ravages of Cyclone Debbie and supporting our members across Queensland have been other priorities in what, to date, has been a very busy year. Much has been achieved – and there are other highlights not included here. I look forward to doing my best to add to these achievements over the next six months.

## Judicial appointments

In the scale of things, appointments to the judiciary from the solicitors' branch of the profession are still relatively recent in Queensland. These will continue to grow, as there is an extensive pool of expertise and experience that our Parliament can now draw on.

It is heartening that there is also a growing number of QLS accredited specialists finding their way to the bench and other senior positions, among them recent magisterial appointees Michelle Dooley (mediation law), Catherine Benson (family law) and Mark Howden (criminal law), as well as Peter Shields (criminal law), who has become a deputy president of the Parole Board Queensland.

While we are all well aware of the many benefits that accredited specialisation will bring to a solicitor's practice, I think we can now observe that it will stand a practitioner in good stead for further career progression.

### Christine Smyth

Queensland Law Society president

[president@qls.com.au](mailto:president@qls.com.au)

Twitter: [@christineasmyth](https://twitter.com/christineasmyth)

LinkedIn: [linkedin.com/in/christinesmythrobbsinwatson](https://www.linkedin.com/in/christinesmythrobbsinwatson)

[christinesmythrobbsinwatson](https://www.linkedin.com/in/christinesmythrobbsinwatson)

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> A study by Monash University indicates that 60% of elder financial abuse is perpetrated by adult children. It is projected that, in 30 years, a quarter of the Australian population will be over 65.