



MEDIA RELEASE

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PRO BONO SET TO INCREASE UNDER NEW LAWCOVER INSURANCE SCHEME

From 1 July, more lawyers will be able to offer free legal services to the community thanks to a new national insurance scheme.

Until now, in-house and government lawyers have been unable to provide pro bono advice due to a lack of professional indemnity insurance and the consequent restrictions placed on their practicing certificates.

The National Pro Bono PI Insurance Policy will plug that gap. The Policy will be held and administered by the National Pro Bono Resource Centre ("NPBRC"). The scheme was devised by law firm DLA Phillips Fox, insurance broker Jardine Lloyd Thomson and the NPBRC and is underwritten by LawCover Insurance. The policy insures lawyers and paralegals who do pro bono legal work on projects approved by NPBRC. As a result of this, the New South Wales Law Society has lifted restrictions on all classes of practicing certificate.

Nicolas Patrick, Pro Bono Director at DLA Phillips Fox said other states are expected to follow suit:

'Restrictions on practicing certificates vary from state to state but there is no longer any reason for the practising certificates of in-house and government lawyers, in any Australian jurisdiction, to limit those lawyers from doing pro bono work and cover is now available nationally for projects approved by NPBRC under the LawCover Pro Bono Insurance policy'.

Patrick said the policy had been almost three years in the making and was developed as a result of interest from DLA Phillips Fox's corporate clients in partnering with the firm on pro bono initiatives.

'If you look at an organisation like Accenture, for example, that is a business with a very strong sense of corporate social responsibility. In the United States, lawyers from our alliance firm, DLA Piper have partnered with Accenture's in-house lawyers on a number of high profile pro bono projects in recent years. In Australia, Accenture's in-house lawyers have been keen to be involved in pro bono work, but until now, they haven't really been able to participate in pro bono work involving the giving of legal advice,' Patrick said.

Patrick noted an increasing number of clients asking legal firms to provide pro bono partnering opportunities.

'We're starting to see RFTs asking law firms to provide opportunities for in-house lawyers to participate in the law firm's pro bono program. Most in-house legal teams aren't large enough to employ dedicated pro bono coordinators, so they will rely to some extent on opportunities being provided by their legal service providers, and pro bono clearing houses.'

John Corker, Director of the NPBRC said 'this was a very significant development that will help corporate and government lawyers to get involved in pro bono work and so increase the profession's overall capacity. The challenge now is to create new projects that will enthuse in-house lawyers to get involved.'

'It is an easy-to-use product provided by LawCover. Only the supervising lawyer of a pro bono project needs to apply to the Centre and they do not have to pay a premium. Once the project is approved any lawyers or paralegals who work on it will be covered by the policy that we have purchased,' Corker said.

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About DLA Phillips Fox

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