



COMMERCIAL ENTERPRISES

Providing quality services at the least possible cost to the community

Crown Solicitor's Office

Crown Solicitor: Ian Knight

- Provides legal services including advice, litigation and transactional services for the State of NSW and its agencies in matters which are core to Government.
- Competes with the private profession to provide legal services to the State and its agencies in non-core matters.
- Provides other services such as assistance to Royal Commissions, other inquiries and intergovernmental committees.

Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages

Registrar: Trevor Stacey

- Records all births, deaths, marriages, changes of names, and adoptions occurring in NSW.
- Provides documentation to individuals to help them establish a range of legal entitlements.
- Collects statistical information for governments and other organisations.
- Performs civil marriages and registers name changes for people born or resident in NSW.

The Crown Solicitor's Office

The Crown Solicitor's Office (CSO) operates on a commercial basis, performing both core and non-core legal work for Government agencies. Core work includes matters which:

- have implications for Government beyond an individual Minister's portfolio;
- involve the constitutional powers and privileges of the State and/or the Commonwealth;
- raise issues which are fundamental to the responsibilities of Government; or
- arise from, or relate to, matters falling within the Attorney General's area of responsibility.

The CSO competes with the private legal profession to perform the non-core (general) legal work of government agencies.

Goal: Contribute to the development of a legal system and laws in NSW that further the principles of justice and contribute to the achievement of the goals of Government.

During the year, CSO provided advice to the Attorney General and to Government on a wide range of issues, including:

- the registration of Pauline Hanson's One Nation party;
- various Olympic matters;



- the Police Commissioner's Employment Contract;
- the implementation of GST arrangements throughout the NSW public sector;
- the Integrated Forestry Operations Agreements;
- the drafting of new operating licences for Sydney Water and Sydney Catchment Authority; and
- the vetting of tender documents for letting of a new contract to manage the Treasury Managed Fund.

A wide range of legal services were also provided to clients. These include:

- assisting the Glenbrook Rail Accident Special Commission of Inquiry;
- acting for the State of NSW in the Homefund litigation;
- assisting the Coroner conducting the Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race inquest;
- appearing for Police and other emergency services at the Thredbo inquest;

The Crown Solicitor has represented clients at the Inquest into the Lithgow Bushfires, the Glenbrook Rail Accident Special Commission of Inquiry, and the Thredbo Inquest. Pictured are solicitors Stephen Hogan, Christa Ludlow and Christine Johnpulle from the Crown Solicitor's Office.



- acting for the State of NSW intervening in the National Wage Case; and
- acted for the Minister for Industrial Relations intervening in the Labor Council's application in relation to the State Wage Case.

Goal: Continuously improve our services and increase satisfaction among our diverse clients.

The CSO continued to build upon the quality of its services this year, introducing a number of new initiatives to improve operations.

Following a successful pilot scheme, three solicitor advocates were appointed in September 1999. The solicitor advocates provide services primarily to the Criminal Law, Community Law and Employment Law teams, and teams as required. The creation of a specialist, in-house advocacy service provides clients with a streamlined service which is cost effective and accessible at short notice.

A major information technology (IT) hardware upgrade was completed during February which provides expanded storage capacity and improved research facilities for staff. Opportunities for using IT to improve client service and support business objectives were also explored, with a consultancy engaged to perform a strategic review of operational and current IT services. The consultancy made a number of recommendations relating to the short and medium term development of IT services to meet the operational needs of the Office. The recommendations were in the areas of financial, information records, knowledge management, matter management, litigation support, and document management and will be considered in the coming year.

The CSO sought expressions of interest during the year from country legal firms for the conduct of agency work on behalf of clients in country courts. A list of preferred agents has been completed. As clients generally prefer the Crown Solicitor to maintain the principal role in the conduct of their litigation, agents are mainly used for routine appearance work, such as mentions and return of subpoenas.

A number of publications and manuals were developed this year to improve client service and standardise procedures. A comprehensive staff manual was finalised which details and standardises procedures and policies of the CSO. This manual will assist staff at all levels of the office, including legal officers, legal clerks and support staff. An *Advice Writing Guide* was also developed and the *House Style Manual* updated and republished to reflect the recent developments within the CSO in document formatting and presentation.

The Year Ahead

The key priorities for the CSO for the coming year are to:

- attract, develop and retain high quality legal staff;
- develop new performance indicators for provision of specialist legal services, such as preparation of legal advice and advocacy; and
- consolidate implementation of performance planning and development for all CSO staff.

The Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages

The NSW Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages (Registry) was established in 1856 when the Government took responsibility for the registration of births, deaths and marriages. It now operates as a Government Trading Enterprise.

Goal: Continuously improve our services and increase satisfaction among our diverse clients.

This year, the Registry concentrated its efforts on achieving new product and service developments, especially in the area of electronic commerce.

An online *Certificate Validation Service* was developed to reduce the fraudulent usage of birth certificates in activities such as establishing false identities. This service allows Government and financial institutions to obtain immediate confirmation of the validity of the birth certificates presented to them. In developing this project, careful attention has been given to

securing and protecting the confidentiality of the data held by the Registry.

The Registry extended the electronic lodgement of death registration across the funeral industry during the year. The Registry is now testing a new facility which will enable funeral directors without special software, but who have Internet access, to securely complete and lodge the death registration form online. It is anticipated that the new online form, which is accessible on the Registry's website, will increase the percentage of forms lodged online from 10 to 50 per cent by the end of 2000.

The Registry also started work on a pilot program for the electronic lodgement of marriage registrations from religious and civil celebrants. This followed the results of a feasibility study, which indicated support for the introduction of this service.

Work on the conversion of all birth, death and marriage records from 1856 to 1952 to electronically accessible media continued during the year. This project involves the conversion of approximately eight million records and will provide the Registry with a complete duplicate set of irreplaceable records relating to the lives of NSW residents.

The Registry now offers clients access to historic birth, death and marriage index information through the Internet. In the past, clients had to access the information by purchasing CD-ROMs or by visiting libraries to view microfiche. Use of the index facility has exceeded expectations, with an average of 690 searches being conducted per hour around the clock. The searches are initiated by clients not only from New South Wales, but from the rest of Australia and around the world.

The feasibility of establishing a Wills Register as an additional service was investigated by the Registry during the year. Key participants in the legal, funeral and trustee industries have indicated strong support for this type of service, which would assist NSW residents with the difficult task of determining whether a Will exists for an individual and where it might be held. A prototype is currently under development in consultation with clients.



The Registry also worked closely with the NSW Health Department and the Australian Bureau of Statistics to produce statistics on Aboriginal deaths in order to provide a more accurate picture of indigenous people's health and life expectancy.

Other achievements for the Registry during 1999–2000 include:

- reducing turnaround times for clients in receiving their Commemorative Certificate from several weeks to under 10 days by transferring certificate production from Victoria to NSW;
- developing a NSW Data Access and Pricing Policy;
- establishing a Customer Council;
- working with the Australian Bureau of Statistics, hospitals and medical practitioners, to develop and introduce a new standardised *Cause of Death Form* as part of its support for a common national vital statistics data set;
- introducing a Teambrief communication system as part of improving communication to all staff within the Registry; and
- introducing a Year 2000 Commemorative Birth Certificate.

The Year Ahead

The key priorities for the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages for the coming year are to:

- conduct a security review;
- introduce online marriage registrations with a pilot program to be developed between religious and civil celebrants and the registry;
- further develop e-commerce activity as part of being the pilot for Departmental e-commerce activity such as ordering stores and establishing financial transactions through the Internet;
- introduce a commemorative birth certificate to celebrate the centenary of Australian Federation;
- establish the Wills Register following assessment of the pilot program;
- increase registration coverage of birth registrations by introduction of online birth registration process and increased sales of commemorative certificate series at time of registration; and
- foster remote access to Registry services through use of e-commerce technology.

Fraud Control and Special Projects Manager, Graham Austin, from the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages. One of the most significant projects the Registry is working on is the conversion of records dating from 1856 to 1952 to electronically accessible media. The multi-million dollar project commenced late last year and is due for completion in December 2001.

