

Dr D J Neal SC

Barrister

27 March 2014

Commissioners Mundy and Angela MacRae
Access to Justice Arrangements
Productivity Commission
LB 2 Collins Street East
MELBOURNE VIC 8003

Dear Commissioners

Access to Justice Arrangements

I refer to your reference on these matters and attach a copy of an article I have recently published in the journal, Law in Context.

The article traces the evolution of legal centres in the 1970s, primarily in Victoria. However, that evolution has national significance and developments described there have spread across the country.

Recent statements by the current Federal Attorney General that cut backs in funding for advocacy services will not affect front-line services seem to me to be poorly informed. My article documents some of the extremely significant work done by legal centres in what may be termed "advocacy work". That ranged from legislation on arrest and interrogation powers, tenancy, changes to consumer protection and consumer credit, and development of publications like the Legal Resources Book (now the Law Handbook).

The campaign against the rapacious practices of Waltons' stores and the debt collectors who succeeded them exemplify the benefits of such campaigns - emerging from case work done by legal centres - and reducing the demands on front-line services which could then be allocated to other cases.

As the article also documents, the claim by Senator Brandis that legal centres are funded only to provide these front line services has not been true since their inception.

I would be happy to discuss these issues further with you or your officers if that would be of assistance.

~~Yours sincerely~~

~~David Neal~~

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