



Tasmania

Rural, Regional and Remote Area Lawyers Survey

Introduction

In March 2009, the Law Council of Australia coordinated a nationwide survey of legal practitioners in rural, regional and remote (RRR) areas of Australia. The study was conducted in order to explore widespread concerns within the profession that suggested there were significant problems in recruiting and retaining lawyers in country Australia. Through the study, the Law Council sought to obtain data from country lawyers about the current and future needs of their practices with an emphasis on exploring future employment intentions, retirement, succession planning, legal aid and pro bono work. The online survey was sent by the law societies in each state or territory to their members working in RRR areas.

The Law Council released the results of the national study in July 2009. The full report is available from the Law Council website.

The survey gathered significant data on country lawyers from across Australia. Set out here is a snapshot of the survey findings relevant to Tasmania.

Main findings

- ◆ **Response rate:** 13% of Tasmanian lawyers responded to the survey (in total 82 practitioners completed the survey). This compares with a total national response rate of 24% (with 1185 practitioners taking part in the survey overall). For the purposes of the survey, the whole of Tasmania (including Hobart) was considered a RRR area. The survey was distributed to all members of the Law Society of Tasmania.
- ◆ **Practice type:** The large majority of Tasmanian lawyers who completed the survey were from private practice (94%). Other respondents included – lawyers from Legal Aid and Aboriginal Legal Aid (2%) and lawyers from community legal centres and government (1% respectively).
- ◆ **Employment status:** In Tasmania (and nationally), 49% of respondents were employees and 45% were principals.

“...country
Australia is
facing a crisis
in the area
of access to
justice...”



◇ **Length of practice in a RRR area:**

In Tasmania, respondents had most commonly worked in a RRR area for more than 21 years (27%). Only 7% of Tasmanian respondents had been in practice in a RRR area for less than a year. Nationally, the largest group of respondents (22%) had been in practice in a RRR area for three to five years.

◇ **Intention to continue practice in a RRR area:**

Most commonly, Tasmanian respondents indicated in the survey that they intended to continue to practice in a RRR area for six to ten years (29%). In total, 32% of Tasmanian respondents indicated that they would leave practice in a RRR area in the next five years. Nationally, this figure was 42%.

◇ **Reasons for working in a RRR area:**

The most commonly cited reason for working in a RRR area by Tasmanian respondents (and nationally) was 'work/life balance'.

◇ **Reasons for leaving a RRR area:**

Most Tasmanian respondents indicated that 'better remuneration', a 'move to the city for lifestyle' or 'partner's relocation' would be their main reasons for moving away from a RRR area altogether. Nationally, the most cited reason for moving from a RRR area was 'family reasons'. The least commonly cited reason for leaving the country in Tasmania (and nationally) was 'isolation'.

◇ **Reasons for leaving current firm/organisation:**

Most commonly, Tasmanian respondents indicated that they would leave their current firm to start a new career (24%). Other key reasons for Tasmanian respondents leaving their current firms were – to move to a legal practice in the city (20%), move to a legal practice in their area (19%) and retirement (16%). Nationally, most practitioners indicated that they would leave their current firm to retire (20%).

◇ **Shortage of lawyers:** Principals were asked in the survey to consider whether their practice had enough lawyers to service their client base and community generally. Of the Tasmanian principals surveyed, 33% indicated that they did not have enough lawyers to service their current client base and 32% indicated that they did not have enough lawyers to meet the legal needs of their community. Nationally, these figures were 43% and 45% respectively.

◇ **Matters of concern for principals:**

Tasmanian principals indicated that the key area of concern for their practices is succession planning (75%). Attracting additional lawyers (69%), attracting lawyers to replace departures (58%) and retaining employees already at their firm (53%) were also key matters of concern for Tasmanian principals. Nationally, succession planning was the most common area of concern for principals (71%).

◇ **Legal aid work:** In Tasmania, 66% of respondents indicated that their firm undertook legal aid work. Of those respondents, 40% indicated that their firm undertook more than 30 cases in the last 12 months. Nationally, these figures were 51% and 50% respectively.

◇ **Pro bono work:** 66% of Tasmania respondents indicated that their firm accepted matters on a pro bono basis. Nationally, 74% of respondents indicated that they undertook pro bono work.

◇ **Volunteer work:** In Tasmania, 61% of respondents undertook additional volunteer work within their communities. Nationally, this figure was 71%.



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