



Victoria

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 Victoria.

Main findings

- ◆ **Response rate:** 48% of Victorian lawyers responded to the survey (in total 418 practitioners completed the survey). This compares with a total national response rate of 24% (with 1185 practitioners taking part in the survey overall). Victoria had the highest response rate of all jurisdictions. However, Victorian practitioners received the survey both electronically by email and a hardcopy survey by mail. It is likely that the distribution of the hardcopy surveys in Victoria contributed to the strong response from its country practitioners. The survey was distributed by the Law Institute of Victoria to all of its members who belong to a Country Lawyers Association.
- ◆ **Practice type:** The large majority of Victorian lawyers who completed the survey were from private practice (98%). One percent of lawyers from community legal centres also completed the survey. Victoria had the highest percentage of private practitioners respond to the survey.

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



◇ **Employment status:** 36% of Victorian respondents were employees and 57% were principals. Nationally, these figures were 49% and 45% respectively.

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

In Victoria, respondents had most commonly worked in a RRR area for more than 21 years (41%). The smallest proportion of Victorian respondents had been in practice in a RRR area for less than a year (8%). 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, Victorian respondents indicated in the survey that they intended to continue to practice in a RRR area for six to ten years (25%). In total, 38% of Victorian respondents indicated that they would leave practice in a RRR area in the next five years. Nationally, this figure was slightly higher at 42%.

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

The most commonly cited reason for working in a RRR area by Victorian respondents was 'country lifestyle'. Nationally, the most cited reason was 'work/life balance'.

◇ **Reasons for leaving a RRR area:**

Most Victorian respondents indicated that 'retirement' would be their main reason 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 Victoria (and nationally) was 'isolation'.

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

Most commonly, Victorian respondents indicated that they would leave their current firm to retire (35%). Other key reasons for Victorian respondents leaving their

current firms were – to move to another practice in their area (19%) and to move to a legal practice in the city (14%). 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 Victorian principals surveyed, 33% indicated that they did not have enough lawyers to service their current client base and 39% 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:**

Victorian principals indicated that the key area of concern for their practices is succession planning (81%). Attracting additional lawyers (52%) and attracting lawyers to replace departures (43%) were also key matters of concern for Victorian principals. Nationally, succession planning was the most common area of concern for principals (71%).

◇ **Legal aid work:** In Victoria, 57% of respondents indicated that their firm undertook legal aid work. Of those respondents, 50% indicated that that their firm undertook more than 30 cases in the last 12 months. Nationally, these figures were 51% and 50% respectively.

◇ **Pro bono work:** 77% of Victoria 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 Victoria, 77% of respondents undertook additional volunteer work within their communities. Nationally, this figure was 71%.



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