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Law Council supporting RRR communities

The launch of the Law Council of Australia's Rural, Regional and Remote (RRR) National Strategic Plan 2021-2023, heralds the profession's reinvigorated commitment to RRR lawyers.

Speaking at the Cooma Court House, Law Council President Dr Jacoba Brasch QC said while close to 30 per cent of Australians live in RRR areas, only 10.5 per cent of the country's solicitors practise outside an urban centre, limiting the options for those needing legal services.

"RRR communities are diverse and dynamic, and the kinds of legal needs experienced within vary substantially, from water rights allocation, to environment and planning restrictions, to farm succession planning, and laws which have special relevance to First Nations people," Dr Brasch said.

"Access to justice is undermined when there is a critical shortage of suitable legal representation in particular regions."

"Many RRR communities are particularly vulnerable to cycles of natural disaster, such as fires, drought. Emergencies generate particular areas of legal need for people who are ineligible for publicly funded legal assistance and emergencies also exacerbate existing legal problems and directly trigger others, including in relation to credit, debt or insurance."

"But there is a clear disparity between remote and urban justice, which means people in difficulties living in RRR communities are missing out."

"The COVID-19 pandemic has no doubt exacerbated access to justice for RRR communities, with court hearings cancelled, difficulties in travelling to obtain legal services or attend court was made significantly more difficult or even impossible by few flights and state and territory border closures," Dr Brasch said.

The Law Council's National Strategic Plan focuses on five key areas for action which include building awareness, recruitment, retention and succession of lawyers, technology, and the promotion of RRR legal practice in education and advocacy.

"There is no doubt that the profession's increased experience using technology because of COVID-19 has created opportunities for the delivery of legal services in RRR areas," Dr Brasch said.

"But we must remember to also address issues faced by people experiencing disadvantage who may, for a variety of reasons, experience difficulties in adapting to on-line legal service delivery."

"For too long, there has been too little regional engagement in law and policy development, which has meant that laws and policies have become 'urban centric' and drafted with little consideration to their application in RRR communities. That is what the National Strategic Plan is addressing," Dr Brasch said.

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The Law Council of Australia is the national voice of the legal profession, promoting justice and the rule of law.