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From: Peter Foster-Bunch

Sent: Tuesday, 31 March 2009 11:42 am

To: NADRAC

Subject: ADR

Dear Sir/Madam

I do not have a legal background but in 1990 following an earlier Senate Inquiry into Access to Justice (1989) to which I made a submission I established a national legal helpline service. It is still operating today and has handled more than 2 million enquiries with the majority of the issues (well over 80%) resolved over the phone.

In 1999, with the advent of the Internet, I launched the facility as an online legal advice and guidance service. It is unique and has proved very successful.

While this mechanism does not provide a complete solution (because it is online and consequently may disadvantage some people by not being a face to face service) it has significant usage and consequently must help reduce pressure on the legal system and legal aid.

It is currently restricted to use by the customers and clients of certain companies - specific banks, insurance companies, telcos and others here and overseas. It could be adapted to meet the needs of the economically & socially disadvantaged people of Australia, which it does do to a degree already as it is free to the end user.

It will, however, achieve greater success if it receives support, expertise and inspired thinking (not money) from the Federal Government and the legal profession.

My thoughts are these:

1. Establish an appropriate national e-mail address for practical legal advice & guidance.
2. This address will be promoted by Government and legal bodies and be placed in appropriate public places that can provide "free" access to the Internet such as **State & Local Government offices, Courts and libraries**.
3. The e-mail service will be managed like a virtual call centre. The enquiries will come in, will be tagged with a unique number for tracking purposes, and forwarded out to certain law firms that have agreed to support the service on a rostered basis.
4. The law firms will be rewarded by their support being recognised and **credited for Pro Bono purposes**.
5. The law firms that support the service will also have their involvement, work, time & effort recognised and accepted for tax deductible purposes.

6. The technology will have the ability to escalate the initial e-mail enquiry (where most problems will be resolved) to a telephone conference with a supporting lawyer and, as necessary, to a face to face conference.

Some outcomes

- The mechanism can easily and quickly be established.
- It will be a low cost to provide.
- The mechanism works quickly so when a problem is identified it works rapidly to 'nip problems in the bud'.
- While never intending to be a complete answer it is a 21st Century solution to assist the age old problem of providing *access to the law* to the financially disadvantaged and perhaps the socially disadvantaged as well.
- Both the large and the smaller law firms can support the service
- Disabled legal service providers and remote legal service providers can support the service.

We know the mechanism does work because it already does today to support the private sector needs.

I will be pleased to discuss and work with the government and the legal profession and to progress this proposal.

Yours faithfully

Peter Foster-Bunch

Managing Director

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