

MEDIA RELEASE

FEDERAL BUDGET LEGAL AID CUTS UNDERMINE OUR JUSTICE SYSTEM

14 May 2014



NEW SOUTH WALES
BAR ASSOCIATION

Cuts to commonwealth legal aid funding announced in last night's federal budget will adversely impact on parties, courts and the justice system as a whole, the President of the New South Wales Bar Association, Phillip Boulten SC said today.

"The Commonwealth government is steadily reducing its contribution under the national legal aid joint funding arrangement with the states and territories" Mr Boulten said.

"The Commonwealth share of legal aid funding has now been reduced from 55% in 1997 to 35%. This represents major cost shifting on to an already massively overburdened NSW legal aid system".

"Inadequate legal aid resources have a catastrophic effect on accused, other parties and the justice system as a whole. These cuts will further increase the numbers of unrepresented litigants coming before our courts. It is well established that self-represented litigants increase the demand on time, costs and resources in the court system" said Mr Boulten.

"The court system cannot keep absorbing the ongoing strain imposed by continuing legal aid cuts. Legal Aid NSW has had to adopt increasingly restrictive means tests so that only a tiny minority of people coming before the courts can access legal aid".

"The Association calls on the Federal Government to commit to restoring its proper share of legal aid funding before irreversible damage is done to our justice system" Mr Boulten said.

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