



# Queensland

## 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 Queensland.

### Main findings

- ◇ **Response rate:** 16% of Queensland lawyers responded to the survey (in total 232 practitioners completed the survey). This compares with a total national response rate of 24% (with 1185 practitioners taking part in the survey overall). The survey was distributed to all members of the Queensland Law Society working outside of Brisbane and the Gold Coast.
- ◇ **Practice type:** The large majority of Queensland lawyers who completed the survey were from private practice (87%). Other respondents included – lawyers from community legal centres (4%), Legal Aid and Aboriginal Legal Aid lawyers (3%) and government and in-house lawyers (2% respectively).
- ◇ **Employment status:** 51% of Queensland respondents were employees and 43% were principals. Nationally, these figures were 49% and 45% respectively.

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



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

In Queensland, the largest group of respondents had been in practice in a RRR area for between three to five years (20%). The smallest proportion of respondents had been in practice for less than a year (9%). 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, Queensland respondents indicated in the survey that they intended to continue to practice in a RRR area for three to five years (23%). In total, 39% of Queensland 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 Queensland respondents (and also by respondents nationally) was 'work/life balance'.

◇ **Reasons for leaving a RRR area:**

Most Queensland respondents (and also respondents nationally) indicated that 'family reasons' would be their main reason for moving away from a RRR area altogether. The least commonly cited reason for leaving the country, both in Queensland and nationally, was 'isolation'.

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

Most commonly, Queensland respondents indicated that they would leave their current firm to move to another RRR practice (23%). Other key reasons for Queensland respondents leaving their current firms were – to move to a legal practice in the city (19%) and leave the practice of law to retire (18%). 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 Queensland principals surveyed, 49% indicated that they did not have enough lawyers to service their current client base and 41% 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:**

Queensland principals indicated that the key area of concern for their practices is succession planning (65%). Attracting additional lawyers (56%) and attracting lawyers to replace departures (45%) were also key matters of concern for Queensland principals. Nationally, succession planning was the most common area of concern for principals (71%).

◇ **Legal aid work:** In Queensland, 32% of respondents indicated that their firm undertook legal aid work. Of those respondents, 74% 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:** 62% of Queensland 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 Queensland, 70% of respondents undertook additional volunteer work within their communities. Nationally, this figure was 71%.



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