



South Australia

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 South Australia.

Main findings

- ◆ **Response rate:** 35% of South Australian lawyers responded to the survey (in total 35 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 Law Society of South Australia working outside of Adelaide.
- ◆ **Practice type:** The large majority of South Australian lawyers who completed the survey were from private practice (91%). Other respondents included – lawyers from Legal Aid and Aboriginal Legal Aid and government lawyers (3% respectively).
- ◆ **Employment status:** 46% of South Australian respondents were employees and 51% were principals. Nationally, these figures were 49% and 45% respectively.
- ◆ **Length of practice in a RRR Area:** In South Australia, respondents had most commonly been working in a RRR

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



area for – one to two years, three to five years or more than 21 years (26% for each of these groups respectively). The smallest proportion of South Australian respondents had been in practice in a RRR area for between six and ten years (6%). 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, South Australian respondents indicated in the survey that they intended to continue to practice in a RRR area for six to ten years (27%). In total, 35% of South Australian respondents indicated that they would leave practice in a RRR area in the next five years. Nationally, this figure was 42%.

◇ **Reasons for working in a RRR area:** The most commonly cited reason for working in a RRR area by South Australian respondents was ‘country lifestyle’. Nationally, most respondents cited ‘work/life balance’ as their main reason for working in a RRR area.

◇ **Reasons for leaving a RRR area:** Most South Australian respondents indicated that ‘increased professional development opportunities’ 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 South Australia was ‘partner’s relocation’ (nationally this was ‘isolation’).

◇ **Reasons for leaving current firm/organisation:** Most commonly, South Australian respondents indicated that they would leave their current firm to move to a practice in the city or to retire (23% respectively). Another key reason for South Australian respondents

leaving their current firms was to move to another country legal practice in their area (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 South Australian principals surveyed, 67% indicated that they did not have enough lawyers to service their current client base and 50% 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:** South Australian principals indicated that the key area of concern for their practices is succession planning (67%). Attracting additional lawyers (61%) and attracting lawyers to replace departures (44%) were also key matters of concern for South Australian principals. Nationally, succession planning was the most common area of concern for principals (71%).

◇ **Legal aid work:** In South Australia, 60% of respondents indicated that their firm undertook legal aid work. Of those respondents, 62% 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:** 86% of South Australia 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 South Australia, 80% of respondents undertook additional volunteer work within their communities. Nationally, this figure was 71%.



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