

Plenary Session 1: Why have a National Blueprint?

Speaking Notes: Ian Govey

Deputy Secretary, Attorney-General's Department

- Good morning. My name is Ian Govey. As Deputy Secretary of the Attorney-General's Department it is my pleasure to chair the first plenary session of, what I hope will be, an interesting and rewarding conference.
- By way of background, in July 2008, the Attorney-General convened a Roundtable of representatives of key organisations in the family law system.
- Those representatives, most of who are here today, were asked to focus on how to improve collaboration across the system, to enable disputes to be resolved early and better manage entrenched family law cases.
- The Roundtable identified the need for:
 - a national blueprint
 - continued community education
 - improving cultural awareness within the system
 - improving the way State and Federal jurisdictions work with each other, and
 - developing strategies to address workforce and training issues.
- All of these issues have been outlined in the paper, Towards a National Blueprint for the Family Law System.
- The need for a national blueprint for the family law system may reflect the fact that the current system is a loosely constituted group of professionals, with different responsibilities. In short, it was not designed as a system.
- An agreed blueprint would provide us with a common understanding of how different types of family law cases should be managed within the family law system – with the end result being that families at risk are identified early and that all families get the support and services they need from the system, regardless of their entry point.
- Our starting point is to try to reach agreement on the need for blueprint, which is what this session will attempt to achieve.

- I'm pleased to welcome representatives from three significant entities within the family law system, who have agreed to present their views on the key question "Why have a National Blueprint? Each will have around 15 minutes to discuss the four questions that appear on the screen. At the end of the discussion we will have approximately 20 minutes, during which time, our facilitator, Les Stahl will invite your questions and comments.
- I would now like you to welcome our panel members:
 - The Honourable Chief Justice Diana Bryant, Family Court of Australia
 - Ms Susan Holmes, Chair, Family Relationship Services of Australia, and
 - Mr George Turnbull, Director, Legal Aid of Western Australia.
- Justice Bryant was appointed Chief Justice of the Family Court of Australia on 5 July 2004. Prior to this appointment she was the inaugural Chief Federal Magistrate and headed the Federal Magistrates Court from 31 January 2000 until July 2004.
- At the time of her appointment as Chief Federal Magistrate Justice Bryant had been an active member of the legal community. Her positions included membership of the Executive of the Family Law Section of the Law Council of Australia, Vice-chair of the Victorian Family Law Bar Association and a board member of Victoria Legal Aid.
- Her Honour was admitted to practice in 1970 in Victoria and practiced as a solicitor/advocate in Perth from 1977 to 1990. She returned to Melbourne and was a member of the Victorian Bar from 1990 until her appointment as Chief Federal Magistrate in 2000. She was appointed a Queen's Counsel in 1997.
- Her Honour's other major contributions to the law include her four year involvement on the committee with Justice Fogarty advising the Government on the model for the Child Support Scheme and her appearance for the mother in *AIF v AMS*, the first relocation case in the High Court.

- Ms Susan Holmes has worked in the family relationships area for over 20 years. Prior to this she worked at the Melbourne Institute where her research included a study on the workforce contribution of Social Workers. As CEO of Relationships Australia Tasmania she has been responsible for the setting up of federally funded Family Relationship Centres and Children's Contact Centres across Tasmania. She has been a strong advocate of the child focused model used in the centres across Australia.
- Susan is involved in many working parties and consultation on issues that effect families at the time of separation including The Family Law Pathways Group and the Family Law Council. She is currently Chairman of Family Relationship Services Australia and is on the Board of Relationships Australia.
- Mr George Turnbull was appointed Director of Legal Aid WA in June 1999. He was first admitted to practice as a barrister and solicitor of the Supreme Court of Victoria in 1973. Mr Turnbull was until June 1998 the Director of the Victorian Office of the Australian Government Solicitor, and was previously Director of the New South Wales and South Australian Offices. During the 1980s, he was Deputy Crown Solicitor and Director for Western Australia.