

OPENING AND WELCOME TO THE 19TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

DERMOT ROSS

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Ladies and Gentlemen, I am very pleased to extend to you all a very warm welcome to this the 19th annual conference put on by our Association.

This is of course the first conference since we changed our name to include financial services aspects, and it is fitting that the theme of our conference includes that expression. I will refer to that later.

But first, I am keen to tell you more about how this conference will unfold. We made an extra special effort this year to ensure that the conference was one which would attract a high number of delegates, and those of you who have been here on previous occasions will know that the delegate numbers are significantly up.

This is despite the fact that there are many sound reasons for declining attendances and conferences these days. Not least of these, of course, is the tightness of the availability of the conference dollar in any law firm or bank's budget, not to mention that many law firms and financial institutions are merging, so there are many fewer players in the market.

When I spoke to the major Sydney law firms last year, many people told me that holding the conference in June was a mistake, because that coincides with the last and the busiest month of the financial year. The planning committee for next year's conference will look very closely at the timing of it, and any suggestions any of you will have will help us considerably. It is a bit hard with school holidays, I know, and we do have a tradition of tying the conference around the Australian Queens Birthday Weekend with a view to enticing Sydneysiders and Melburnians up for a long week-end. But if that doesn't suit - and I know that some people have had to cancel their registration at the last minute; they just couldn't get away from the office - then we are certainly looking to make it a more time-friendly conference.

There are quite a few different things about this conference compared to previous ones. I would just like to mention a few of them.

Last night, as you all know, we held a cocktail function to welcome delegates, and that gave things a kick start, so to speak. In previous years, it has been only the insiders of the Association who have met formally on the Wednesday, and, by that, I mean, the Directors, the Conference Planning Committee, and the Speakers. It was a great pleasure to see so many of you there last night enjoying the hospitality in informal surroundings.

You will see that we have 14 sessions during this conference. Not only have we a number of concurrent ones, with two topics being dealt with simultaneously, but we have the rare and, to me, quite exciting experiment of the early morning slot tomorrow having three concurrent papers. I would urge you all to attend at least one of those early morning slots tomorrow, because they promise to be amongst the best the conference has to offer.

You will see from the conference program, which itself had a transformation into glossiness and sexiness this year, that amongst our sponsors for the conference are 16 of the region's major law firms. Our Association is particularly grateful to all of those firms. All of them have provided us with a significant cash contribution, which has enabled us to invite more speakers, to spend more money for your benefit, and in all, to make the conference one which I have no doubt will be extremely rewarding for you all on many different levels. To all of those firms, I thank you very much, but unfortunately I ask you to brace yourself for the possibility that a similar request may be forthcoming in a few months' time.

Opening and Welcome, 19th BFSLA Conference

To our primary sponsors, Thomson Law Book Company and Westlaw, thank you for your generous assistance. We are enjoying working with you and we hope that your involvement is rewarding for you as well.

With the increased number of sessions, we have, of course, an increased number of speakers, all of whom are of the highest calibre. We have over 30 guest speakers this year, more than double of last year, and you will see from their names and resumes in the full conference brochure that they are all leaders in their respective professions and occupations, and we are indeed very privileged and fortunate to have them as our guests.

We have such an excellent lineup of speakers that it seems invidious to single one above others; nonetheless, I do draw your attention to the fact that tonight's dinner speaker, Lucas Avenell QC from Vancouver, as a leading consumer law and human rights advocate, Mr Avenell has been described as the Canadian equivalent of Geoffrey Robertson, and I am sure we can look forward to a memorable address from him.

The brochure says that the code of dress for tonight's dinner is business attire. For the benefit of my many New Zealand friends whose business attire does not include a suit or a tie, you are very welcome to come without one. Certainly we would not want anyone to forego our dinner simply because they don't have a suit. Without doubt, tonight's dinner, which, in any many ways is the heart of the conference, will be a highlight, and I cannot recommend to you all highly enough that you attend and enjoy yourselves.

Another feature of this conference is we have scheduled the annual general meeting for this hall immediately following the last plenary session at 5.00 pm. We have done this in the hope that all delegates, whether you are members of our Association or not, will be able to attend, so that you can get a better feel for who the Directors of the Association are, what the Association does, and how it conducts its affairs. The AGM shouldn't last more than 20 or 25 minutes, and I would urge you all to stay on for it.

It has been one of my aims as President this year to try to open up the processes and systems of our Association to the scrutiny of members, and to encourage participation from as many of you as is possible. I will refer to some of these themes when I give you my address as Chairman of our company during the AGM.

I could also tell you about the golf tournament we hoped to hold as part of this conference, but I'm afraid it has not eventuated, and it is just really another long story.

What I can say, however, is that your conference planning committee, whose names appear on the brochure, put in a considerable amount of effort, initiative, and enterprise with a view to organising this conference for you. To my colleagues on that committee, I publicly give you my thanks now. I believe you can all take considerable credit for the conference which is unfolding, and I think it is going to be a real cracker.

It is wonderful to see the fruits of all your labours coming to bear in such a wonderful way. The analogy of labours bearing fruit, of course, brings me back to the theme of our conference: Financial Services Law, the New Era.

The Financial Services Reform Act has been in operation for almost three months now, I understand, and as you are all aware, it has grown its own industry of pundits and advisers with no doubt lots of controversy, argument, and confusion.

What better subject then than this to open our conference, and I am very happy to hand you over now to Davyd Lewis of Mallesons, who is chairing our first session.