

The Role of Australia's FAMILY LAW COUNCIL

The Family Law Council, a statutory authority established under section 115 of the Family Law Act 1975, commenced to operate from 26 November 1976. The Council is an advisory body set up to advise the Attorney-General on the operation of the Family Law Act and related legislation, legal aid in family law, and any other relevant matter. It examines matters referred to it by

the Attorney-General, but it can also look into matters of its own motion.

The Council provides the Attorney-General with advice through reports or letters of advice, the latter being used when urgent advice is required or the issue under consideration is not a major one requiring wide public consultation; being a comparatively representative body, the Council is generally

able to give a quick and representative view in such circumstances. When it looks at major or complex issues the Council consults as widely as possible before reporting to the Attorney-General. Consultation is usually through the release of a discussion paper for public comment, after which a report to the Attorney-General is made.

The Council has produced a number of

major reports on family law and related issues including such matters as child sexual abuse, administration of the Family Court, parenting after separation, family mediation, arbitration in family law, representation of children in family law, bankruptcy and family law, magistrates in family law, female genital mutilation, and sterilisation of children.

A high proportion of the Council's recommendations have been implemented by successive governments. In its *Annual Report 1994-95* the Council said that about eight out of ten of its recommendations which had been considered by government had been fully or partly implemented.

As well as its advisory role the Council also

scrutinises family law legislative amendments and generally monitors the operation of the family law system.

In addition to the Chairperson, the Council comprises 11 part-time members including judges, relationship counsellors, Commonwealth and State Government employees, barristers and solicitors, social workers and others. Members are appointed for three-year terms and reappointments are rare, thus ensuring that the Council has a regular infusion of new ideas and enthusiasm.

The Council maintains close links with the Australian Institute of Family Studies, the Australian Law Reform Commission, the Family Court of Australia, the Family Court of

Western Australia and the Law Council of Australia. The Council meets four times a year around Australia, including regional cities. It operates a system of sub-committees to do detailed studies of the various issues it is examining.

If you would like further information about the Council or its published reports please contact: The Director of Research, Family Law Council, Level 3, 50 Blackall Street, Barton ACT 2600. Telephone (06) 250 6375. Fax (06) 250 5917.

**– Jennifer Boland
Chairperson
Family Law Council**