



Law Council  
OF AUSTRALIA

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Media Release

## Major Parties Fall Short on Legal Aid Funding Despite Budget Surplus of \$28b for Past Two Years

Both major parties have failed to give any commitment to minimum increases in legal aid funding, despite Australia recording a combined Budget surplus of \$28 billion over the past two years.

Law Council President Tim Bugg said, "The Budget surplus in 2006/07 was \$17.3 billion; this year it is projected to be \$10.6 billion – yet we're supposed to accept that a fraction of this amount cannot be spared to assist less fortunate Australians pursue their right to justice."

Legal aid funding was just one of the issues raised by the Law Council in a pre-election survey sent to all political parties in the lead up to the Federal poll later this year.

"It is well documented that legal aid funding is inadequate, yet the Coalition seeks to rely on its record and the ALP says that it is still finalising its position on legal aid funding. Only the Democrats and Greens agreed to an immediate injection of \$140 million into legal aid," Mr Bugg said.

The response by the major parties to other issues raised by the Law Council was also disappointing, according to Mr Bugg.

"Neither major party supported a review of the detention provisions under terrorism legislation, despite the flaws revealed by the Dr Haneef case. Both major parties also declined to explore options for a Bill of Rights," he said.

In terms of freedom of information laws, only the ALP, Democrats and Greens would change freedom of information legislation to allow for a review of a Minister's decision to withhold information sought by the public.

"Although the Attorney-General has taken initiatives in relation to harmonisation of State and Territory laws, the Coalition is out of step with the other parties by not supporting a specific reference group on harmonisation. Lack of harmonisation has been identified as an impediment to business by several government inquiries," Mr Bugg said.

"The major parties' response to issues such as client legal privilege and anti-money-laundering was also extremely disappointing. Only the minor parties seem to appreciate the importance of immediately protecting the all important client-lawyer relationship," Mr Bugg concluded.

The full list of questions and responses is available at [www.lawcouncil.asn.au](http://www.lawcouncil.asn.au)

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*The Law Council of Australia exists to represent the legal profession at the national level, to speak on behalf of its constituent bodies on national issues, and to promote the administration of justice, access to justice and general improvement of the law.*

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