

ALRAESA

Association of Law Reform Agencies of Eastern and Southern Africa



“COMMONWEALTH ASSOCIATION OF LAW REFORM AGENCIES”

**ASSOCIATION OF LAW REFORM AGENCIES FOR EASTERN
AND SOUTHERN AFRICA:**

LAW REFORM CONFERENCE: 15 to 17 March 2005

Tuesday 15 March 2005

Introduction

The Commonwealth Association of Law reform Agencies (CALRAs) was formed to encourage and promote international cooperation in law reform – so as to improve the law across the Commonwealth and the world.

Background, history and support

Some 2,000 million people live in the Commonwealth, in over 50 nations. About 25 Commonwealth countries have one or more Law Reform Commissions or other permanent Law Reform Agencies (LRAs). Several countries with federal systems have an LRA in many of their states or provinces. Overall, there are over 60 LRAs across the Commonwealth and beyond. They vary greatly in size, workload, etc, as is right and proper when one considers the great variety of countries and states which they serve. However, they can usefully learn from each others’ experience.

Over the years, a number of LRAs have assisted other LRAs in various ways, especially through bilateral exchange of information and views. However, cross-fertilisation between LRAs is not always easy: they are busy, varied and often geographically distant. Their personnel tend to be with them for a fairly limited period, often without prior involvement in law reform. Inevitably, cooperation tends to be haphazard, patchy and more reactive than proactive.

There is scope for taking past cooperation further, using the wealth of experience that such bodies have – so as both to improve law reform itself (and therefore the law and society) and to reduce unnecessary duplication and effort.

For many years there has been strong and widespread informal support for establishing a Commonwealth Association, to encourage, facilitate and take forward cooperative initiatives in law reform.

The Commonwealth Association of Law Reform Agencies (CALRAs) was formally established at a Law Reform Agencies Day during the Commonwealth Law Conference in 2003. Its facilities are available beyond the Commonwealth. CALRAs has the strong support of the Commonwealth Secretariat, which is aware of the benefits which the 80 other Commonwealth Associations have found in comparable spheres.

The formation of CALRAs is timely. Many LRAs are now well-established, while others are being formed or rejuvenated; many are working in an atmosphere of change – both in the law, in legal systems and in public sector management; and it is a time of particular pressure on many, and especially on their resources. The Internet is also providing enormous opportunities for cooperation for many LRAs, although LRAs without the Internet must also be catered for.

Aims and objectives

CALRAs has a broad set of aims and objectives in its founding constitution (which is available on CALRAs' website* or from the General Secretary). The following are some of the possible areas for action in due course:-

- * Mutual information and support;
- * Sharing advice about methods of law reform;
- * Exchanging information about topics for law reform;
- * Sharing information about the impact which law reform bodies can make;
- * Innovation: exchanging information about successful ways of working.

CALRAs will avoid duplicating work or initiatives undertaken by others.

First priorities

At the first meeting of CALRAs, in April 2004, it was decided initially to give high priority to:-

- * organising a Commonwealth law reform conference every two years (where possible, in association with the Commonwealth Law Conference) as well as other conferences and events as required; the first is in London on 11 September 2005; it will be immediately before the prestigious Golden Jubilee Commonwealth Law Conference. It is being organised by CALRAs, with some assistance from the Law Commission for England and Wales. Advice is being received from the Executive Committee and an Advisory Committee. The Commonwealth Secretariat supports the conference, will be represented on the platform and hopes there will be a good attendance. A one page invitation, and the draft programme, are available here afterwards. There will also be a General Meeting of CALRAs.
- * facilitating the development of a CALRAs internet portal, with hotlinks to the homepages of all member law reform agencies; a website is being established – with considerable assistance from the Australian Law reform Commission; an important feature will be links to the websites of LRAs and others across the Commonwealth;
- * promoting staff development and exchange opportunities among members; CALRAs could have an important role of encouragement and facilitation, to enable more such opportunities; a policy paper is under preparation;
- * developing a protocol about law reform agencies receiving copies of all law reform publications; a protocol has been drafted and approved;

- * seeking to develop an online training/research course dedicated to the needs of law reform staff; this is a long term priority, which may develop from the one about staff development.

We have many other hopes and plans, but always very much welcome your suggestions – while bearing in mind our extremely limited resources.

Membership, applications, fees and funding; Executive Committee

Membership of CALRAs is open to:-

- * institutional law reform agencies,
- * individuals with a current or previous tie to a law reform agency, and
- * any other body which, or individual who, supports the aims of CALRAs - subject to the Executive Committee's approval of each application.

Annual membership fees for the period 1st July to 30th June are currently:-

Large bodies	£250
Small bodies	£100
Individuals	£20.

CALRAs' only income is currently members' fees. It is an informal body, run by volunteers.

Virtually all those who have joined so far are LRAs, partly because they are mainly the ones approached. They are partly large, and partly small, LRAs.

Executive Committee

The first members of the Executive Committee are:

- * Justice Elton Singini, SC, Chair of the Malawi Law Commission (President of CALRAs)
- * Professor David Weisbrot, President of the Australian Law Reform Commission (Vice-President)
- * Mr Michael Sayers, former Chief Executive of the Law Commission for England and Wales (Hon General Secretary)
- * Professor Peter Lown, QC, Director, Alberta Law Reform Institute, Canada (Hon Treasurer)
- * Mrs Lakshmi Gunasekera, Secretary of the Law Commission of Sri Lanka
- * Mr Utoni Nujoma, Chair of the Law Reform and Development Commission of Namibia
- * Justice Bruce Robertson, President of the New Zealand Law Commission and
- * Mrs Alisia Taumoepeau, Solicitor General of Tonga.

Conclusion

Do come on 11 September. With the copies of the leaflet of invitation, and of the programme, which are available here afterwards -- are plenty of information notes about CALRAs and of application forms; do join or, perhaps more likely, do encourage your LRA *or other organisation* to apply if it has not yet done so.

If you are involved or interested in law reform, CALRAs is your organisation and for your benefit. I hope we can all work together for that purpose.

Enquiries and applications for membership are very welcome. Application forms are available on CALRAs' website* and from the Hon General Secretary (Michael Sayers) at 18 Manor Way, Onslow Village, Guildford, GU2 7RN, United Kingdom. E-mail: sayers@speed-mail.co.uk
Telephone: +44 (0)1483 575366

* The website is being constructed at the time of writing. Its domain name has been registered : www.calras.org