

**MEDIA RELEASE**

**Legal assistance sector likely to cut jobs and services following release of Federal Budget**

**15th May 2015**

Community Legal Centres Tasmania today expressed their concern at foreshadowed funding cuts to the legal assistance sector in Tasmania following the recent release of the Federal Budget. The cuts follow on from the Federal Government’s decision two years ago to withdraw all funding to the Environmental Defender’s Office.

Jane Hutchison the Chair of CLC Tas stated:

“We are very concerned that the Federal Government is cutting $570,000 from the Legal Aid Commission of Tasmania and Community Legal Centres in Tasmania for the next financial year. These cuts follow on from the complete withdrawal of funding to the Environmental Defender’s Office which has left them fighting for their survival. With our capacity already stretched to the limit these cuts will lead to a loss of jobs resulting in a reduction of services to the people who need it most”.

Last year the Productivity Commission recognised the significant unmet legal need in Australia and recommended that $200 million of additional funding be injected into the legal assistance sector including the reinstatement of EDO funding. Instead, the Federal Government Budget cuts $370,000 from the Legal Aid Commission of Tasmania and $200,000 from Community Legal Centres around Tasmania. Whilst the Commonwealth will provide top up funding of $330,000 to cover the short fall this is for the 2015-16 financial year only and will still leave a short fall of $240,000 and more than double that amount in future years.

Ms Hutchison said:

“With staff and services at risk throughout Tasmania we call on the Attorney-General Vanessa Goodwin to address the shortfall and provide a much needed funding boost. This is particularly important given that the Tasmanian Government has historically provided very little assistance to community legal centres with most of our current funding tied to one-off or project work”.

**For further information:** Jane Hutchison on 6223 2500(w) or 0417 596 919