

**MEDIA RELEASE**

**Equal Justice more than a slogan**

**– Legal profession rejects funding cut to legal assistance sector**

**15th June 2016**

Barristers from the Tasmanian Bar and solicitors of private firms will today join with members of the legal assistance sector in raising awareness of the Federal Government’s decision to cut funding to the legal assistance sector. The lawyers, dressed in full regalia of suit, wig and gown will hold a banner on the steps of the Supreme Court of Tasmania demanding “Equal Justice for All”.

Jane Hutchison, the Chair of CLC Tas said:

Equal Justice for all has to be more than just a slogan, it needs to be adequately funded. The Federal Government’s 30 per cent cut will result in a slashing of staff across the legal assistance sector resulting in delays before the courts as self-represented clients muddle their way through a complex and unfamiliar legal system. Sadly, less legal representation is also likely to result in increased numbers of people being sent to prison.

Along with the 30 per cent cut to the legal assistance sector which commences on 1 July 2017 the Environmental Defenders Office has been without any federal Government funding since 1 July 2014.

Jess Feehely, principal solicitor with the EDO said:

Environmental and planning laws are complex. Without access to legal advice, many Tasmanians will struggle to understand these laws, to exercise their rights, and to hold government to account on decisions that will affect the environment.

The Productivity Commission has consistently emphasised the importance of public interest environmental law services, and has recommended that funding cuts to EDOs be reversed. We urge the Government to take these recommendations on board and ensure all legal assistance services, including those protecting the environment, are adequately funded.

**PHOTO OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE**

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