



social
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history

ALUMNI NETWORK

Staying connected

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'Welcome to the fifth issue of the Alumni Network newsletter'.

FROM THE COMMISSIONER

In June 2008 the Minister for Revenue and Assistant Treasurer, Chris Bowen, announced the appointment of David Butler to the position of Second Commissioner of Taxation.

David is returning to us after serving as the Division Head with the OECD in Paris, and prior to that as the New Zealand Tax Commissioner. The experience and knowledge David brings with him will be a welcome addition to our Executive. David's focus will primarily be on the people and

business dimensions of our transformational Change Program, reinforcing the strong link that currently exists between the Change Program and the Operations sub-Plan.

I would like to thank Bill Gibson for the excellent job he did acting in the role after Greg Farr's departure last year.

You can view the Minister's announcement [here](#).

Tax time is here and we hope that e-tax and pre-filing will make life a little easier for many taxpayers.

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This year marked the 10th anniversary of e-tax. Growth in the use of e-tax has been on an upwards curve. Our e-tax pilot in 1998 supported 1,227 electronic returns before we went public the following year, and 27,000 lodgments were made. E-tax lodgment rose to 1.9 million last year.

Taxpayers are now able to download e-tax from our website, or book a session at our shopfronts.

We are continuing to increase the amount of data that can be pre-filled using e-tax or that tax agents can utilise through the Tax Agent Portal.



Michael D'Ascenzo
Commissioner of Taxation

RELEASE OF THE COMPLIANCE PROGRAM

The release of the compliance program in Parramatta last Wednesday was well received by those who attended.

My speech to attendees, called 'A fair go for taxpayers', highlighted the balance of strategies to help and support taxpayers, make it as easy as possible for taxpayers to comply, and deter, detect and deal appropriately and proportionately with risks to Australia's tax and superannuation systems. It also underlined our emphasis on 'prevention is better than cure'.

To read the Commissioner's speech, [click here](#).

ANNUAL REPORT AWARDS



The Commissioner of Taxation Annual Report 2006–07 has been recognised with an award from the Australasian Reporting Awards (ARA) in Sydney recently.

The Annual Report Project team won a Silver award for distinguished achievement in reporting from ARA, with the Tax Office report praised for being engaging, rewardingly refreshing and telling the organisation's story well.

Marketing Communications Line Deputy Commissioner Alison Lendon and the project team attended the award ceremony, with Alison accepting the award on behalf of the Tax Office. 'It is lovely to receive this award in recognition of the focus we place on improving the Annual Report each year and the great effort that a large number of people across the office put into it,' Alison said.

TAX news

TAX OFFICE SPORTS CARNIVAL

The 26th Tax Office Sports Carnival will be held at Scarborough Beach in Perth from 13–19 March 2010. Scarborough has a wide range of accommodation options with easy bus access and very few traffic problems. Most of the sporting venues are within five kilometres and to top it off it has one of Australia's great beaches on the door step.

Perth has great weather in March, beautiful warm days in the low to mid thirties and balmy nights. So put the dates in your diary and start planning your trip.

Terri Ashley has been appointed as the Carnival Director. Terri started in the job on 1 July so preparations for the carnival are now starting to ramp up.

More information about carnival events and how you can participate will be included in our next newsletter.

The carnival committee is particularly keen to hear from alumni members in Perth who would like to help with the organisation. You can email the organising committee at atosportscarnival@ato.gov.au

GET INVOLVED IN OUR CENTENARY

With the Alumni's collective corporate and cultural knowledge of the organisation, members are encouraged to get involved in the Tax Office centenary in 2010.

The centenary is a time to recognise the importance of our past, present and future contribution to Australian society.

Your help is needed to collect interesting stories about our organisation and its people.

Planning for the centenary year is already well under way, with the Centenary project team recently going to tender to gain the services of an historian to document the Tax Office history.

A variety of events will be held to recognise our longevity, both in regional and metropolitan offices.

As a member of the Tax Office Alumni you are strongly encouraged to be a part of this exciting time, which will help position the Tax Office into the next 100 years.

TELL US YOUR STORY

If you have a story to share about your time as a tax officer or have any ideas which will help celebrate the Tax Office centenary, contact the Centenary project manager Karen Colquhoun on **(02) 6216 1807** or email karen.colquhoun@ato.gov.au

TAX AVOIDANCE/ EVASION 70S AND 80S

In 1977, Trevor Boucher became Second Commissioner, Policy and Legislation and began giving advice to newly appointed Treasurer, John Howard on what could be done to curtail paper schemes of avoidance and later 'bottom-of-the-harbour' schemes.

Trevor, former Commissioner is compiling a written record, broadly from the Tax Office's perspective, of the administrative and legislative action and court challenges against the tax avoidance/evasion schemes of the late 1970s and early 1980s.

The record will be based on Trevor's personal involvement, recollections, conversations (with serving and former tax officers and tax practitioners) and access to official records.

We would like to hear from you about your recollections of the schemes era of the 70s and 80s. Are there particular aspects you would like to see covered in this account?

Please email: vicki.woolley@ato.gov.au

TAX OFFICE WORKFORCE PLAN

A key challenge for the Tax Office in meeting government and community expectations into the future is sustaining and adapting our workforce. In addition to these expectations, we, like all employers, face a rapidly changing employment environment.

To address these and other challenges, we have developed the first Tax Office Workforce Plan. The plan sets out the strategies we will pursue over the next 3–5 years to secure the highly skilled, well managed, valued and committed workforce required to meet our future business needs.

The plan, which provides the first common framework for organisation-wide workforce planning, is a result of extensive consultation, collaboration and co-design with key business representatives. It includes an analysis of our internal workforce and external workforce environment.

The plan was endorsed by the ATO Executive on 1 July 2008 and sets out our strategic workforce goals, our future workforce needs and the strategic responses required to ensure our future workforce needs are met. The recommended workforce strategies are outlined under six themes:

SHAPING
OUR
STRUCTURE

RECRUITING
FOR THE
FUTURE

ENGAGING
OUR
WORKFORCE

BUILDING
WORKFORCE
CAPABILITY

LOCATING
OUR
WORKFORCE

SUCCESSION
PLANNING

Workforce planning is central to our corporate planning and the Tax Office Workforce Plan will be integrated into the broader corporate and strategic planning processes in the organisation. Leaders are consulting staff and integrating the plan into their business and workforce planning agendas, so we can achieve the best workforce for our organisation's future.

HAS YOUR PRIVATE HEALTH INSURER DEMUTUALISED?

If so, you may be interested in proposed legislative changes announced by the Government.

The proposed changes are designed to provide relief from capital gains tax (CGT) for policy holders of health insurers that demutualise.

So far, two Australian health insurers *NIB* and *MBF* have demutualised, which broadly means these insurers have converted from being a *not for profit* insurer to a *for profit* insurer.

While the proposed changes to the tax laws were introduced into Parliament on 26 June 2008, they will not become law until they have been passed by both Houses of Parliament and approved by the Governor General.

However, once law, the changes will take effect from 1 July 2007 and apply to the recent demutualisation of *NIB* and *MBF*.

Regular updates on the progress of the changes through Parliament will be available on the Tax Office website.

Fact sheets containing important information for policy holders of health insurers that have already demutualised are also available on the Tax Office website:

To access the *Demutualisation of MBF* fact sheet, [click here](#)

To access the *Demutualisation of NIB* fact sheet, [click here](#)

LEGAL LAW AWARDS

The Tax Office won the award in the category of 'Government in-house legal team of the year' ahead of several other nominees including the Departments of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Immigration and Citizenship, Employment and Workplace Relations and Finance and Administration.

Departments were nominated following intensive industry research by the ALB Australasian Law Awards research team. The judging panel, comprising senior lawyers from firms, industry and professional associations, considered finalists in various categories recognising outstanding client service, as well as the ability to combine rigorous analysis with sound judgment.

Acting Assistant Commissioner for Litigation, Grahame Hager attended the black-tie function held at Sydney's Westin Hotel on behalf of the Tax Office. He said the award recognises tax officers' professionalism in the conduct of tax litigation.

'There was also a specific acknowledgement by the judging panel of ATO work in identifying offshore arrangements to evade tax and implementing practice statements to increase the efficiency of litigation following the report on ATO litigation management by the Inspector-General of Taxation,' Grahame said.

'While all legal technical officers are to be congratulated, the staff involved in those highlighted areas of our work should feel particularly proud of their efforts.'

TAX HELP AND E-TAX CELEBRATIONS

2008 marks 10 years since e-tax was first publicly released among Australian taxpayers and 20 years of Tax Help. A series of events will be delivered to recognise these significant milestones and the workforce behind the success of both initiatives.

The national event was held at National Office on 8 July where e-tax pre-filling was launched, and 11 Tax Help volunteers were recognised for 20 years service. Eleven regional Tax Help celebrations followed with volunteers representing each region.



TAX HELP

Tax Help was introduced nationally in 1988 following a pilot program conducted out of the Newcastle Office in 1987.

Tax Help aims to provide free assistance for low-income clients in an area near where they live to meet their individual tax obligations such as lodging tax returns. Particular focus is placed on assisting low-income clients from an Indigenous or non-English speaking background, clients with a disability, and clients located in regional and remote areas.

We now have 1,350 volunteers who last year helped 75,000 people around the country. The volunteers represent 47 ethnic backgrounds and offer help in 57 languages.

We have identified 14 volunteers nationally who, if they are accepted again in 2008, will have been participating for the past 20 years.

Tax Help is a network of community volunteers who provide a free, accessible and confidential service for low-income taxpayers to meet their individual tax obligations, like lodging returns.

Tax Help is a highly successful collaboration with the community. It contributes to trust and confidence in the fairness of our tax system and the inherent decency of Australia's democracy.

NAIDOC WEEK



National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) has become the name for the full week of celebrations.

This year's NAIDOC Week ran from Sunday, 6 July to Sunday, 13 July with the theme '*Advance Australia Fair?*'. The theme aimed to get people to reflect on the Australian principle of a 'fair go' and consider the inequalities still experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in this country.

Many of our sites participated in NAIDOC celebrations:

In Upper Mount Gravatt there was a performance by didgeridoo player Jahlow Walker (great grandson of the late Oodgeroo Nunuccal – Kath Walker, Aboriginal activist, poet and writer) in the foyer over several days and special NAIDOC cakes were delivered to each floor by Site Leadership representatives.

In Latitude East office NAIDOC celebrations included a native bush tucker morning tea involving explanation on some traditional dances including the emu fertility dance (which employees helped demonstrate!), sharing of some dreaming stories and a performance by a didgeridoo player.

Adelaide CBD sites celebrated NAIDOC with a morning tea with an Aboriginal Elder from the local Tandanya National Aboriginal Cultural Institute who delivered a special NAIDOC message and gave a demonstration on how to play the 'yidaki' (didgeridoo).

In Northbridge two Noongar Elders spoke to staff about a community project to save nine dialects of the Noongar language and shared illustrations from some of the stories used to regenerate the language amongst the coastal community.

A whole of Government celebration involving several Commonwealth agencies was held in **Melbourne CBD National Office** and other sites screened a collection of Indigenous short films provided by the Australian Film Commission.



Profile OF A FORMER TAX OFFICER – PETER BANHUK

...The Alumni has meant that I haven't lost touch with many of the friends in the Tax Office. Apart from the Tax Office organised Alumni get-togethers, we still have regular restaurant outings with others who have retired, along with current Tax Office staff. A group of us (Townsville retirees) have also recently started getting together on a regular basis for morning teas, just to catch up.

Just before I retired I was attached to the non-profit segment in a National position, but working out of Townsville Office.

I originally commenced work in the Sydney Tax Office, along with a couple of memorable years in the then Newcastle Regional Office. Here I can still remember having to carry a revolver with me when doing the daily banking – heaven only knows why. It was kept in the briefcase, along with the money being banked.

After a few more years in Sydney I transferred to Townsville, with my wife and young family. It was a great place to bring up our children. One of the biggest challenges I had within the Tax Office was opening up, and bringing to fruition GST offices in Cairns, Mackay and Rockhampton.

In retirement I have had two wonderful trips overseas, to Canada, Europe and Britain and caravan trips around Queensland.

The Alumni has meant that I haven't lost touch with many of the friends in the Tax Office. Apart from the Tax Office organised Alumni get-togethers, we still have regular restaurant outings with others who have retired, along with current Tax Office staff. A group of us (Townsville retirees) have also recently started getting together on a regular basis for morning teas, just to catch up.

I'm not really sure how I had time to fit in work.



Dennis Hewitt in the Hobart FM studio

Profile OF A FORMER TAX OFFICER – DENNIS HEWITT

...The Tax Office has been a major part of my life. Over the decades, I have made numerous friends, in interstate branches as well as locally. I regard Alumni as an important avenue by which contact can be maintained with former workmates, and others with whom I have had occasional dealings with as a Tax Office employee.

My time in the Tax Office started almost 40 years ago, when I was 16 years old and just out of high school.

My initial posting was to Sales Tax, where I was by far the youngest in the section.

I later transferred to Records, Investigations, and to several other sections before going to Compliance (Investigations), where I stayed for the next 21 years. I last worked in Superannuation Client Account Services, Hobart.

I currently present the Sunday morning breakfast programme on Hobart FM 96.1 and will be presenting the Saturday morning breakfast programme, relieving its regular presenter (and current Tax Office staffer) Tim Kingston, who is nursing a broken leg.

The Tax Office has been a major part of my life. Over the decades, I have made numerous friends, in interstate branches as well as locally. I regard Alumni as an important avenue by which contact can be maintained with former workmates, and others with whom I have had occasional dealings with as an Tax Office employee.

It is also interesting to see new developments happening within the office.

I thank the staff responsible for implementing the Alumni network as it represents a major advance in the field of retaining contact with past employees.



Taken at Pamela's retirement lunch. I am on the right, with Alistair Douglas, Joyce Donnellan and Nigel Johnson – all long serving tax officers

Profile OF A FORMER TAX OFFICER – PAMELA KING

...throughout my career worked in sections that included Records, Defaults, Internal Audit, Sales Tax, Recovery, Ledgers, Receiving and Accounting.

...The Alumni gives me the opportunity to catch up with old Tax mates

I started in the Hobart Tax Office in 1957 and throughout my career worked in sections that included Records, Defaults, Internal Audit, Sales Tax, Recovery, Ledgers, Receiving and Accounting – As they were known then.

I remember when the Social Club sold oranges, and the boys in Sales Tax held a daily cricket match against the Searchers from Records with the wooden slats off the orange boxes.

I have memories of the floods of 1960, when almost all the records in the basement were wet and those staff who had hot houses were trying to dry out the old notices of assessment. When we left in 1972 the musty smell still remained.

In 1972 we moved offices, sharing our new building with several departments and that belonging feel was never quite the same.

I left Taxation in 1986 to work part time for the Salvation Army, and retired in 1999.

The Alumni gives me the opportunity to catch up with old Tax mates.

CONTACT DETAILS

For more information about the Alumni Network:

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- search for 'Alumni Network' on our website: www.ato.gov.au

or

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