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Introduction

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Volume 10 Number 2

Special issue: Frontiers of ADR — a selection from current research

Introduction

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contents

23	Ethics for a mediation 'profession': an answer to the neutrality dilemma?
26	An alternative for who? Access to ADR processes
28	The purpose of court-connected mediation from the legal perspective
30	Lawyers post-ADR: mediation and collaborative law
32	Family law: the lawyer-client relationship, procedural justice and the dispute resolution process
34	The Children and Families in Transition project
35	Transformative and facilitative mediation case studies: workplace conflict
37	A mediation model for the disclosure of adverse events in a hospital setting
38	Transforming mediation in the Asia-Pacific region
40	ADR diary

Sam Hardy and Hon Justice Murray Kellam AO

This special issue of the *ADR Bulletin* includes a selection of articles drawn from papers presented at the third National ADR Research Forum convened by the National Alternative Dispute Resolution Advisory Council (NADRAC) and held at La Trobe University in July 2007. The aim of the Forum was to optimise research in ADR by promoting information sharing and collaborative effort among those involved in conducting or commissioning ADR research or evaluation. Over 100 participants and speakers took part in the Forum over the two days.

The articles included in this special issue illustrate the range of research topics and methodologies used to conduct research in this rapidly growing field. The articles cover the practice of ADR in contexts such as family conflict (Bagshaw and Howieson), hospitals (Shirley and Cockburn) and the workplace (Manning). A number of articles also consider the implications of ADR in a legal context (Rundle, Ardagh and Cumes and Howieson). Other areas covered include the important issue of access to ADR processes (Sourdin), how mediation training can be culturally appropriate (Bagshaw) and ethics for a mediation 'profession' (Field).

The articles also demonstrate that the methodological approaches to research are very diverse. There are large-scale, long-term empirical projects including surveys, interviews, focus groups and observations of practice (Bagshaw, Rundle, Sourdin); case studies (Bagshaw and Manning); and theoretical analyses (Field, Shirley and Cockburn, Howieson, Ardagh and Cumes).

In summary, this selection of articles provides a representative sample of a much larger body of research being carried out by many academics, practitioners and 'pracademics' across Australia. ●

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I am grateful to the editors for producing this special issue of the *ADR Bulletin*. NADRAC has a broad charter. Apart from providing policy advice to the Commonwealth Attorney-General, NADRAC is charged with promoting the use and raising the profile of ADR. In fulfilling its objectives NADRAC is specifically empowered not only to provide advice on the need for ADR research but also to facilitate ADR research and participate in research conferences. The continued development of dispute resolution relies upon an improved understanding of ADR processes and interventions. High quality and broad ranging research which helps to answer important questions for funders, service providers, practitioners, users and the broader community will help to achieve this objective. For some years NADRAC has sought to promote 'theory meets practice' opportunities by encouraging communication between researchers, practitioners and policy makers. In February 2003 NADRAC convened its first research forum, then called a 'roundtable', on ADR research. The 50 participants at that 'roundtable' provided

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valuable insights and information, which NADRAC drew upon to publish *ADR Research: a resource paper* in March 2004. That paper was intended to promote discussion and to assist researchers conducting work in the ADR area. The success of that first 'roundtable' also led NADRAC to decide to hold similar forums on a biennial basis. There have now been a total of three ADR Research Forums, each of which has been more successful than the last.

The most recent National ADR Research Forum was conducted over a two day period at La Trobe University in Melbourne in July 2007. In early 2007 NADRAC had invited researchers to submit abstracts of their research papers for presentation at the Forum. As the abstracts came in throughout early 2007, NADRAC's Research Committee was a little stunned by the number, the quality and the broad range of endeavour being conducted by ADR researchers in Australia. Given the high quality of the abstracts that were received, the committee decided that it would be inappropriate to pick and choose amongst them. As a result, 25 researchers were invited to deliver presentations at the Forum. Regrettably, by reason of time limits each researcher had only a brief time in which to present details of their work to the large audience. I am grateful indeed to the individual research presenters who kept to time limits and thus ensured all the presenters had an adequate opportunity to discuss their work. In many ways two days was insufficient to do justice to the quality of the work presented. The courage of the researchers in engaging in such a large public forum and discussing their,

often developing, research projects was impressive. This year's Forum attracted the biggest attendance yet, in all 110 people from a range of research, policy and practice backgrounds attended. An evaluation conducted by the NADRAC Secretariat indicates that the vast majority of those who were present agreed it was a productive and informative event.

The editors have selected but a few of the papers presented at the Forum for publication in this edition of the ADR Bulletin. However those which have been selected are demonstrative of the broad range and diversity of the research work being undertaken in ADR in Australia and indicative of the high quality of the presentations delivered at the Forum. NADRAC is grateful to the editors of the *ADR Bulletin* for publishing this special edition. On NADRAC's behalf I would also like to thank each researcher who made a contribution to the overwhelming success of the Forum. Special mention should also be made of the contribution of the Convenor of NADRAC's Research Committee, Professor Tania Sourdin, the Forum's facilitator, Dr Samantha Hardy, and of La Trobe University for freely offering NADRAC a venue for the event. I am sure that the published extracts in this issue of the *ADR Bulletin* will generate much interest and hope that they may stimulate further research. NADRAC will continue to do what it may to create an environment that fosters more ADR research of the quality and wonderful diversity represented here. ●

*The Hon Justice Murray Kellam AO is
the Chair of NADRAC.*

contributions

Contributions to the *ADR Bulletin* for 2007 are welcome.

Submissions should be presented as a Word file, attached to an email.

Please submit articles or notes for publication to:

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