

News Release Deputy Premier John Rau

Attorney General
Minister for Planning
Minister for Industrial Relations
Minister for Business Services and Consumers



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Laws to improve accountability of the legal profession

Changes to laws that govern the regulation of South Australia's legal profession have been introduced into Parliament today by Attorney General John Rau.

The *Legal Practitioners (Miscellaneous) Amendment Bill 2013* proposes a new Legal Profession Conduct Commissioner as well as a public database of practitioners who have been disciplined for professional misconduct.

"It is important that South Australians have confidence that those in the State's legal profession are conducting themselves appropriately," Mr Rau said.

"Likewise, it is important that the legal profession has clear, contemporary instructions regarding the sort of information that should be available to clients.

"The Bill that I am introducing today is the culmination of around 18 months of consultation and will benefit both the legal profession and those who are its clients.

"Central to the changes proposed in this Bill is replacing the present Legal Practitioners Conduct Board, with a Legal Profession Conduct Commissioner with increased powers.

"A new publicly accessible database of practitioners who have been disciplined will mean greater transparency and will assist those who are seeking to engage a lawyer.

"The Bill also identifies certain events, including bankruptcy, or being convicted of a serious offence, which trigger an obligation on a practitioner to explain to the Court why he or she is still a fit and proper person to practise law."

Mr Rau said that there are also provisions within the proposed laws that will require legal practitioners to give their clients clear information regarding legal costs.

"These provisions seek to ensure that clients know of their rights to negotiate a costs agreement, receive an itemised bill, be notified of substantial changes, receive progress reports and avenues available to challenge a bill," Mr Rau said.

The Bill also provides a new procedure for the Supreme Court to deal with practitioners who pose an immediate risk to the public. Other proposals include measures dealing with trust accounts, incorporated legal practices and community legal centres.

"These changes are about fairness, transparency and accountability," Mr Rau said.

"They bring South Australia's legal profession into closer harmony with its interstate counterparts."