

# Service on edge of a funding 'cliff'

Suncoast legal service hopes for no further cuts

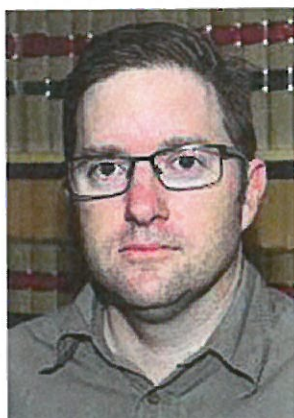
**Nicky Moffat**  
Nicky.Moffat@scnews.com.au

WITH federal government funding cuts to community legal centres due to take effect next year, Suncoast Community Legal Service is worried it is about to fall "off a funding cliff".

The federal government handed responsibility for distributing funding to community legal centres to the states in July last year, and centre managers are now submitting tenders and hoping their funding will stay in place for next year.

With 30% of funds cut across the country in the 2014 federal budget, there will have to be losers in this model, says SCLS principal solicitor Julian Porter.

"We don't know who's going to get the chop. There is real uncertainty within the sector as to how this new funding will be distributed," he said. "We need some clarity if we're



**Principal solicitor with SCLS Julian Porter.**

still going to be able to offer our services into the future.

"It's absolutely essential that we move away from the current model of funding."

Labor senator for Queensland Chris Ketter was in Maroochydore last week to hear from solicitors and volunteers.

"These funding cuts will leave real uncertainty in the sector, people need to be able to access practical legal advice," he said.

"This is a service we cannot afford to lose."

**“We don't know who's going to get the chop. There is real uncertainty within the sector”**

— Suncoast Community Legal Service principal solicitor Julian Porter

Federal member for Fairfax Ted O'Brien said the Suncoast legal service played "an important role in providing access to justice."

"I support ongoing government funding for their operations," he said.

"I would happily support efforts by the Suncoast Community Legal Service to advocate to the State Government to carve out sufficient funds for them to continue their operations."

He said he "could only assume" the five-year National Partnership Agreement on Legal Assistance Services that governed the current

funding decision-making framework had been made voluntarily by both state and federal signatories.

"I'm more than happy to be briefed by the local community service and legal sector on their needs on the matter and if there's a need to speak directly with the Attorney-General," he said.

"However, my understanding is it's already been agreed upon by the Attorney-General and the State Government, so to go back now and try to undo a five-year agreement is unlikely."

Mr Porter said the service would submit a tender to the state Department of Justice, and hoped decision makers would recognise the work SCLS does for the Coast community by retaining its funding.

"We'll just show all the good stuff that we've done with the money we've had so far, but if that's not enough we'll have to look at other funding," he said.

"The truth of the matter is we may be about to fall off a funding cliff, but we will know the result in March."