

Legal service cuts 'shameful'

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FISHER MP Andrew Wallace (centre) meeting with community legal service representatives including Julian Porter of Suncoast Community Legal Service(second left) in Canberra earlier this year.



by Bill Hoffman

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ATTORNEY-General Yvette D'Ath has been accused of shameful hypocrisy for stripping \$240,000 in funding from the Suncoast Community Legal Service.

Federal Fisher MP Andrew Wallace has spoken out a day after cuts representing 39% of the service's budget were announced.

"Attorney-General D'Ath was among the loudest voices calling on the Federal Government to allocate more funding for our Community Legal Centres. But now that the Commonwealth has provided an extra \$39 million to support them, she has sold out Sunshine Coasters by denying us our fair share of that funding," Mr Wallace said.

"It is shameful hypocrisy. The Queensland Government have shown yet again how little they care about the Sunshine Coast. The Suncoast Community Legal Service fulfils an essential role in providing access to justice for our most vulnerable people.

"I call on the Queensland Attorney-General to do the right thing and reverse this savage cut today."

Mr Wallace said in April this year the Federal Government had committed to an additional \$39 million in funding for Community Legal Centres.

The money, he said, was to ensure no community legal centre would need to lose out.

"Combined with existing funding under the National Partnership Agreement to 2020, this represents the largest ever Commonwealth investment in legal assistance services - a record \$1.73 billion," Mr Wallace said.

Under the National Partnership Agreement community legal centre funding was allocated by State and Territory Governments.

Mr Wallace said the 39% reduction to Suncoast funding left it with a \$409,000 budget which may result in the loss of at least two key legal staff.

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He said the Coast's community legal service last year had provided about 4000 advices and handled 145 case work matters.

The loss of funding may leave it able to deliver 2800 advices and possibly as few as 30 case work matters over the next year.

A spokesperson for the Attorney-General said they understood the funding provided to Sunshine Coast Community Legal Service over 2015-17 was temporary Commonwealth funding.

"Any funding provided in the 2017-20 agreements was done through an application process," she said.

"It was the Palaszczuk Government that fought to reverse the cuts proposed to community legal centres by the Federal Government.

"Queensland now provides more than 60% of funding to community legal centres compared to the Commonwealth's 40%."



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