



ILC Student Open Forum held 22 September 2009, topic 'Alcohol restrictions in Indigenous communities' overview written by Lucienne Cassidy, student volunteer

In September, student volunteers at the Indigenous Law Centre hosted the first in a series of open forum events to be held twice a year. The open forum was on the topic of alcohol restrictions in Indigenous communities, and was attended by students, academics and professionals from the Indigenous affairs and public sectors. During the forum, a panel of academics and representatives from the Australian Human Rights Commission provided structured discussion and answered questions on a range of topics.

In introducing the forum, we highlighted that the forum was intended to be open, honest and constructive, and that its purpose is to develop a culture of open and constructive discussions beyond the event itself.

To set the context for the discussion, the Sex Discrimination Commissioner Elizabeth Broderick gave an in-depth and personal introduction to the documentary *Yajilarra* which she helped to produce and publicise. 'Yajilarra', which means "to dream" tells the story of a group of Aboriginal women from Fitzroy Crossing, WA who successfully campaigned for the imposition of alcohol restrictions in their town. Elizabeth spoke of her incredible experiences working with such strong and passionate women, including taking the women and their documentary to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in March this year, where the documentary received a standing ovation.

Following the very powerful documentary, we introduced the panel, which comprised of anthropologist Maggie Brady (who generously flew up from Canberra to join us on the night), Australian Human Rights Commission Director of the Sex and Age Discrimination Unit, Cassandra Goldie, UNSW academics Sean Brennan and Megan Davis (Director of the ILC), whose focus is Indigenous legal issues, and Jane Latimer, Associate Professor at The George Institute for International Health and producer of *Yajilarra*.

Each panellist provided us with a unique perspective on alcohol restrictions and the myriad of issues that the restrictions raises: Maggie provided an extremely useful historical context to government policy and to present day Indigenous women's movements; Cassandra and Jane provided both personal and professional perspectives on working with the women to promote *Yajilarra* and its important message about grass-roots leadership and activism; and Sean and Megan provided broader contributions from their areas of study, in particular the different policy and legal approaches to regulation and control and the central role of Indigenous women as leaders in achieving outcomes in Indigenous communities.

With the powerful message conveyed in *Yajilarra* and the panellists' perspectives fresh in everyone's minds, a very open and in-depth discussion ensued, triggered largely by the powerful message conveyed in *Yajilarra* and the panellists'. The enthusiasm and interest from the audience (who more than packed out the room) was overwhelming, and their thought-provoking questions and contributions allowed us to touch upon a multitude of different issues in a constructive and comprehensive way.

The night was a huge success and we thank everyone who attended and contributed so enthusiastically. A special thank you goes to the speakers and panellists, who were central in guiding a constructive discussion around the issues. The ILC is very excited about the next open forum event, which is planned for the middle of Semester 1, 2010, the topic of which we are currently discussing but will be just as current and important as the last.