

TLG LAWYERS
BRISBANE



Did you ever want to be a vet, but couldn't stand the sight of blood? Well, here is an alternative: why not show your love for animals by becoming an animal lawyer?

Tracy-Lynne Geysen of TLG Lawyers in Brisbane did – and she is now the principal solicitor of Australia's only dedicated animal law practice.

An animal lover through and through, Geysen is blessed with the powerful combination of passion, conscience and stubborn resolve.

In her native Queensland, she was horrified by the apparent impunity of those committing acts of animal cruelty, and when she saw a news bulletin depicting a dog hanging from a tree, it was the last straw.

"It just offends me so much that [cruelty] could be done against animals. Animals love unconditionally and are so loyal to us. To think of cases where people cut off their tails and ears and feet – it's horrible," she says.

Spurred into action, Geysen formed an organisation known as BLEATS (Brisbane Lawyers Educating and Advocating for Tougher Sentences) in an attempt to push magistrates to crack down on offenders.

The overwhelming success of BLEATS, in which over 150 lawyers do pro bono work for the RSPCA, inspired Geysen to take further action by combining family and animal law in her own private practice.

"You can count the [Australian] animal lawyers on your left hand," says Geysen. "It is really exciting to be at the forefront of that and I really expect it to take off."

According to Geysen, animal law around the world is booming – particularly in the US and Europe – thanks largely to growing public awareness of issues surrounding animal cruelty. And, suggests Geysen, Australia is moving in the same direction.

"People just love their animals ... and they will do what they have to do for their pets," she says.

"Twenty years ago people scoffed at environmental law as an area of law and now it is huge, so we are really just waiting for animal law to become the next [big] area."

While TLG also practices family law, Geysen eventually hopes to focus primarily on the animal law side of the business, with inter-state expansion a possibility.

"Since we started in August 2009, we have had about 40 animal law enquiries. We now have 20 active files, which is way more than I thought we would have at this early stage," says Geysen.

"My plan is to have four fulltime solicitors by the end of next year and have two doing family law and two doing animal law, and that is just in Queensland."

While the majority of TLG's animal practice is currently taken up by appeals against dangerous dog declarations and vet negligence cases, Geysen believes the variety of matters will broaden as the practice expands, and is hopeful big business will get on board.

"We'll take on the big cases – the chicken farms, the sow stalls ... If PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) was prepared to pay us to start doing something, we would certainly be prepared to do that," she says.

Claire Chaffey



fe amongst those affected is so great, if restore that, it is a wonderful thing." Other who appeared in the film speaking of le with mental illness was former premier ern Australia, Professor Geoff Gallop. is keynote address prior to the film's ng, Gallop relied on the wisdom of singer d Cohen to sum up his feelings on the Everybody knows that the boat is leaky- rybody knows, everybody knows. That's goes, everybody knows, everybody's broken feeling," he said. know there is something that we need to and we need to deal with ... We try and ie issue but we know it's there ... and on ry occasions that leads to tragedy and ing the several hundred attendees at the 's launch was Marie Jepson, Tristan Jep- other and founder of the Tristan Jepson al Foundation. ough [the film] was incredibly powerful. made themselves very vulnerable and redibly courageous in how honest they out their experiences and its impact on ey risked a lot," she said. an only have a positive effect in letting now that there are people who under-

stand and who feel as they do." Freehills partner Peter Butler, one of the drivers behind the initiative, said he found the film "absolutely inspirational" and applauded those involved for revealing intimate details about a topic which is so personal and so difficult to confront. "Depression is a hard thing to talk about," he said. "What everyone working on this initiative wanted to do was try to end the stigma and create an environment where it is okay to say, 'I'm not feeling very well at the moment. I need help. I can't do it on my own.'" Butler was also complimentary of the cooperation shown by firms in facilitating what is a significant step forward. "The thing that the law firms have been doing really unselfishly is sharing what they're doing internally to improve resilience ... They are doing it without any fear of the competitive nature of the legal profession," he said. "We are learning from each other. No-one's got a monopoly on the perfect working environment." The film will be incorporated into the College of Law's practical legal training curriculum, with a pilot to be run this year, followed by fully fledged implementation in 2011.