CONVEYANCER. AUSTRALIAN
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OUTBACK TYCOONS

LAW TECH DISRUPTION IN AN UNLIKELY LOCATION



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Tough times and silver linings

Ask anyone who has spent time in this industry and they'll tell you the same thing: conveyancing in Australia was built by small practices. Sole practitioners and tight-knit firms who know their clients by name and have worked with the same agents for years.

So, it is concerning to hear how many of those people are now asking whether they can keep going.

In this edition, we look at why. Twenty years of compliance creep, rising technology and cybersecurity costs, soaring professional indemnity premiums and ever more complex transactions are squeezing margins. And with online and high-volume providers setting the price, lifting fees feels risky.

For some, the AML/CTF reforms that began in July have been the last straw. Others are finding strength in numbers through mergers or quietly thinking about selling.

But it's not all doom and gloom.

The AIC leaders in NSW, Victoria and South Australia we've spoken with agree the load is heavy, especially if you're running the business and doing the files yourself. Still, they say most members are adapting, not leaving.

Their advice is refreshingly practical. Charge what your work is worth and walk away from low fixed fees. Keep learning. Compete on expertise, trust and local knowledge, not price.

Perhaps we should add one more thing: speak up. As Jennie Tonner from AICNSW puts it, "We know this industry better than anyone else."

Small firms are the heart of this profession. We'd like to see them thrive, not just survive.



Tony Gillies, Publisher

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Why it's critical to keep a lid on territory prices

By LEIGH REINHOLD

High costs and heavy regulation risk driving away property investors from the Canberra market, warns REIACT chief Maria Edwards

THE ACT Government should be mindful to avoid legislating and pricing investors out of the territory's property market, warns the Real Estate Institute (ACT).

"The ACT needs to be very careful that the cumulative effect of land tax, rates, rent regulation and increasingly prescriptive tenancy legislation does not make residential property investment structurally unattractive," REIACT CEO Maria Edwards told *AC*.

"Governments understandably look at individual measures separately – rates, land tax, tenancy law, minimum standards, rent regulation, planning charges – but an investor experiences all of those measures together.

"Rental supply will become one of Canberra's major housing challenges if we fail to maintain sufficient private investor participation."

Edwards said the future of Canberra's property landscape over the next five to 10 years included greater density, particularly within established suburbs.

"We will see more townhouses, terraces and low-rise apartments and a greater emphasis on housing diversity," she said.

"We will also have to deal with an important fiscal question. The ACT has been transitioning away from stamp duty since 2012-13 and replacing that revenue principally through general rates.

"The 2026-27 Budget explicitly continues that approach and that creates a long-term issue for homeowners: what does the ACT's property tax burden look like when stamp duty has been substantially removed? That is something REIACT will be watching very closely."

Edwards said the REIACT has backed "elements" of the 2026-27 Budget, including the stamp duty reforms and the incentives around Missing Middle development.

"We particularly welcome removing stamp duty for first-home buyers," she said. "It removes a substantial upfront cost and gives first-home buyers greater flexibility about what and where they purchase.

"But housing policy has to work across the entire market. Helping somebody become a first-home buyer is a good outcome. Losing a rental property from the market at the same time is not necessarily a good housing outcome."

Edwards said the ACT's residential land tax revenue was forecast at approximately $253.7 million for 2026–27, while residential general rates revenue is forecast to increase from $565.7 million to $607 million.

"At the same time, landlords generally cannot increase rent by more than 10 per cent above the increase in Canberra's rents CPI without agreement from the tenant or an ACAT order," she said. "At present this is approximately an increase of one per cent per year. REIACT would like the Government to assess whether the total regulatory environment is encouraging or discouraging rental investment."

The REIACT would also like more transparency around tax reform.

"The 2026-27 Budget says the general rates component of residential bills will increase by an average of eight per cent, although removal of the Health Levy means the average total rates bill increase is capped at five per cent this year," Edwards said.

"As stamp duty continues to disappear, property owners deserve a clear long-term picture of what is replacing it."

Focusing on advocating government for "housing outcomes rather than housing announcements", the REIACT more broadly wants to see:

- Housing targets translated into completed homes;

"Rental supply will become one of Canberra's major housing challenges if we fail to maintain sufficient private investor participation."
– REIACT CEO Maria Edwards





- Greater diversity of housing;
- Planning reforms that actually result in viable development;
- A strong and sustainable private rental market;
- Taxation and regulatory settings that do not discourage investment; and
- Transparency around the long-term impact of the ACT's transition from stamp duty to annual property taxation.

To keep up with housing demand in the nation's capital, Edwards said Canberra needs a predictable supply of serviced land, infrastructure delivered alongside population growth, efficient approvals, and planning settings that support sensible infill.

"Canberra needs townhouses, terraces and two- and three-bedroom apartments that work for families and down-sizers," she said.

"But a housing policy cannot be judged solely on how many people it assists into home ownership.

"We also have to ask whether our taxation and tenancy settings are encouraging people to provide rental housing. We need policy that supports buyers and renters, rather than improving one side of the equation at the expense of the other."

While Edwards said there was a "substantial pipeline" for housing in the ACT, she emphasised the distinction needed to be made between "housing that has been planned, housing that has been enabled, and housing that has actually been built".

"The Government has committed to enabling 30,000 additional homes by

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CONVEYANCER COLLABORATION

Creating strong reliance regimes to accommodate the recently introduced AML/CTF legislation is an opportunity for greater collaboration between conveyancers and real estate agents, said the REIACT.

"We would like to see conveyancers involved in more REIACT education, industry forums and discussions around the property transaction," REIACT CEO Maria Edwards said.

"Joint professional development around contracts, settlements, common transaction problems and changes to ACT property law could be valuable for both professions.

"The REIACT welcomes conveyancers to join as Associate Members – elevating their profile amongst our agents and providing opportunities for networking and advocacy inclusion as well as education."

Edwards said the benefits are mutual if real estate agents and conveyancers can work more closely together.

"Agents and conveyancers perform very different roles and have different professional obligations, but we are both dealing with the same transaction and, ultimately, serving the same consumer," she saids.

"Many of the problems that occur during a sale are not because one profession has failed, but because information hasn't moved efficiently between the different professionals involved.

"There is enormous value in agents and conveyancers having a better understanding of each other's processes, timeframes and responsibilities."

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the end of 2030 and the Missing Middle reforms create considerably more capacity within established suburbs," she said.

"That's positive. But the challenge is converting that theoretical capacity into finished homes that meet actual demand.

"Supply also needs to be considered in terms of housing type. Building another one-bedroom apartment doesn't necessarily solve the problem for a family looking for a three-bedroom home, or for a downsizer wanting to leave a detached property without leaving their neighbourhood. So I think we need to move beyond asking, 'How many dwellings?' and start asking, 'What dwellings, where and for whom?'"

Edwards pointed to "feasibility" as the single biggest bottleneck to improving housing supply in the ACT in the current climate.

"We can rezone land, change planning rules and announce dwelling targets, but ultimately somebody still has to be able to finance and construct the project and somebody has to be able to afford the finished property," she said.

"Development charges, construction costs, infrastructure, finance, planning timeframes and buyer demand all affect whether a project proceeds.

"That's why REIACT welcomed the Government's decision to temporarily reduce the Lease Variation Charge for eligible Missing Middle development.

"I think the next phase of housing policy needs to concentrate much more heavily on the gap between approval and completion." C.



REGION TO WATCH: Molonglo Valley

The key area for property investment and community development in Canberra over the coming decade is the Molonglo Valley, according to the REIACT.

"Molonglo represents much more than another greenfield housing development," said REIACT CEO Maria Edwards of the major urban project, located 10km west of the CBD.

Established to accommodate Canberra's rapid growth, the multi-stage regional project is projected to house up to 70,000 residents by 2050.

"It is a test of how successfully Canberra can accommodate population growth while creating the infrastructure, housing choice and community services that make a new area genuinely liveable," Edwards said.

"The region is continuing to expand through areas including Denman Prospect and Whitlam, with future development extending further west and the eventual Molonglo Town Centre becoming increasingly important."

Edwards said what makes Molonglo particularly interesting is the opportunity to deliver a much broader mix of homes.

"Canberra cannot meet its future housing needs with detached houses at one end of the spectrum and predominantly small apartments at the other," she said.

"Growing communities need townhouses, terraces, family-sized apartments and other medium-density options alongside traditional detached housing."

Edwards believes Molonglo also highlights why housing supply cannot be considered separately from infrastructure.

"Schools, shops, roads, public transport, health services, recreation facilities and employment opportunities all need to keep pace with residential development," she said.

"That is the challenge facing Canberra more broadly over the next decade.

"If we get Molonglo right, it can demonstrate how housing growth and community-building can occur together.

"The Molonglo Valley is a microcosm of Canberra's housing challenge: the goal shouldn't simply be to build more dwellings. It should be to build complete communities."



Forties pre-fab: a prototype of the steel-framed Beaufort Home erected in Melbourne's Treasury Gardens in June 1946. The government ordered 5,000, but only 23 were built due to a post-war steel shortage. Photo Arthur Baldwinson collection, State Library of NSW

By RICHARD CUNNINGHAM

WHAT'S OLD IS NEW AGAIN

While modern modular homes feel like a fresh architectural trend, Australia actually embraced "prefab" housing in the 1950s to survive a severe postwar crisis

Modular homes are often thought to be a recent invention, but they've been in Australia at least since the immediate post-World War II years.

They were then known as prefabricated, or "prefab", homes, some built here but most imported from England, France, Austria and Sweden.

The early 1950s saw an acute housing shortage, with the surge in migration and a need for workers' housing in projects such as the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric scheme.

There was also demand for war service homes: thousands of veterans struggling to find accommodation.

The Federal Government was told of a case where 10 people were living in a garage.

Another family lived in a boatshed, paying weekly rent of £3 10s (about $100 in today's money).

In 1950, more than 14,000 kits were imported by state governments and over 4000 shipped for the Commonwealth Department of Works.

Among the local builders, Vandyke Brothers Pty Ltd – in business since the 1920s – turned out its patented "Sectionit" homes at a Sydney factory at the rate of 20 a week.

They could be assembled on-site in a matter of days, whereas a traditional home of comparable size could take two months.

Prefabs were typically of timber and fibro, often criticised for being of low quality compared to bricks-and-mortar housing.

However, they were only ever meant to be temporary. Today, few examples remain, often on Crown land and subject to heritage orders.

Modern modular structures are far superior in design, materials and construction.

But the concept goes at least as far back as 1624, when a panelised house was shipped from England to Cape Ann, Massachusetts, as accommodation for fishermen.

In 1788, Governor Arthur Phillip occupied a timber and canvas home shipped from England with the First Fleet and assembled on the eastern shore of Sydney Cove.

So, the colony's very first Government House… was a prefab. **C.**

By LEIGH REINHOLD

COMING TOGETHER

As smaller firms face an existential crisis under the weight of costs and compliance obligations, some are opting for survival in the strength of numbers

High risk, low returns and 20 years of compliance creep are pushing smaller conveyancers to reconsider their future options, according to industry experts.

"I think there are increasing pressures encouraging sole practitioners and smaller firms to consider merging or leaving the industry," said Sue Mosely, from Hunter Conveyancing, who helps mentor a group of nine small operators in the Newcastle region.

"There has certainly been a lot of discussion in favour of selling out."

Mosely said a variety of factors are making the life of the solo conveyancer and smaller operators unsustainable.

"For years, our industry has been built around small practices and sole practitioners who have developed successful small businesses from personal service and long standing relationships with clients and real estate agents," she told *AC*.

"Now increasing regulation, technology costs, cybersecurity threats, professional indemnity pressures and growing client expectations have steadily increased the cost

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and complexity of running a conveyancing practice.

"Our margins are being squeezed while smaller firms find themselves doing so much more work. But, to remain competitive with the online and high volume providers, they are unable to increase their fees proportionately.

"Add to that the fact property transactions in this climate are becoming far more complicated; finding support staff for a small firm is a constant struggle while trying to stay profitable; and the emotional toll is substantial."

AICNSW president Jennie Tonner said compliance has become a "huge burden" for conveyancers.

"A lot more time has to be taken on each conveyance now as we are effectively a conveyancer and unpaid contractors to the NSW and Federal Governments," she said, adding the situation is making conveyancers feel "very vulnerable".

"They have not only been exposed to the risk of having surcharge duty put on them without any experience or training, they now have another level of even heavier compliance from the Federal Government with AML/CTF," Tonner said. "We are being forced to take on so much risk as a conveyancer. As a result, our professional indemnity insurance has skyrocketed."

Tonner said conveyancers need assistance from government at all levels to help struggling small businesses.

"We need government and other peak bodies to listen to what we have to say and the solutions that we can provide," she added.

"This has not happened in the past. We know this industry better than anyone else. We need to be heard. As president this is one of my main focuses."

Tonner believes once conveyancers have had time to adjust to the extra AML/CTF duties, businesses will "adapt" but they need to price their work accordingly.

"I highly encourage conveyancing firms to increase their fees and stop offering low fixed prices," she advised.

"All low fixed prices do is place risk on the consumer and themselves."

While anecdotal reports in the conveyancing community abound that Tranche 2 of the AML/CTF obligations is the last straw for some people, Vicki Aird, membership manager at AICNSW, said time will tell the impact of this added layer of reforms.

"From AICNSW's perspective, it is still relatively early to assess the long-term impact of the AML/CTF reforms on the conveyancing profession," Aird

"While compliance obligations have increased, members' experiences vary significantly, and business decisions are generally influenced by a range of commercial, personal and regulatory factors rather than a single issue."

Aird advises that every business is experiencing the introduction of the AML/CTF differently.

"The impact varies considerably depending on the size of the practice, its business model, existing compliance framework and available resources," she said.

"As with any major regulatory reform, implementation requires an investment of time and resources.



"They have not only been exposed to the risk of having surcharge duty put on them without any experience or training, they now have another level of even heavier compliance from the Federal Government with AML/CTF."

– AICNSW president Jennie Tonner



AICNSW President Jennie Tonner.

"Some smaller practices have indicated that adapting to the new requirements presents challenges, while others have already incorporated many of the necessary risk management and compliance processes into their businesses."

In Victoria, AICVIC president Shakila Maclean said smaller conveyancing practices across the state, and the profession more broadly, have felt overwhelmed by the volume and pace of additional compliance requirements with the introduction of AML/CTF obligations.

"However, we have not observed a significant number of smaller Victorian conveyancing practices exiting the industry as a result," Maclean said.

"What we are seeing is practitioners

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The only way is up: 'Get big or die'

The calibre of solo conveyancers waving the white flag and going by the wayside is too high, says Dott & Crossitt founder Jared Zak

Jared Zak, principal solicitor and founder of conveyancing firm Dott & Crossitt, sees "dark days" ahead for the solo conveyancer.

"The opportunity I see is that it's either get big or die," said Zak, whose company is No.1 in NSW for transaction volume.

"When you can get bigger, you can develop some of those economies of scale, compliance costs can be spread across your business. And you just can't do that when you're a single operator."

Zak said the "death knell" is ringing for the small conveyancer with the layered burdens of compliance costs, the AML/CTF, insurances and trust accounting, along with the inability to effectively pass on increasing costs to clients.

"You hear all those tech guys now on their podcasts saying that single operators will be able to use AI and make millions of dollars," he said.

"Maybe in some businesses but not ours. And that's probably to do with compliance, which is basically negating all the benefits of AI.

"So, yeah, I do think it is dark days for the single operator, which is a shame because the single operators generally offer the best service because they are completely dedicated to the client.

"And they're normally, by virtue of being single operators, 24/7, whereas as you get bigger, your staff have to move more to a 9-5 model, which doesn't really fit with conveyancing."

Zak said he has noticed an uptick over the past two years in the amount of "well qualified" conveyancers looking to sell their businesses to him.

"Last year, we had two acquisitions where they essentially folded their business into ours," Zak said.

"Then this year, the seasonality was almost exactly the same, because of the new insurances coming in around June 30 and then the AML/CTF, so again we had more inquiries.

"The calibre of conveyancers who were waving the white flag was extremely high, which is a sad thing."



Dott & Crossitt founder Jared Zak.



AICSA President Matthew Kelly.

"AML is a different beast, the model comes with hefty penalties for non-compliance, or simply getting it wrong."

– AICSA president Matthew Kelly

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working their way through the changes and looking to AICVIC for practical information, education and support to help them navigate the new requirements."

Maclean said, at this stage, AICVIC is seeing Victorian conveyancers adapting to the changes rather than leaving the industry in significant numbers.

"That does not mean the compliance burden should be underestimated," she cautioned.

"For a sole practitioner or small conveyancing practice in Victoria, every additional compliance obligation can have a disproportionate impact because they generally do not have dedicated compliance teams or additional staff to absorb that work. Often, the practitioner is both running the business and doing the conveyancing work."

Maclean said it's too early to say whether AML/CTF reform will cause Victorian conveyancers to close their practices.

"The new obligations only commenced on July 1," she said.

"What we can say is that the implementation has created a significant additional workload and pressure for many smaller Victorian practices.

"AICVIC's focus is on ensuring those practitioners have access to the education, practical resources and support they need to navigate the changes, remain competitive and continue providing an important service to Victorian consumers."

Meanwhile, South Australian conveyancers are left feeling "quite vulnerable" with the added obligations of the AML/CTF, according to AICSA president Matthew Kelly.

"AML/CTF has lifted the risk and the anxiety," Kelly said.

"This change is different to other recent changes, like e-conveyancing or VOI, as there is more at stake.

"AML is a different beast, the model comes with hefty penalties for non-compliance, or simply getting it wrong.

"There is an amplified concern about the consequences of this legislation and ensuring that we all do the right thing.

"This is why the AICSA has been focusing strongly on training and will continue to offer and adapt our training as the situation evolves, and time goes on.

"We also believe that it's imperative that the training is affordable for all members."

Kelly tells *AC* the weight of AML reform on the small operator is a heavy one.

"The burden is significant," he said.

"Many entered the profession for the flexible lifestyle, however AML reform is expected to shake up their world.

"They will now have to do a whole lot more work and change the way that they operate. Sole practitioners and small firms don't have the support of being in a bigger practice.

"AICSA provides a community for these practitioners. This is important now more than ever."

Kelly added there is a lot the smaller conveyancers can do for themselves to remain working productively in the industry.

"To start with, they should look at the fees they charge," he said.

"Our profession needs to be charging for our work appropriately. There is a significant amount of additional work which needs to be reflected in the fees charged.

"Conveyancers also need to ensure that they are continuing their professional development, to be proficient in more complex conveyancing.

"Conveyancers should be aiming to compete on expertise and value adding, rather than cost for basic residential transactions.

"They should find their point of difference, focus on what they can be and what they offer that a large practice cannot.

"These will be areas such as service, trust, community knowledge and personal service."

‘I feel like an unpaid contractor for the government’

The latest tranche of AML/CTF legislation is like “another nail in the coffin” for experienced conveyancer Jacki Adams, who feels she works as an “unpaid contractor” for the government.

“The AML/CTF legislation is another risk I never asked to take on,” said Adams, the principal of JLA Conveyancing in Raymond Terrace.

She has stopped accepting some work – including SMSF transfers – and is restricting acting for companies during busy periods because of the extra workload the AML/CTF necessitates.

“I’m having to limit the work I accept to ensure I can remain across all requirements – and the urgency required in this industry. Too heavy a workload simply increases my risks of missing something and making a mistake.”

A licensed conveyancer for the past 12 years and with 24 years experience within the legal industry, Adams said the legislative hoops she has to jump through to do her job make her feel under-compensated for her work, while the AML/CTF is adding at least an extra 20 minutes to every file.

“More and more time is spent being an unpaid government agent than we spend doing our job: being legal professionals,” she told *AC*.

“We receive no remuneration for this work, little to no training, inconsistent advice from Revenue NSW and Fair Trading, no support team or support contacts with Revenue NSW, the ATO or Fair Trading, and we’re left explaining to the public why this information is required in the first place.

“My clients are offended, questioning why and who needs this information, why they’ve not heard of it before.

“Others are beyond frustrated that they have had to go through the same process no less than three times.

“Conveyancers also bear all the risk if we make a mistake, exposing ourselves to a professional indemnity insurance claim as well as professional discipline.”

Adams believes the mounting pressures on conveyancers are affecting the viability of being a small operator and she has considered consolidating with other conveyancing businesses to survive.

“As a solo conveyancer, I truly believe our increasing costs, the huge increases year-on-year of our professional indemnity insurance, increases in operating costs, wage increases and unregulated competition in the industry means the small firm’s days are numbered,” she said, adding she has heard of some conveyancers who chose to leave the industry when the AML/CTF was announced.



Jacki Adams, of JLA Conveyancing.

“More and more time is spent being an unpaid government agent than we spend doing our job: being legal professionals.”

– Jacki Adams, of JLA Conveyancing

Adams would like to see more input from the Australian Institute of Conveyancers (AIC) as conveyancers country-wide are impacted.

“I would love to see more vocal support from the AIC as to what is happening to represent our industry in defending us from this constant onslaught, protecting us from the financial and legal risks that are increasing each year,” she said.

“While there definitely seems to be things ‘happening in the background’, we really aren’t privy to what is being said or done to represent our industry.

“There also needs to be more time and resources allocated to educating the public on the role of conveyancers and lawyers in a property transaction, along with setting mandatory and minimum charges for our services which reflect the high level of expertise, skill and experience needed.”

Adams said the government should “accept responsibility” for their own processing and enforcement work, which they have “slowly put on the conveyancing and legal industry over the past 20 years”. She believes the solution lies within Service NSW centres.

“All clients should be able to walk into a Service NSW centre where they can carry out an ID check, have their ATO forms lodged and carry out their AML checks,” she said.

“Once they have carried out all requirements, they could be given a reference number to be shared by the client with their legal team, their lender, their agent.”

Adams said conveyancers could then verify the information and reference number online and confirm the client has been identified, their citizenship status confirmed and their AML and ATO information confirmed.

“That reference number could be added into the PEXA workspace,” she said, “and all parties would clearly see the reference aligns with Service NSW; just like how the stamp duty assessment number and PEXA are linked systems.

“The legal professional then has the information they need to progress the matter, the cost of that process is borne by the client and the risks of maintaining the privacy of that system and any misinformation are handled by the bodies wanting the information in the first place.”

Franchising: Cutting-edge approach to the job


Jim's Legal chief operating officer Sam Braithwaite. Photo: Luke Marsden

Known Australia-wide for mowing lawns, fixing fences and washing dogs, the Jim's franchise model is now encompassing conveyancing, with plans to go nationwide.

AC talks to Sam Braithwaite, chief operating officer of Jim's Legal, to get the lowdown.

What does Jim's Conveyancing offer the franchisee?

Jim's Conveyancing gives qualified conveyancers the opportunity to operate their own business while having the backing, systems and brand recognition of the wider Jim's Group.

A franchisee remains responsible for running their own conveyancing practice, but they're not starting from scratch.

They have the benefit of an established brand, marketing and lead generation, business systems, training, an exclusive territory and ongoing support.

The Jim's model also operates on a flat-fee basis rather than taking a percentage of the franchisee's revenue.

For us, the aim is to allow the conveyancer to spend more of their time actually servicing clients and growing their business, rather than having to independently build a brand, generate every lead and develop all of the systems around the practice themselves.

Who is your typical franchisee?

Our typical franchisee is an experienced and appropriately qualified conveyancer who wants the independence of operating their own business but sees value in being part of a larger network.

We're particularly interested in people who are good conveyancers first and foremost.

They may already be operating independently, working within another conveyancing business or looking to establish their own practice.

It's not simply about selling franchises. We want people who understand conveyancing, have strong client service standards and want to build a sustainable business under the Jim's brand.

Jim's Conveyancing requires franchisees to be fully qualified and independently licensed where required.

Why should a conveyancer become a Jim's franchisee?

One of the biggest challenges for an independent conveyancer is that being technically good at conveyancing does not automatically mean you have the time or resources to build a brand, generate leads, market the business and manage all of the administrative requirements that come with running a practice.

Joining Jim's gives the franchisee the ability to operate their own business while leveraging a nationally recognised brand and established franchise infrastructure.

Jim's Group reports more than 5700 franchisees across more than 50 divisions and 96 per cent brand recognition in Australia. That recognition is difficult and expensive for a small independent operator to replicate. The objective is ultimately quite simple: let good conveyancers concentrate on conveyancing and client relationships, while we help provide the framework around them to grow a business.

Have you noticed a rise in small operators coming to join the ranks of Jim's Conveyancing?

We're certainly seeing interest from smaller operators and conveyancers who are considering whether remaining completely independent is still the best model for them.

I would not say that compliance is the only reason. There are a number of pressures on smaller practices, including marketing costs, technology, insurance, administration and increasing regulatory obligations.

At the same time, there are conveyancers who want to own and grow their own business but do not necessarily want to build every component of that business from the ground up.



"For us, the aim is to allow the conveyancer to spend more of their time actually servicing clients and growing their business, rather than having to independently build a brand, generate every lead and develop all of the systems around the practice themselves."

– Jim's Legal chief operating officer Sam Braithwaite

A franchise model can be attractive in that environment.

What do you think is driving that interest: AML/CTF, indemnity insurance etc?

It's a combination of factors but compliance is unquestionably becoming a much bigger consideration.

The expansion of Australia's AML/CTF regime is a good example. From July 1, relevant Tranche 2 businesses, including conveyancers providing designated services, became subject to the expanded AML/CTF regime.

That introduces additional obligations around matters such as customer due diligence and AML/CTF policies and procedures.

The new rules contain specific requirements dealing with customer due diligence in real estate transactions.

For a large organisation, there are people and resources available to deal with regulatory change. For a sole practitioner or small conveyancing business, the same person may be the conveyancer, business owner, marketer and administrator.

Every additional compliance obligation therefore has a proportionately greater impact.

How can you help conveyancers manage their compliance loads?

The benefit of being part of a larger network is that every franchisee does not necessarily have to confront each new regulatory development entirely on their own.

We can monitor developments affecting the industry, provide information and guidance to the network, develop common systems and processes where appropriate and help franchisees understand what is changing and what they need to do within their own practice.

That does not remove the individual conveyancer's professional or regulatory responsibilities but it means they have a broader support structure around them rather than having to independently identify and respond to every change.

Why is a model like yours attractive for smaller operators struggling with the layers of compliance put upon them?

Scale is probably the biggest advantage.

A compliance change that requires research, new procedures, new technology or staff training can represent a significant burden for a sole practitioner. Across a network, there is an opportunity to develop resources and systems centrally and then make those available to franchisees.

It also extends beyond compliance. Smaller operators still need to generate work, maintain a website, advertise, manage inquiries and build their reputation.

Our model is designed to give them the independence of owning their own business without necessarily having the isolation that can come with operating completely alone.

Jim's is a trusted name in other fields. Why has the brand now branched out into conveyancing?

Conveyancing is actually a very natural fit for the Jim's model.

Consumers already associate Jim's with engaging a local service provider backed by a larger national brand.

Property transactions are another area where consumers want someone local, accessible and accountable who can guide them through what can be a stressful process.

The opportunity is to take the strengths of the Jim's model, particularly brand recognition, customer service, local franchise ownership and central support and apply those principles to professional services.

It is obviously a different environment from some of the traditional Jim's divisions because conveyancing is a regulated professional service.

That's why having appropriately qualified and experienced franchisees is particularly important to us.

You're currently situated in Victoria and South Australia. Do you have plans of going national?

Absolutely. The intention is to build Jim's Conveyancing into a national business.

Victoria is currently our established market and we are in the process of expanding into South Australia with our first Adelaide-based franchisee coming on board.

From there, our objective is to progressively establish the division in the other states and territories with the right franchisees.

Interestingly, the Jim's Conveyancing franchise site already identifies opportunities across Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Perth, Canberra, Hobart, Darwin, the Gold Coast and the Sunshine Coast.

We don't want expansion simply for the sake of putting dots on a map.

We want appropriately qualified franchisees in each market who can provide a high standard of service and build the brand properly. C.

Are you ready for

What's Next?



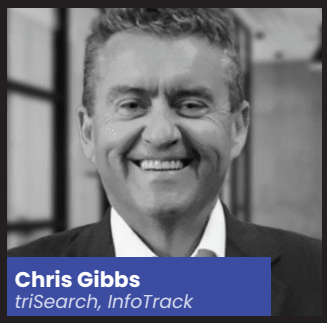
Jennie Tonner
AIC NSW



Shakila Maclean
AIC VIC



Tim Lawless
Cotality



Chris Gibbs
triSearch, InfoTrack



Kiani Mills
Impériale Conveyancing



John Ahern
InfoTrack

Tuesday, November 17
W Hotel, Sydney

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Steve Sammartino
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Christian Beck
Entrepreneur, LEAP



David Koch AM
Business personality



Dan Mossop
AUSTRAC



Neil Jeans
Grant Thornton



Amber Sherlock
Presenter



Angelique Opie
Presenter

REFLECT
REIMAGINE
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Australian Conveyancer proudly presents a unique event that critically analyses transformative changes to conveyancing, the property market, our national economy and technology. It explores the impact to leadership behaviours, regulatory compliance and business strategy while offering practical learning.



OB

WHY WE *can't* GIVE *BLIGATIONS* THE FLICK

Industry experts are united in their concerns over "deposit flicking". Questions have been raised about who is accountable for consumers' money once it sits with a third party and whether it is legally protected

By SAM McKEITH
Photo ALANA LANDSBERRY

The peak body for NSW conveyancers will hold talks with NSW Fair Trading over "deposit flicking" as the agency's investigation into the contentious practice continues.

The practice, where real estate agents transfer purchaser property deposits to third parties to hold on the agents' behalf until settlement, has sparked concerns it could be used to dodge new AML/CTF rules and leaves consumers financially exposed.

In July, NSW Fair Trading launched an investigation to look at safeguards in place for buyers and whether agents are acting in accordance with existing legal obligations.

It was initiated after at least 170 conveyancers lobbied authorities for a clampdown.

A source familiar with the matter said the probe was ongoing, without providing details.

AIC NSW president Jennie Tonner said she was working closely with NSW Fair Trading to resolve the issue and was "speaking to them on a regular basis".

"They are working on the issue with a view of getting a decision made as soon as possible," Tonner said.

"I know this is frustrating to members that we can't get government to move at the speed of property conveyances and lawyers but, unfortunately, that is the speed they work to.

"We can only help and assist them where possible to get to that decision as soon as they can."

Griffith University's Graeme Hughes, an expert on business and consumer issues, said NSW Fair Trading was "right to investigate but an open-ended inquiry with no interim guidance leaves buyers transacting in the dark".

"The regulator can take the time a proper investigation needs and still tell the market, plainly, where a deposit should sit and what safeguards apply to it," Hughes said.

"A home deposit is the largest sum most people will ever transfer in their lifetime and they are entitled to know it is sitting in a regulated account with clear protections around it.

"Deposit flicking puts a question mark over that, occurring at a moment in time, where the buyer is most exposed."

Dott & Crossitt founder Jared Zak

CONTINUED ON PAGE 20

Dott & Crossitt founder Jared Zak.



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urged the agency to resolve the "live consumer concern" of deposit flicking.

"It is really concerning that the regulators are taking this long to respond," Zak said.

As the investigation continued, deposit flicking was putting property buyers at risk, he said, pointing to property sale contracts that he argued lacked adequate consumer protections. "One thing that we're noticing on the ground at the moment, which is really worrying, is just the amount of deposits that are being flicked without any special conditions," Zak said.

"We've seen a dozen contracts go through, or deposits be flicked, without a special condition. There doesn't seem to be any real care or urgency from the agents to get them returned.

"It is really concerning that the regulators are taking this long to respond."

– Dott & Crossitt founder Jared Zak

REINSW CEO
Tim McKibbin.

"There appears to be a belief held by some that outsourcing the trust accounting function to a third party removes the AML/CTF obligations. That is not our position."
– REINSW CEO Tim McKibbin

"I'm concerned that basically the regulators in action is just giving the green light to this kind of activity."

The comments by Zak, an outspoken critic of deposit flicking, come after high-profile court action against him linked to the issue was discontinued last month.

The lawsuit, launched by law firm Agency Settlements, was initiated after Zak took aim at the Riverstone Partners-backed practice in an online petition critical of deposit flicking.

Agency Settlements, which offers services that assist real estate agents in complying with their obligations under new anti-money laundering laws, abandoned the lawsuit weeks later.

The firm was ordered to pay Zak $60,000 in legal costs.

It has previously said it stands by its legal advice and business processes, which have been reviewed by the NSW Supreme Court, Thompson's Lawyers and law firm Jemmeson Fisher.

Real estate agents and conveyancers in July came under a new federal AML/CTF regime aimed at cracking down on transnational organised crime in Australia's property sector.

Under the laws, overseen by federal financial crime regulator AUSTRAC, practitioners must conduct due diligence on clients, report large cash transactions, keep records and report suspicious activity or face potential multi-million-dollar fines.

AUSTRAC has warned agents that they remain covered by tough new AML/CTF laws enacted in July, despite the availability of deposit flicking.

AML/CTF experts, too, have warned agents to steer clear of the contentious practice. They caution that it is not possible under Tranche 2 for designated operators, such as real estate agents, to avoid screening clients via outsourcing obligations to third-party solutions.

Weeks after the new laws took effect, AIC NSW issued a special alert to members, urging them to take "pre-emptive action" against deposit flicking in order to protect clients.

The measures included making sure to verify agent intentions on purchaser deposits as early as possible and not to assume the agent will hold the deposit.

"Contact the selling agent immediately you receive instructions to confirm they will hold the deposit in their trust account [only] for the duration of the matter", the alert said.

REINSW, the peak body for the state's real estate agents, has also put its members on notice.

In an alert, it said the peak body has "serious concerns" with the practice, urging deposit holders to "not agree to release, transfer or direct a deposit to be paid to another party".

"There appears to be a belief held by some that outsourcing the trust accounting function to a third party removes the AML/CTF obligations. That is not our position," CEO Tim McKibbin said at the time.

While most concerns have been raised in NSW, other states are monitoring the issue.

Australian Institute of Conveyancers Victoria says it is worried about a potential impact on reliance agreements, although it cannot see "major issues at the moment".

However, consumer protection must remain top priority, according to AIC Victoria president Shakila Maclean.

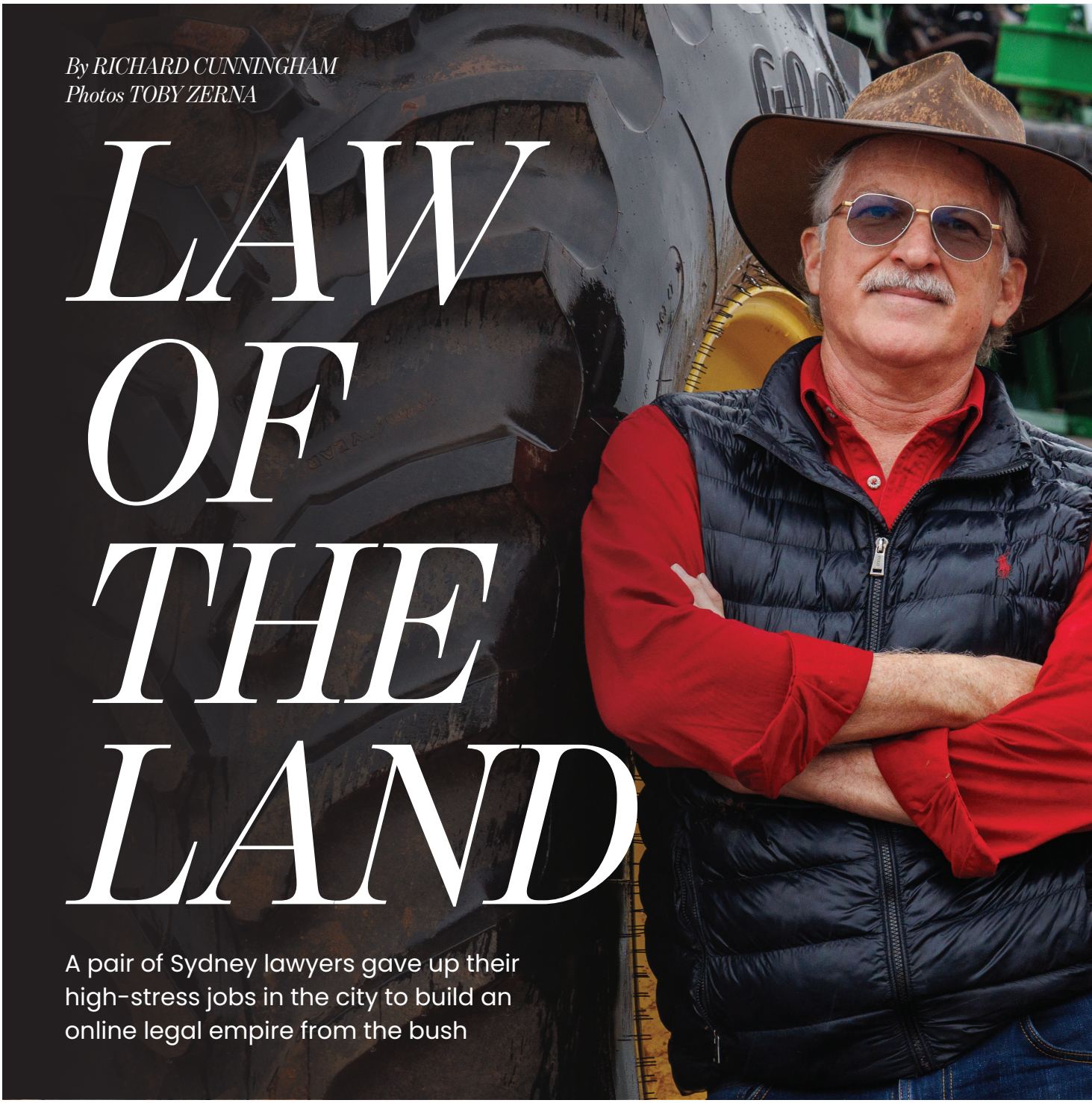
Maclean warns that innovation "should never come at the expense of transparency, informed consent or the safeguards that have long existed to protect buyers and sellers".

In Queensland, the Law Society does not yet see the issue as significant but is closely watching.

"Our message to practitioners is to ensure they understand and comply with their AML/CTF obligations and maintain appropriate safeguards," it said recently.

Hughes described deposit flicking as "not only a NSW question".

"The same practice is being examined in Queensland and Victoria and the principle is identical in every state. A deposit should be protected by rules a buyer can understand and rely upon." C.



By RICHARD CUNNINGHAM
Photos TOBY ZERNA

LAW OF THE LAND

A pair of Sydney lawyers gave up their high-stress jobs in the city to build an online legal empire from the bush

At first glance, the NSW township of Nyngan doesn't loom as a hi-tech haven.

Population 2000, it's smack in the middle of the state, about 600km north-west of Sydney.

A 1990 flood almost wiped the place off the map and when the *AC* crew waded in from Dubbo, we were anxious about a repeat.

"Thunderstorms," the official forecast said, "possibly severe with damaging winds, large hail and heavy rain which may lead to flash flooding."

It wasn't quite that bad, but locals rated it Nyngan's wettest day in ages.

The town sits astride the Bogan River and one claim to fame is the Big Bogan. That's a six-metre, rusty steel sculpture of a bloke with a mullet, thongs, singlet, a Southern Cross tattoo, a fishing rod and an Esky. And a dog. Named Rusty, of course.

Another local attraction is Lawlab Conveyancing, a nationwide property law firm operating under that name since 2004.

Lawlab has handled more than 60,000 transactions worth $48 billion, with offices in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Darwin. But the firm's headquarters are on Pangee St, just a chip shot away from the Big Bogan.

There to meet us were Lawlab directors Richard Bootle and Ian Perkins, said to have put Nyngan on the map as an Aussie "Silicon Valley".

"Well, Silicon Valley can be anywhere you have high-speed internet," they say modestly.

But they're pioneers, for sure.

Bootle, Perkins and Ian's brother Graeme developed the in-house tech platform Rundl a decade ago, now followed



Lawlab directors Ian Perkins and Richard Bootle.

Lawlab has handled more than 60,000 transactions worth $48 billion, with offices in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Darwin.

by Launch, BuySecure, SellSecure and WillSecure.

They call Rundl the "Facebook of business". It allows clients, brokers, agents and conveyancers to collaborate and check the progress of transactions online.

"What Rundl does is replace phone calls, faxes and emails," Bootle said.

Like Facebook, parties to a transaction form a private group where they can discuss the deal, ask questions, examine and digitally sign documents.

"What Rundl does, it shares with everyone," Perkins explained. "Everyone with permission to see the contract, can see the contract."

It saves time, money and reams of paperwork.

There are now similar products but Rundl was possibly the first, constantly evolving and adapting to various state and territorial jurisdictions.

The newer "Launch" is an internal matter management system.

The "Secure" suite are artificial intelligence tools, largely trained using quarantined metadata from those 60,000 files.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 24



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HQ ought to be a glass and steel edifice. But it's an old bank building and former backpacker hostel still signposted as "Beancounters House". There are about 20 workstations, unmanned when we visited: staff working from home on this wet and miserable day – because they can.

Lawlab has 50 people nationwide, including 30 lawyers and licensed conveyancers.

"If you have a phone, we can deliver a conveyancing service," Perkins said.

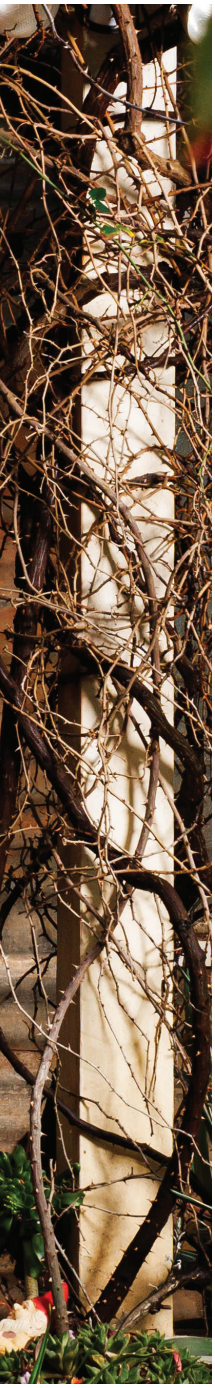
It wasn't so simple at first. Nyngan had the ideas, the software but not the bandwidth. "Then we found out the Telstra exchange had the ability to offer ADSL … but no one had ever asked for it," Bootle said. "We lobbied through our local MP and they turned it on."

"Seeing your lawyer and having a cup of tea was the premium service. Suddenly Covid came along and everyone was like 'I don't want to see my lawyer'!"
– Ian Perkins

Locals were initially reluctant to embrace digital communication. That changed with the Covid pandemic. "Seeing your lawyer and having a cup of tea was the premium service," Perkins said. "Suddenly Covid came along and everyone was like 'I don't want to see my lawyer'!"

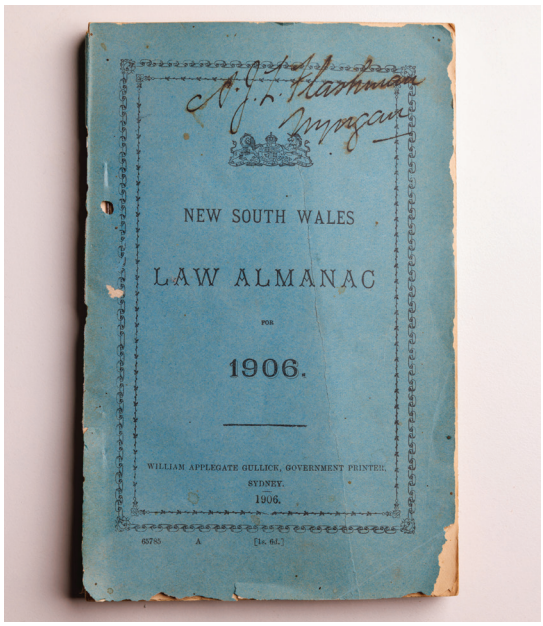
Bootle added: "Covid was a great boost for business. It's now standard that we do digital conveyancing."

Why Nyngan? Bootle was born there, a family connection going back to the 1920s. A city-educated solicitor, he returned to help manage the family farm











Clockwise from far left, Lawlab directors Ian Perkins and Richard Bootle with Billy, their 10-month-old great dane; journals line the walls of their office; the welcome sign to Nyngan; Perkins takes a call; Bootle works at his computer; and a 1906 New South Wales Law Almanac.





when his father suffered a heart attack. Bootle also worked part-time in the local law office of Flashman & Chalker.

Perkins was in Sydney, eyeing a move to London for a career in banking law when he met Bootle, who persuaded him to head west. They bought Flashmans and rebranded it as Lawlab in 2004.

"We wrestled with just what to do, to grow," Perkins said. "We decided to look at technology as a means for greater reach."

Which allowed them to stay in Nyngan. The pair now own 37,000 acres, with Poll Hereford and Japanese Akaushi cattle plus crops including wheat, chick-peas, oats and barley.

Both love the rural lifestyle. "I get to have an exciting, challenging career in an industry that I'm passionate about," Perkins explained.

"But I still get to wake up on the farm, ride a motorbike, have a two-hour lunch break, go and chase some cows. I get the diversity and excitement of county living but I didn't have to lose my corporate career. I feel I've got the best of both worlds."

Bootle and Perkins do travel if required, say to initial meetings with important referrers. But thereafter, it's mainly video conferences.

A trip to Sydney takes three hours by road and air, but they know city people whose daily commute is just as long. They're restoring the 1878 family homestead overlooking the Bogan River. It will be home too for Billy, their 10-month-old great dane.

Graeme Perkins heads their Melbourne-based software development team. They used to meet monthly but such is the pace of change that it's now weekly.

They've tried to marry country-style service with hi-tech tools, saying there is room for both.

"We believe firmly that there is a real place for conveyancers and lawyers looking after buyers and sellers," they said.

"But the world has shifted and what we need to do is adopt the best from AI, to give us the time and space to do our job."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 26

A RURAL HOTSPOT

So, what's to like about Nyngan? It seems there is plenty.

Richard Bootle was born there but when Ian Perkins arrived from Sydney, he found it "a bit backward-looking".

It had one of the lowest socioeconomic ratings of any Australian LGA. But new mines opened – copper, rare earths – attracting well-paid workers and their families.

"It started as a lot of FIFO but we're seeing a growing population of younger people," Perkins said. "We've seen a bit of a baby boom."

One of Australia's largest solar farms is 10km west of Nyngan, so there's plenty of power, water from the Bogan River, and oodles of open space.

"If you wanted to build a data centre, this would be ideal," they said.

The influx of younger people has seen many choose to stay. You can buy a three- or four-bedroom home for less than $400,000.

There's the 1883 Nyngan Hotel, which has been renovated for boutique accommodation and dining, and excellent cafes such as Gundog Espresso.

They also praise Bogan Shire Council (slogan: "Comfortable country living") for its childcare and health services.

Plus, there's a library, museum, Olympic-sized swimming pool, gyms, rowing, more pubs, clubs and takeaways.

"Nyngan has transformed itself over the past 20 years," Bootle and Perkins said.

"It's a really interesting, cosmopolitan place." C.



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It's also a saving for clients. A contract review that might have taken days and cost up to $500 can be done in five minutes for about $80 using BuySecure.

It uses locally developed, tried and tested AI, not generic overseas systems.

"Buyers deserve tools built for Australian law, contracts and consumer protection," Bootle said.

Lawlab offers a fixed-fee service with extras to be agreed upon. "We're low-cost for lawyers, mid-range for conveyancers."

They do worry about the challenges and regulatory burden faced by all conveyancers, big and small.

"I do think there is a really important role played by local suburban lawyers and conveyancers," Bootle said.

"I don't know how your average firm can compete, when I know how hard we work to stay abreast of change. The pressures on our industry are immense."

Perkins added: "The banks, government, some of the real estate companies are huge. We have the least market power in this. Conveyancers really need to step up to the mark and be aware of the threats that are sitting around the corner."

What might help is access to Lawlab's software. They're working on bundling the best of it into what they call "conveyancing in a box".

"It's an active process but we intend to have it out on the market within a year," Bootle said.

One reservation about digital offices is the lack of live interaction between fledgling conveyancers and workmates.



Clockwise from main, Lawlab directors Ian Perkins and Richard Bootle; a sign for the Big Bogan; an aerial view of Nyngan; the Nyngan railway; and a helicopter memorial honours the pilots, emergency crews and volunteers who rescued the town from flooding in 1990.









"Conveyancers really need to step up to the mark and be aware of the threats that are sitting around the corner."

– Ian Perkins

"It's a dilemma for the industry," Perkins said.

"Anyone with experience can work from home.

"But if you haven't developed your gut instincts, how do you do that without senior colleagues around you?

"How do you deal with a broker, a real estate agent?"

They're addressing the issue with practical modules and training days, but they admit there's a lot to be said for watercooler chat.

"It's a real and growing problem," they said. "The opportunities we have to learn basic skills are being swept away."

As for their own ambitions, unsurprisingly, it's to be the best national provider of conveyancing services across all jurisdictions.

Bootle and Perkins aim to do it while still living in Nyngan, maintaining close business relationships, with that country service ethic.

"We're not yet the biggest," Bootle said, "but I'd argue we're the best." C.

Moving the dial

Game-changing words and numbers that impacted the industry this month

4.6%

New home loan cash rate, the highest in 15 years

"As we see it, the RBA's reaction function is shifting, with a greater focus now being placed on getting inflation back to target, and a lesser focus on the full employment objective."

– Paul Bloxham, chief Australia economist for HSBC, considered a Melbourne Cup Day rate hike as his base case

4.0%

Inflation: Consumer Price Index as of August 2026

$90,000

Reduced borrowing capacity for median households

"THIS DECISION IS DIFFICULT FOR HOUSEHOLDS WITH A MORTGAGE AND BUSINESSES WITH LOANS, BUT HIGH INFLATION HURTS ALL AUSTRALIANS."

– RBA Governor Michele Bullock



THE RATES DECISION UNPACKED

"If that gets away, then that is a circumstance in which I think you might need to have quite a dramatic slowdown in the economy."

– *RBA Governor Michele Bullock*

"This particular Middle East shock has made us poorer and we can't respond to that by letting inflation get out of control."

– *RBA Governor Michele Bullock explaining the central bank may have to drive the economy downward if inflation can't be controlled*[o]

"Business conditions have turned negative for the first time in six years. Consumer sentiment has dropped more than 5 per cent. That is not an economy running hot. So, who did the growing? Government, and not by a little. Commonwealth government spending has climbed to 26.8 per cent of GDP... State government spending isn't helping either."

– *Business personality David Koch in a open letter to the Government ahead of the rates decision*

+$97

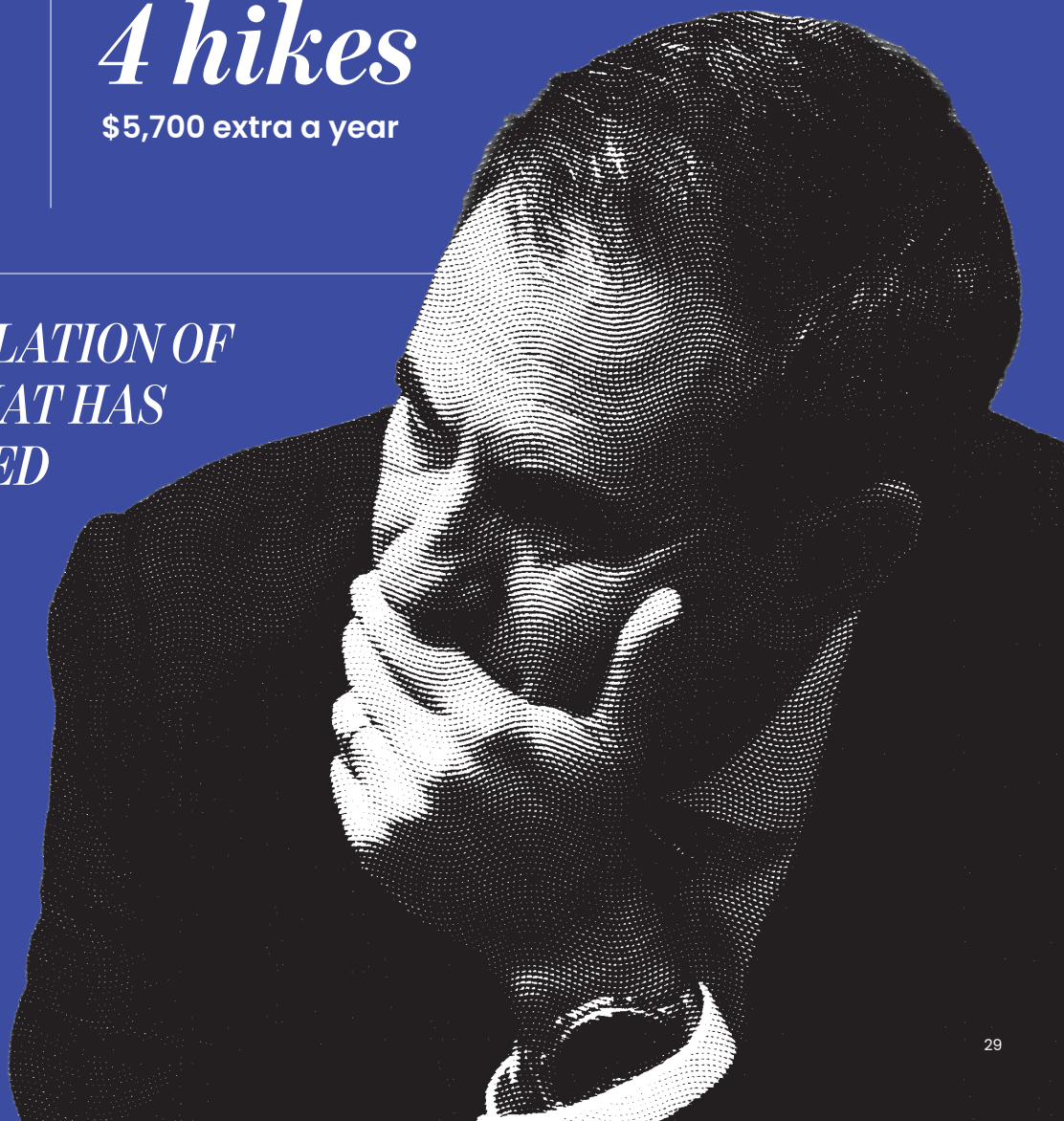
A month for average mortgage

4 hikes

$5,700 extra a year

"THE RE-ESCALATION OF THE WAR ... THAT HAS TURBOCHARGED AN EXISTING INFLATION CHALLENGE THAT WE HAVE IN OUR ECONOMY."

– *Federal Treasurer Jim Chalmers*



"The lift in available stock is improving choice for buyers, but ironically, many prospective buyers don't have the confidence or financial capacity to buy."
– *Cotality*

"At a time when we have a housing supply crisis, these changes would hamstring the very businesses that are central to the solution."
– *Denita Wawn, Master Builders Australia CEO, on the proposed discretionary tax changes*

"AI will play a pivotal role in reaching long-term productivity growth of 1.2 per cent and higher if productivity gains accelerate over time."
– *Treasurer Jim Chalmers after the release of the Intergenerational Report*



16,953

Total number of dwelling approved in August, a fall of 6.1 per cent between July 2026 and August 2026

-21%

The fall in private sector dwelling (apartments and townhouses) construction approvals from July 2026 to August 2026

3.7%

The rise of private sector home approvals between July 2026 and August 2026



Fall in national dwelling values since March peak

-5.2%

4.6%

National unemployment figure as of August 2026



"Despite the affordability challenges and economic uncertainty they've experienced, our findings suggest that aspirations such as home ownership, family and financial security still really appeal to young people."

– NGM Group's James Cudmore following a recent survey on people's housing expectations

"A trust account is an obligation; it's not a profit centre. But with this phenomenon, I can see that principle eroding away."

– Dott & Crossitt founder Jared Zak on the practice of deposit flicking

"The rise of AI is being used as a terrible toupee to try to hide the ever-larger bald spots evident in the Australian economy and the Australian budget."

– Independent economist Chris Richardson

$899,236

National median dwelling value



"EVERY HOUSING POLICY SHOULD BE JUDGED AGAINST A STRAIGHTFORWARD TEST: WILL IT INCREASE THE NUMBER OF HOMES AVAILABLE TO AUSTRALIANS?"

– Real Estate Institute Australia president Jacob Caine

Dwelling values

Date range 12 months to September 30, 2026

Dwelling values fell 1.1 per cent in September, the sixth straight month of falling values, taking the cumulative decline since the March peak to 5.2 per cent nationally. “97 per cent of capital city suburbs were down in value over the three months to end of September,” said Cotality’s research director Tim Lawless. “The housing downturn reflects a combination of affordability constraints, higher interest rates, elevated living costs, and weaker consumer sentiment.” The nation’s median dwelling price sits at $899,236.

Sydney



Sydney’s median dwelling price is now $1,198,596, down 1.4 per cent for the month and down 7 per cent for the year. Significant September sales included 2/29 Billyard Ave, Elizabeth Bay for $20,500,000.

Melbourne



Melbourne values were down 0.7 per cent for the month, off 6.2 per cent for the year, with the median dwelling price now $780,550. Significant Melbourne sales include 31 Montalto Ave, Toorak for $6,000,000.

Brisbane



Brisbane dwelling values were down 1.5 per cent for the month, but up 5.9 per cent for the year. The median price was $1,048,880. Significant Queensland sales included 22 Hilda St, Mermaid Beach for $4,875,000.

Adelaide



Adelaide property values were down 1.3 per cent for the month, up 6.5 per cent for the year. The median dwelling value was $928,560. Significant SA sales included 15 Wootoona Terrace, St Georges for $11,000,000.

Perth



Perth remains strong for annual price growth, up 10.1 per cent for the year but values were down 1.2 per cent in September. The median dwelling is $975,022. Significant WA sales included 7 Pulo Rd, Brentwood for $2,540,000.

Hobart



Hobart values were down 0.5 per cent in September and 1.2 per cent for the quarter. A median dwelling is $741,496. Top Tasmanian sales included 19 Pitt St, North Hobart for $1,979,000.

Darwin



Darwin remains the most affordable capital, values up 0.5 per cent for the quarter, 11.9 per cent for the year. A median dwelling is $633,431. Top NT sales included 200 Balanda Drive, Dundee Beach for $950,000.

Canberra



The national capital again saw negative growth, down 1.1 per cent in September and down 3.2 per cent for the quarter. The median dwelling value is $861,744. Top sales included 9 Turner Place, Yarralumla for $2,425.000.

Source: Cotality Home Value Index

For year	-7.0%	Last quarter	-4.9%
For year	-6.2%	Last quarter	-3.4%
For year	+5.9%	Last quarter	-4.7%
For year	+6.5%	Last quarter	-2.7%
For year	+10.1%	Last quarter	-4.7%
For year	+7.0%	Last quarter	-1.2%
For year	+11.9%	Last quarter	+0.5%
For year	-1.6%	Last quarter	-3.2%



Howard Waldron
Lotsearch co-founder and CEO



Photo JULIAN ANDREWS

Unearthing opportunity in an unlikely place

Howard Waldron is the co-founder (with Peter Rodgers) and CEO of environmental search agency Lotsearch. Founded in 2014, Lotsearch uses historical and current datasets to identify property with environmental risk, offering planning intelligence and due diligence reports for conveyancers, legal practitioners and valuers

I was born and brought up in the United Kingdom but travelled widely as a child, including months spent exploring the coast of Western Australia.

It was there that I impressed my parents with my sense of direction.

Driving down a dusty outback road, they took a left fork and I shouted: "We're going the wrong way!"

My parents' immediate reaction was to carry on. How could a five-year-old barely able to see out of the window possibly know where to go?

But 5km later they turned around, realising they had taken a wrong turn and bemused at how I knew which way to go.

A geographer was what I was destined to be. I studied the subject at school and university, landing my first job with Landmark Information Group, the UK's leading provider of environmental risk and planning intelligence.

Landmark developed a unique database based on ordnance survey maps dating to the 1800s, each area surveyed and remapped regularly over 200 years.

The detail was astonishing – each property, village store, even individual trees drawn in. Also, the locations of mines, mills, foundries and factories.

There were multiple instances where homes, schools and hospitals were built on significantly contaminated sites and huge legal cases ensued.

Landmark pioneered the development of environmental searches to help lawyers. Over time, they became a mandatory part of the conveyancing workflow. I loved the job but, after a few years, I revisited Australia and stayed.

My friend, colleague (and now business partner) Peter Rodgers and I launched Lotsearch in June 2014.

Naively, we assumed the startup would be relatively straightforward. Technology had improved, database storage and software licences were cheaper and there were fewer barriers to entry.

What could possibly go wrong?

We started building the database and, while we found some fantastic old maps, they were often one-offs or limited to only a part of a town or city.

Realising there was not the same depth of mapping as in the UK, we had to quickly pivot to other sources.

One was old trade directories and phone books. While it was challenging, we found new ways to locate former businesses and their activities.

Further research identified potential contaminative sources such as gasworks and landfills.

Today, we have the most extensive historical land use database in Australia, with millions of business entries, old photos and maps.

It has enabled us to identify more than 260,000 known, or potential, contamination hotspots and deliver more than 100,000 environmental searches.

Having celebrated our 12th birthday, I'm incredibly proud of our team and everything we've achieved.

We've built the nation's most comprehensive environmental information platform but, more importantly, it's a business with purpose.

Every search helps someone make a more informed decision about a property, whether it's a family buying their first home, a lawyer protecting their client or a developer understanding potential risk.

Australia is an incredible country and I genuinely believe we all have a responsibility to leave it in a better state than we found it.

triSearch®

AML/CTF Stories



It's important for conveyancers to know that they don't have to do this alone.

Lauren Haines
The Conveyancing Group

When AML/CTF reforms were introduced, Lauren Haines and her team wanted a simple way to manage the new obligations without adding another process to their day-to-day work. Here's how the triSearch AML/CTF Compliance Centre has helped:

All in one place
Built into the software they already use.

Guidance along the way
Hands-on support from the triSearch team from start to finish.

Data security
ISO/IEC 27001:2022 and SOC 2 Type 2 certified, with data stored in Australia.

A framework to start from
Policy templates and staff training are available to help you get started.

AML/CTF Compliance Centre

Australia's compliance choice for conveyancers and property lawyers

Book a demo at **trisearch.com.au/aml-ctf.**

Watch Lauren's story