

2 March 2012
Canberra

Williams Love & Nicol Lawyers assist Lake Ginninderra Tepee Man

Boutique Canberra law firm Williams Love & Nicol Lawyers is assisting local University of Canberra student William Woodbridge in a battle with the ACT Government over his current dwelling – a tepee secured to a raft currently floating on Lake Ginninderra.

The firm is acting pro bono in the matter, with the hope of raising awareness about the lack of affordable student accommodation in Canberra and helping Mr Woodbridge find a new home.

The student left University of Canberra accommodation primarily due to recent price rises, a result of the privatisation of the housing. The decision was also brought about after Mr Woodbridge received a \$380 fine for setting off a fire alarm while cooking at the student residence. Outraged at the exorbitant fee, especially given he claims the food was not burnt in the slightest, Mr Woodbridge decided to build his new dwelling.

Mr Woodbridge has been residing on the Belconnen waterway since early February largely unnoticed and without causing disturbance. He was recently told by a Lake Inspector that he must move on with urgent effect.

While Mr Woodbridge unequivocally accepts the authority of the ACT Government, he has instructed Williams Love & Nicol to write to the Environment and Sustainable Development Directorate seeking a compromise: simply to allow a reasonable period to find alternate accommodation.

The Industrial Design has used his ingenuity and skill in attempting to address an intractable problem that the Government and the University seem helpless to resolve. In doing so Mr Woodbridge has revealed himself as a character of self determination, self reliance and tenacity. Of all the characteristics that a Government should reward, these are the ones. He has endeavoured to provide an alternate solution for a problem that is seemingly always resolved with a temporary solution.

Williams Love & Nicol has written to the Directorate asking for a reciprocal undertaking; Mr Woodbridge has agreed he will vacate the lake by 30 March 2012, and in return it is asked that the Directorate allow him that time. While this goes beyond the deadline given to Mr Woodbridge of 8 March, Williams Love & Nicol believe that in the circumstances it is a reasonable compromise. Mr Woodbridge attends university and maintains casual employment, and as such he cannot devote his time solely to finding alternate accommodation.

Business and Commercial Law Partner at Williams Love & Nicol, Mark Love, underlined the issue.

“It is not a matter of Bill simply moving off the lake; the point is, to where? He needs to balance the demands of study and work to find something that is tremendously scarce.

Firm paralegal Kieran Pender, who has been assisting Mr Woodbridge, has expressed hope the Directorate will be sympathetic.

“To date the Directorate have been very compassionate and helpful in their dealings with William. While

we understand their position, we are very hopeful they'll agree to the compromise.

"Mr Woodbridge has expressed a desire to remain on his raft and while he accepts that is unlikely, it would be fantastic if someone was able to come forward and offer a dam for him to live on!"

While some may laugh off Mr Woodbridge's situation, Mr Pender emphasised the seriousness of the matter.

"Our client is just a humble student with a fantastic set of skills and was able to make the best of a bad situation. Hopefully his plight is heard by the ACT Government and they look at addressing the issue of affordable student accommodation."

About the firm

Williams Love & Nicol is a premier commercial law firm providing full client services from our base in Canberra. Our practice is focused on providing commercially realistic and practical advice that is timely, legally correct and delivers value for money. With a total professional staff of more than 17 lawyers, our structure is designed to ensure that we effectively manage matters ranging in size and complexity.

This includes enabling tasks to be allocated to the appropriate skill level for greatest efficiency and cost-effectiveness. The diversity of our practice means we can quickly assemble a team with the most relevant skills and experience for any matter.

Our partners each manage a strategic business unit within the firm: planning and local government, employment and industrial law, commercial litigation, commercial and business law, and property law. Each partner has been accredited by the Law Society of NSW as a specialist in his area of practice, and has worked at senior levels in major national law firms. This experience enables us to provide high quality legal services without the costly, burdensome structures often associated with larger firms.