



**MEDIA ALERT/MEDIA STATEMENT**  
**Wednesday 6 July, 2016**

## **From eBay to DIY divorce: Artificial Intelligence, “robot lawyers” & beyond**

### **Disruptive legal tech = logging on instead of lawyering-up**

The technology behind eBay’s dispute resolution service could soon help revolutionise Australian divorce battles and other common legal disputes.

Australia’s peak legal assistance body today joins with RMIT University to show how Artificial Intelligence & digital technology can eliminate lengthy, expensive, lawyered-up family court conflicts. ([ABS](#) figures show there are **more than 45,000 divorces annually** in Australia.)

**Interviewees (inc. Rob Hulls) are available for comment today ahead of tonight’s event (details below).**

**Event: A Forum on Artificial Intelligence & Access to Justice**

**When: Tonight, Wednesday 6 July (6-7.30 PM)**

**Where: RMIT Storey Hall Building 16, 336–348 Swanston St, Melbourne**

In particular, this evening’s event showcases internationally-acclaimed Dutch technology which empowers individuals to solve their legal disputes and reach agreement. The Dutch technology:

- has been adopted in the UK and Canada
- is used overseas to resolve legal issues relating to debt and consumer matters, landlord-tenant disagreements, family law, and employment disputes
- was devised with assistance from the developers of the eBay dispute resolution system which deals with around 60 million disagreements each year.

The Dutch platform uses Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning (a computer science relating to algorithms that can learn from data and make predictions based on that learning).

#### **Laws, flaws and digital meteorites**

“Australians have embraced digital technology - using it for their shopping, communicating, dating, house hunting, work and leisure activities,” says Bevan Warner from National Legal Aid. (NLA represents Australia’s largest legal assistance providers: the legal aid commissions in each State and Territory.)

“Online dispute resolution can prevent costly and lengthy court action - so it would benefit our justice system and our society as a whole. It is vital Australia explores the possibilities this technology offers.

“The digital meteorite has reshaped Australian society and offers the opportunity to address fundamental problems in our legal system. Let’s face it: lawyers can be expensive, and court proceedings can be slow, confrontational and painful.



“In contrast, the Dutch technology helps people deal comprehensively with their legal problem and encourages a mediated settlement rather than recourse to lawyers and courts. Agreements reached through collaboration tend to be more effective than decisions imposed by judges.”

**The Dutch Rechtwijzer technology (pronounced *wrecked-visor*) empowers people to:**

- identify their legal problem and explore their needs and options
- deal with the matter in their own words at their own pace & in their own home
- start a resolution procedure
- involve the other party in the process
- enter a dialogue and negotiation phase
- systematically work through areas of dispute
- make agreements that they understand.

**It achieves the above outcomes by:**

- offering transparent and objective information, one bite at a time, and access to legal service providers when required
- enabling mediation, legal review and adjudication if needed
- ensuring the legal processes are easier to navigate and less adversarial.

**Mind the justice gap**

“Technology offers the opportunity to help Australians who fall into the *justice gap*,” says Rob Hulls, the Director of RMIT’s Centre for Innovative Justice. “They cannot afford to pay a lawyer but aren’t poor enough to qualify for legal aid. They miss out on getting a fair go.

“It is time to think differently. We must draw on innovative design, and disruptive technologies such as artificial intelligence, to dramatically improve access to justice. This will not only make existing services more efficient and effective, but empower people to resolve their own disputes.

“Over the years, there have been numerous inquiries to find ways to improve access to justice - with little overall impact. And we know that while there is no shortage of legal information, information is often not enough to help those in need”.



**Kindling debate to light the future**

Wednesday’s forum brings together leading figures from the fields of law, technology and design. It’s organised by National Legal Aid and RMIT’s Centre for Innovative Justice. The event also includes participants from Dutch Legal Aid and The Hague Institute for Innovation of Law (HiiL) which is based in Tilburg University Law School in The Netherlands.

“This forum kindles a vital national conversation about legal assistance that embraces technology now appearing on the horizon,” says Bevan Warner from National Legal Aid.

“We see the power and empowering potential of disruptive technologies in our handheld devices – and want to work with the best designers and engineers to improve access to justice.

“The research is unequivocal. There is widespread unmet legal need and a rising inequality gap in our society. 50% of our community will experience a legal event this year and 50% of those will be classified as serious. Many people will do nothing. Most won’t see a lawyer. Many will not qualify for legal aid assistance. Many will forsake their rights altogether.

“Technology must be utilised to better assist Australians get fair and proper access to justice.

“We have an immense responsibility to make the law accessible – and the same goes for technological legal tools. Put simply, we must design legal assistance technology that suits the needs of ordinary people - and that extends to low-income and disadvantaged Australians.”

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**Interviewees (expected to be available for comment on Wednesday July 6 & Thursday July 7)**



- **Bevan Warner (centre)**, National Legal Aid (Bevan is also the Director of Victoria Legal Aid)
- **Rob Hulls (right)**, Director of the RMIT Centre for Innovative Justice
- **(TBC) Prof. Maurits Barendrecht**, The Hague Institute for Innovation of Law (Tilburg University Law School, The Netherlands). [Click here to see/hear Professor Barendrecht.](#)

For *additional* Legal Aid comment from Western Australia, SA, Tasmania and NT, the following people may also be available for interview. To reach them, call Jeremy Boylen on 0421 611 856.

- **(NT)** Suzan Cox QC, Director of NT Legal Aid Commission (& Chair of National Legal Aid)
- **(SA)** Gabrielle Canny, Director of the Legal Services Commission of SA
- **(Tas.)** Dr Graham Hill, Director of the Legal Aid Commission of Tasmania
- **(WA)** George Turnbull, Director of Legal Aid WA