

# Blue Pencil

Newsletter of  
The Society  
of Editors  
(NSW) Inc.

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## A singular use of **THEY**

*The Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department, as part of its Corporations Law Simplification Program, set up a Simplification Task Force to examine various drafting issues. In September 1995 this task force produced the paper 'A singular use of THEY'.*

### About this series

The central objective of the Simplification Program is a law that is capable of being understood by its users. This paper is one in a series which explores some of the recommendations the task force has made to remove complication that arises in language and layout through current drafting practices. The aim is always clarity and a document in language that is familiar and easy to read.

### The issue

In the First and draft Second Corporate Law Simplification Bills, *they* has been used to refer to an indefinite noun, rather than the traditional legal *he* or the cumbersome *he or she*. Proposed new subsection 242(5) in Schedule 6 of the First Bill, for instance, reads:

A person is entitled to have an alternative address included in notices under subsections (1), (2) and (8) if:

(a) their name, but not their residential address, is on an electoral roll...

This paper sets out the reasons for this decision.

### What the dictionaries say

The three great unabridged dictionaries of the English language are the *Oxford English Dictionary* (Clarendon Press: 1989), *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* (Merriam Webster: 1986), and

the *Dictionary of the English Language* (Random House: 1987). Here are extracts from their entries for *they, than, themselves* and *theit*.

#### **Oxford**

**they** 3. Official used in reference to a singular noun made universal by every, any, no, etc., or applicable to one of either sex (- 'he or she').

1526 Pilg. Perf. 1759 CH-STERE Lett.

rv. ccciv. 170 If a person is born of a... gloomy temper...they cannot help it

**their** 3. Often used in relation to a singular sb. or pronoun denoting a person, after each, every, either, neither, no one, every one, etc. Also so used instead of 'his or her', when the gender is inclusive or uncertain. (Not favoured by grammarians.)

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**Next meeting: Tuesday, 6 February 2001**

## Independent contracting & freelancing

Kate Robinson and Ruth Green are two of the four authors (with Janet Petty and John Wood) of a book called *Independent Contracting. Succeeding as a Contract Professional in Australia* (Pearson Education). The book is specifically for people who have decided to freelance in whatever profession and work as independent contractors for a variety of clients.

Kate Robinson has worked in commercial/educational publishing and marketing for fifteen years and currently runs her own independent contracting business. She is also a member of the Society of Editors (NSW) Inc. Ruth Green is a professional writer who works in legal publishing. She has edited, written and managed publications on a wide range of employment issues.

**Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts, 280 Pitt Street, Sydney** (between Park and Bathurst streets, near the Pilgrim Theatre and Pitt Street Uniting Church and the closest train station is Town Hall). 6.30 pm for 7.00 pm. Drinks and light refreshments provided. Non-members welcome. **RSVP by Friday, 2 February** on (02) 9294 4999 (voicemail). You can also email your RSVP to Merry Pearson (details on page 6). Members \$12; non-members and those who don't RSVP, \$15.

#### **Coming meeting:**

**Tuesday, 6 March:** Annual general meeting

