

# Media Release

Thursday 9 April 2015

## Former lawyer gaoled after stealing \$4.8m from clients

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A former lawyer who was found guilty of stealing over \$4.8 million from his clients has been sent to gaol by the Supreme Court of Victoria.

On Thursday 9 April 2015, Her Honour Justice Betty King ordered that **Mr Alan John Munt** be imprisoned for eight and a half years. Justice King found Mr Munt guilty of a string of fraud and theft charges relating to his misuse of client funds over an extended period of time.

Mr Munt had previously operated various law practices in the Dandenong Ranges between the late 1990s and 2009. In September 2009, Mr Munt's activities were reported to the Law Institute of Victoria by a concerned employee. Following the immediate appointment of an investigator the Law Institute trust inspector reported that Mr Munt had misappropriated his clients' trust and investment monies through a Ponzi investment scheme.

Using its powers under the *Legal Profession Act 2004*, the Legal Services Board led the initial investigation into Mr Munt's serious trust account offences, before Victoria Police commenced its own investigations in 2012.

Michael McGarvie, Legal Services Commissioner and CEO of the Legal Services Board, said the investigation required new levels of cooperation and communication between Victoria Police, the Board and the trust account inspectors from the Law Institute.

'This collaboration was critical to uncovering the full extent of Mr Munt's offences. As the offences straddled the boundary between three independent investigatory bodies, it made for an unusually complex matter,' Mr McGarvie said.

'The Board accepts that there were impediments to be overcome in the investigation, and fully agrees that in regulation delays are unacceptable. What we as investigators have learned from this process has prompted each of us to review and improve how we coordinate inter-agency collaboration to address the causes of delay for future investigations.'

The Board has paid over two million dollars to Mr Munt's victims through claims against the Fidelity Fund – the statutory compensation scheme maintained by the Board for clients who have lost trust money due to the improper conduct of a lawyer.

Mr McGarvie said the offences which Mr Munt admitted to were an extremely rare occurrence among the state's 19,000 lawyers.

'Lawyers must be totally trustworthy in handling their clients' money. When they fail, not only can they lose their licence and face gaol, but the legal profession itself pays compensation to victims through the Fidelity Fund.'

Mr Munt will spend a minimum of five years and six months in prison.

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