

A-G should find new pastures: QC

QUEEN's Counsel Mr William Lane yesterday came out against Mr Michael Thomas' plans to go into private practice when he steps down as Attorney-General.

Mr Lane said Mr Thomas should follow his predecessors and leave the territory after he completed his contract here. There is concern that Mr Thomas, as a former Attorney-General, would have an edge over others if he practised here.

"It is not quite so much having an advantage," said Mr Lane. "It is simply the position of the Attorney-General... (is) a very powerful position and he is also a member of the Executive Council.

"It is better, really, for him not to practice now," he said. "It is better for

himself, better for the judiciary and better for the view which the public holds."

Mr Thomas will retire from the Government in May and return to private practice as a barrister.

The Bar Association will discuss the issue in the middle of March. Mr Lane said it was better for Mr Thomas to know what the profession felt.

According to the association's chairman, Mr Robert Tang, there are diverse views on the matter but the general feeling is that there should be guidelines for top civil servants who want to enter the private sector.

Mr Lane also suggested at yesterday's Kiwanis Club luncheon that various professionals such as accountants and lawyers should be allowed to form joint partnerships.

He added the formation of multi-disciplinary partnerships was being discussed in London and was a trend in Europe.

Accountancy and solicitor firms were getting larger and forming "one-stop shops" to provide different types of services in addition to their professions, he said.

"It appears not to be so much the question of competition between the professions, but more because of meeting the local demands," he said.

Mr Lane also called for allowing limited liabilities for professionals. There was no reason for them to bear the risk in case of fraud, he said.

Under present regulations, lawyers and accountants can only run businesses in the form of partnerships.