

\$20m menace

Judge attacks sacked academic

By SCOTT TUCKER

A FORMER University of Newcastle lecturer has been described as a 'vexatious litigant' costing the community up to \$20million from legal actions over the past two decades.

The bizarre case of Dr Michael Edward Spautz dates back to 1973 when the academic was appointed a senior lecturer in the university's Department of Commerce.

Between August 1973 and mid-1976 the university advertised three times for an appointee to fill the chair of commerce.

Dr Spautz applied twice but missed out.

In mid-1976 Dr Alan Williams was appointed, sparking a series of disputes which led Dr Spautz to accuse him of plagiarism.

The feud continued to escalate, prompting the university council to dismiss Dr Spautz on May 23, 1980.

But the sacking set in train a number of legal actions.

For more than 20 years Dr Spautz has been pursuing revenge through the legal system.

He has attempted to sue former university colleagues, his own lawyers, Newcastle Federal MP Allan Morris and even High Court Judge Michael Kirkby.

The one-man litigation machine has tied up the local, district, supreme and high courts with legal actions.

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Academic's \$20m actions

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So litigious is Dr Spautz that Supreme Court Justice Barry O'Keefe has described him as a 'vexatious litigant'.

In his latest court appearance last month, Dr Spautz took on Attorney-General Bob Debus as he pushed to sue his former solicitor, two senior counsel and a junior counsel.

He alleged his legal team had failed him, accusing them of everything from negligence to fraud and deceit.

But Justice O'Keefe was unimpressed, dismissing Dr Spautz's applications and expressing disbelief at his legal antics.



DR SPAUTZ

'Litigation has become a way of life for him,' the judge said.

'He revels in it. He enjoys the personal discomfiture and cost which his campaign of litigation brings to those whom he targets.'

'He has even considered converting his cam-

paign into a crusade.'

Justice O'Keefe estimated Dr Spautz's legal actions had cost Newcastle University more than \$12million, not including the costs to individuals and the legal system which could bring the tally to \$20million.

But because Dr Spautz was 'on the dole' there was no prospect of costs being recouped.

Dr Spautz has lost cases in the Supreme Court in 1991, Court of Appeal in 1994 and High Court in the same year.

At the time of the latest Supreme Court hearing his tally of actions, suits, applications, prosecutions and appeals in various courts was approaching 50.

The legal record of a Dr Michael Spautz

LIFE and times of Dr Michael Edward Spautz:

- 1973: Dr Spautz appointed senior lecturer in Newcastle University's Department of Commerce.

- 1976: Dr Alan Williams appointed chair of commerce, sparking disputes with Dr Spautz.

- May 23, 1980: Dr Spautz dismissed from lectureship for 'conduct which rendered him unfit'.

- October 13, 1982: Warrant issued for Dr Spautz' arrest. Jailed for 56 days for failing to pay \$5000 court costs.

- 1983: Dr Spautz tries to bring criminal defamation charges

against several university figures, but fails.

- 1989: Attorney-General seeks orders against Dr Spautz.

- April 18, 1991: Dr Spautz fails to claim damages for wrongful dismissal in the Supreme Court's Equity Division. Described by Justice Sully as speaking 'like a man possessed'.

- November 18, 1994: Dr Spautz denied leave to appeal to High Court.

- December 12, 1996: Court of Appeal rules Dr Spautz should be compensated \$75,000 for wrongful imprisonment.

- February 2001: Supreme Court rules for Attorney-General.