

AWL 2021 AGM Report - Leah Marrone AWL President

Australian Women Lawyers Ltd. Is the national peak body of women lawyers in Australia, WLASA is one of our constituent bodies. I am the SA delegate and current President of AWL.

It has been a particularly difficult year for a volunteer run national non-profit, and similar organisations would no doubt share in this experience. While we were already on zoom for most of our meetings prior to the pandemic, our two planning day face to face meetings each year provided a good chance for us to not only get a lot of work done, but also gel together as a board with regularly changing members. For much of the year the entire eastern seaboard has been in lockdown, which makes even zoom meetings and prioritising any volunteer work even more difficult as we navigate working from home, particularly as many of us have small children at home. However, while we have not been able to meet in person, we have still achieved a great deal, and while we are still staying on track with our [Strategic Plan](#), we have also given ourselves permission to extend or delay some project ideas. I congratulate and thank each member of the board for their efforts during this difficult time.

We are currently working on ways that we can lobby and advocate for women in the profession in relation to issues specific to lockdowns, covid, etc. We welcome your feedback and ideas in relation to this and any other matter.

Conference 2020

Our biggest achievement in the last year was pulling off a very successful free online conference. AWL 2020 had over 1000 registrants and our sessions are still available for you to view and to collect CPD points on: <https://australianwomenlawyers.com.au/2020-awl-national-conference/>

Conference 2022

Planning is well underway for our (in person) 2022 Conference in Brisbane on 5- 7 August. While the online format was good for the time, we all missed being together and have decided to aim for an in person event. Register your interest and ideas for speakers and topics on our website: <https://australianwomenlawyers.com.au/2022-australian-women-lawyers-conference/>



We are particularly excited to have confirmed as our 2022 conference key-note speaker, the Chief Justice of the High Court, our Patron, the Hon Chief Justice Susan Kiefel AC.

Stay tuned to social media for further conference announcements over the coming months.

Website update and logo revamp

We have also been working on other back end projects such as updating our website and logo and look forward to launching those early in the new year.

Lobbying and Policy work

We continue to be champions of reform around sexual harassment and have had many of our strategies and proposals adopted around the country, with continued lobbying efforts at many levels of government and the profession. In particular AWL has continued to play an integral role, on the Law Council of Australia's Equal Opportunity Committee (with our representatives Leah Marrone for the past few years, with Holly Lam taking over this year), most particularly our important work in framing and developing the [National Action Plan to Reduce Sexual Harassment in the Legal Profession](#). See further: <https://www.lawcouncil.asn.au/policy-agenda/advancing-the-profession/time-for-change-addressing-sexual-harassment>

Importantly on the issue of Sexual Harassment in the Legal Profession, AWL wrote to the Bar Association of NSW to support them (and encourage them to appeal) the following decision: *Council of the New South Wales Bar Association v EFA (No 2)* [2021] NSWCATOD 84 (18 June 2021). While lobbying for strategies for cultural change, these strategies are completely undermined if, on the rare occasion that a victim is brave enough to take a complaint forward, perpetrators of sexual harassment face little or no consequences for their actions. The matter is now being appealed.

Our representatives also attended a roundtable on defamation law reform in the context of sexual harassment allegations. Additionally, our board members help support our constituent bodies in the great work being done across the country on implementing other changes to the profession to help create the cultural changes needed to address sexual harassment.

We have of course contributed to policy reform in other areas also. In particular, we have supported various policy submissions of our constituent bodies on a range of areas. We also attended and contributed to the ALRC Consultation on Judicial Impartiality.

AWL first raised concerns with a letter to the Prime Minister about allegations in relation to the then Attorney General's fitness to hold that position – see our letter here: <https://australianwomenlawyers.com.au/awl-has-written-to-the-prime-minister-to-register-its-concerns-about-the-alleged-conduct-of-the-attorney-general/> . Following his announcement on 3 March 2021, AWL released a short but simple statement again calling for an independent inquiry: <https://twitter.com/AusWomenLawyers/status/1366974508792381442/photo/1> This tweet received 2532 likes, 1020 retweets, had 511 940 impressions, and 34 880 engagements. We were one of the first to call for such an inquiry and the subsequent media engagements and in depth board discussions around this took up a large part of the following month. Some of that media engagement can be seen below.

One of the main roles of AWL, as the peak body is to provide the national voice on key issues that women in the profession face, and more broadly law reform areas relating to women. Some of the Media AWL has had in the past year includes:

<https://www.lawyersweekly.com.au/biglaw/32105-the-future-of-auslaw-is-female>

<https://lsj.com.au/articles/an-act-of-parity-are-quotas-and-salary-transparency-the-solution-to-laws-gender-inequality-woes/>

<https://www.lawyersweekly.com.au/biglaw/30822-we-have-to-continue-fighting-the-changes-the-profession-must-consider-in-2021-to-achieve-true-gender-equality>

<https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/invisible-woman-syndrome-nine-men-appointed-to-federal-court-in-victoria-since-2013-20210420-p57ktd.html>

<https://www.abc.net.au/radio/programs/pm/advice-from-solicitor-general-most-logical-step-in-porter-case/13235516>

<https://www.podchaser.com/podcasts/pm-full-episode-587462/episodes/morrison-declares-porter-an-in-86042104>

<https://www.lawyersweekly.com.au/biglaw/30808-gobsmacking-what-the-profession-has-to-say-about-the-porter-allegations>

<https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/drive/stark-warning-from-afp-and-deflective-political-commentary/13193902>

<https://www.lawyersweekly.com.au/biglaw/30795-christian-porter-comes-forward-in-rape-allegations>

<https://pressfrom.info/au/news/australia/-350751-a-disturbing-day-for-women-and-the-legal-community.html>

<https://www.themorningbulletin.com.au/news/shock-salaries-reveal-women-paid-less-than-men-in-/4139936/>

<https://www.abc.net.au/radio/programs/worldtoday/calls-for-more-female-judges/13102946>

<https://www.smh.com.au/national/barrister-faces-disciplinary-action-over-inappropriate-sexual-conduct-20210304-p577u4.html>

https://issuu.com/lawsocietysa/docs/lrb_september_2020_hr/s/10955767

<https://www.dailybulletin.com.au/news/55511-deep-cultural-shifts-required-open-letter-from-500-legal-women-calls-for-reform-of-way-judges-are-appointed-and-disciplined>

<https://twitter.com/aDottore/status/1364939610241921024?s=08>

<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/women-fear-being-called-dobbers-if-they-speak-on-sexual-harassment-heydon-accuser-20200828-p55qdv.html?fbclid=IwAR3zZdrsF-aRVieVGynh4ZHIOIZY8R5AqtNNiHjtHF0AwL4fz1vb8bPWw6c>

https://www.lawyersweekly.com.au/biglaw/29318-justice-system-biases-target-female-offenders/amp?_twitter_impression=true&fbclid=IwAR1xcZvtT-sBwLYVFmbioSGNGkp_nnV6RtaFFUvicbk-GAX1rtJpv_gR11k

https://www.lawyersweekly.com.au/biglaw/29305-the-impact-of-technology-climate-change-and-social-issues-on-female-lawyers?fbclid=IwAR1xcZvtT-sBwLYVFmbioSGNGkp_nnV6RtaFFUvicbk-GAX1rtJpv_gR11k

https://www.lawyersweekly.com.au/biglaw/29322-this-is-our-profession-noor-blumer-on-reporting-sexual-harassment?fbclid=IwAR2F_sKdw79GJPF5oNE2262q5ZsO_9T3NMCdrqK7fs-2wJARp357f7wkYc8

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