

**President’s Report 2023 Year**

**Presented at the AGM, Adelaide, 18 November 2023**

**Astrid Haban-Beer – Director from the Women Barristers’ Association (Vic)**

I am honoured to have been the President of AWL for the past year.

The 2023 year saw a refreshed board with new board members from Queensland (Catherine Cheek), NSW (Renee Bianchi), Tasmania (Adrienne Morton, then Alinta Robinson-Herbert), Victoria (Stephanie Pasharis, Vic- VWL) and South Australia (Shelley O'Connell).

Janette McCahon (WA), Traci Keys (NT), and Astrid Haban-Beer (Vic-WBA) continued on board from previous years. The outgoing President from 2020-2022, Leah Marrone, remained on AWL board as a non-voting co-opted member.

We commenced the year with a well-attended strategic planning day in Sydney in January 2023 which focused our priority areas for the year.

The planning meeting identified the following areas of focus for AWL going forward for the year:

• Sustainable practice for women lawyers;

• Encouraging diversity and intersectionality in all areas of legal practice;

• Equitable briefing;

• Gender pay gap closure within the legal profession;

• Supporting initiatives to stamp out sexual harassment, and encouraging respect at work; and

• Support for indigenous women involved in the justice sector.

As a board, we also resolved to connect with aligned organisations at a deeper level. AWL represents women lawyers in all states and territories. We hoped to build or enhance connections with our constituent bodies, the Law Council of Australia, law societies, courts, government, the Australian Association of Women Judges, and the Australian Gender Equality Council (AGEC), and other stakeholders or allies.

To that end, Traci Keys (NT) and I connected with AGEC, Renée Bianchi was appointed as our LCA Equal Opportunity Committee representative and I connected with federal Attorney General Mark Dreyfus. I also note that Leah Marrone was a member of the government’s Respect at Work Council (in her personal capacity). I also met with many constituent body members through attendance at events in NSW, Victoria and the ACT, and Renée Bianchi attended an event in Darwin.

In September I spoke at an equitable briefing event in Victoria (the largest equitable briefing event held in the country to date with representatives from large law firms and government present) to celebrate the most ambitious equitable briefing policy in the Country. The Victorian government equitable briefing policy (applying to all firms who engage in government work) require 50% of briefs by both volume and value of briefs go to women at both senior and junior levels.

I, and other board members of AWL have spoken to media outlets including the ABC, Lawyers Weekly, The Age, Lawyerly, AAP, The Australian and The AFR throughout the year. These media mentions appear (in most part) on our website. We also produced a number of media statements on issues such as the Voice referendum, International Women’s Day, and harassment issues in the profession.

Importantly this year, the refresh of our website went live, and while there are still some details to input, the website at www.australianwomenlawyers.com.au is a modern, updated access point for the wider public. We must ensure that this website is maintained regularly, with current information.

It was also our hope to progress obtaining peak body funding. This is still a work in progress with one meeting occurring between Leah Marrone, myself and representatives from the Attorney-General’s department and email contact and plans to meet with the Office for Women and the federal Minister for Women, Katy Gallagher.

In October, I attended the ceremonial sitting at the High Court of Australia, to farewell the Hon. Chief Justice Susan Kiefel, AWL’s patron. We were invited to attend the sitting. Thank you to the retired Chief Justice for her patronage of AWL and her leadership of the legal community since 2017. Her Honour’s service and commitment to justice are significant, and her Honour’s position as the first woman appointed as Chief Justice of the High Court is a key beacon of progress for all women in the legal profession, and those still to come.

At the Chief Justice’s farewell function post ceremony, I was able to further discuss AWL’s work with leaders of the legal profession. In particular, judges are keen to support and progress equitable briefing initiatives to improve women’s appearance statistics in their courts.

AWL approached the Hon. Justice Jacqueline Gleeson of the HCA to be our new patron following the retirement of Chief Justice Kiefel. I am delighted that Justice Gleeson has accepted the appointment.

Finally, we have a number of retiring board members this year. Janette McCahon from WA has been appointed to the AAT as a Tribunal members, and Traci Keys from the NT is retiring. Congratulations, and thank you for your service to AWL and women lawyers across the country. Significantly, Leah Marrone from SA is retiring from the board after a stellar 8 years on the board, including as Vice-President and President. Leah’s board tenure included being AWL’s champion in dealing with sexual harassment in the legal profession, discrimination issues in broader society, and championing discrimination and defamation law reform, connecting with government and, importantly steering AWL through the COVID-pandemic. Thank you to Leah for your years of service to AWL.

Thank you to all board members for coming together to build a new board, and a refreshed framework this year, and I wish AWL and all continuing and incoming board members every success in the year to come.

**Astrid Haban-Beer**

**President, AWL 2023**