



**Victorian
Women
Lawyers**



WOMEN KEEPING IN TOUCH

VWL E-NEWSLETTER

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WORD FROM THE CONVENOR

Dear Member

It is indeed an honour and a privilege to be elected Convenor of Victorian Women Lawyers. I love this organisation, I love its people and I love the difference that we make for our female colleagues in the profession. I am very grateful for the opportunity to have served on the Executive Committee for the last three years, particularly under the fantastic leadership of Christine Melis, Jennifer Kanis and Astrid Haban-Ber. I thank them for their support and inspiration.

Much of what we do as an organisation costs money, but thanks to the judgement of Justice French (as he was then) in the Federal Court in 2008, VWL is regarded as a charitable organisation for income taxation purposes: *Victorian Women Lawyers' Association Inc v Commissioner of Taxation* [2008] FCA 983. The tax case was a pivotal point in our history and has secured our future ability to provide quality, low-cost events to our members and for our Executive Committee to travel to and participate in meetings and conferences to provide a voice for our membership.

In November, I represented VWL at the National Rural Regional Law and Justice Conference in Warrnambool, hosted by Deakin University. The Conference focussed on the challenges facing rural, regional and remote lawyers across the country, including recruitment, retention, networking and continuing professional development. Guest speakers included the President of VCAT, Justice Iain Ross, President-Elect of the Law Council of Australia Alexander Ward and a number of academics and practitioners from across Australia, New Zealand and the United States.

While it was acknowledged that rural, regional and remote Australia is not homogenous, the unique experiences of RRR female lawyers were, disappointingly, not specifically addressed by any of the speakers or papers delivered at the Conference.

Over dinner with a group of Warrnambool-based female lawyers and law students, I learnt of their frustrations at not being able to attend networking and CPD events in Melbourne due to the travelling distance and inconvenient scheduling. The Warrnambool legal ladies expressed a desire for recognition and opportunities to contribute to the profession while remaining in their regional base.

I think there is real scope for VWL to help - after all, we are VICTORIAN Women Lawyers. And so here is something for us to focus on in 2011: reaching out to our colleagues outside of the Melbourne CBD - something we have begun with the regional Sexual Assault Forums, Geelong dinner and the Law Student Mentoring Program, but something we can definitely build upon. I look forward to hearing your ideas about how we can "reach out" as an organisation to support our current and potential membership base.

The keynote speaker at the Conference was the Chief Justice himself, Robert French, who began his legal life as a regional practitioner in Western Australia. I managed to have a chat to him during which I conveyed the profuse thanks of all VWL members for his Honour's wonderful decision in the tax case. He was genuinely interested in the impact of his judgment and in the activities of VWL and he sent his best wishes to all VWL members.

In his decision, His Honour accepted, on judicial notice:

"...the historical and persisting disadvantage of women in relation to their participation and career advancement within the legal profession."

That fact unfortunately remains true today and it is our driving mission that one day, in the near future, it will be overcome. I look forward to the progress we will achieve together in 2011 towards that goal.

May I take this opportunity to wish you and your loved ones a very safe and happy festive season. See you in the new year!

Sincerely,

Kate Ashmor
Convenor



The Honourable Chief Justice Robert French AC and VWL's new Convenor, Kate Ashmor.

UPCOMINGEVENTS

17 February 2011:

Welcome to 2011 – Making it Happen

Victorian Women Lawyers together with Women in Finance (Vic) and the Institute of Chartered Accountants is proud to announce that its first networking function will be held at 12:30-2:00pm on Thursday 17 February 2011 at the RACV Club, Bourke Street Melbourne. The theme of the event is, Welcome to 2011 - Making It Happen. The aim of this event is to provide an environment for each organisation's members to be inspired, to gain insights from industry leaders and to network with other professionals. More details of the high profile panellists will follow but please put this date in your diary now!

COMMITTEEREPORTS

Work Practices Committee

Paid Parent Leave Scheme

The Australian Government will deliver Australia's first national Paid Parental Leave scheme from 1 January 2011. The scheme is funded by the Australian Government.

Parents planning to have or adopt a child on or after 1 January 2011 need to be aware of the scheme and consider how decisions they make about work could affect their eligibility for Paid Parental Leave.

Claims can be submitted up to three months before the expected date of birth or adoption. Parents are encouraged to lodge a claim before their child arrives so their payments can start on time.

The Paid Parental Leave scheme will help Australian families balance work and family commitments and help employers retain the valuable skills and experience of their staff. It will help employers enhance the family friendly workplace conditions many already offer. Paid Parental Leave can be taken in addition to existing employer-funded schemes, at either the same time or consecutively.

For more information on the Paid Parental Leave scheme, go to:

http://www.vwl.asn.au/cms_files/Paid%20Parental%20Leave%20Scheme.pdf

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Portia 2010 now published

VWL's annual publication, 'Portia' is now available here:

http://www.vwl.asn.au/cms_files/PortiaBook2010_Finalweb.pdf

Members will receive a copy in the mail in the coming weeks.

November 2010 edition of *Themis* now available

To read about what other constituent bodies of Australian Women Lawyers have been doing in 2010, see the November edition of Themis here:

http://www.vwl.asn.au/cms_files/THEMIS-ISSUE13-10.pdf

OPPORTUNITIES

Chair of the Communications Committee

The position of Chair of the VWL Communications Committee is vacant and available to VWL members. The Communications Committee produces VWL's publications, conducts media liaison and administers the VWL website. It is a highly important and rewarding role at the heart of everything VWL does. If you are interested, please contact the Secretary, Beth Hilton-Thorp, at jthorp@bigpond.net.au.

November 2010 edition of *Themis* now available

To read about what other constituent bodies of Australian Women Lawyers have been doing in 2010, see the November edition of Themis here:

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EVENTREPORTS

AGM & End Of Year Celebration - 25 November 2010

Amongst juggling clowns, hoola hoops and stilts courtesy of the wonderful performers from the Melbourne Women's Circus (<http://womenscircus.org.au/>), VWL celebrated another fantastic year at our End of Year Celebration at Minter Ellison on 25 November. Shirley Woods from Project Respect (<http://projectrespect.org.au/>) described the important work her organisation does to support women in the sex industry, including trafficked women. Attendees also celebrated the release of Portia, VWL's annual publication, which will be posted to all members shortly.

Court of Victoria, who shared her own experiences of working in the cut and thrust of the public service. In Justice Emerton's inspiring career - as a government solicitor and ministerial advisor, as a woman barrister, as Crown Counsel and now as a Supreme Court judge - her Honour has seen, and even at times experienced, the effects of the many stereotypes, good and bad, and surprises, again good and bad, that come with working in association with the largest employer in the State of Victoria. John Cain, the Victorian Government Solicitor, was also on hand to lend his personal endorsement of WiG, stating that the Celebration followed a highly-attended Annual General Meeting, where the following Executive Committee office bearers were elected for 2011:

Convenor: Kate Ashmor

Assistant Convenor: Patricia Athanasiadis

Secretary: Beth Hilton-Thorp

Treasurer: Jacquie Browning

General Members: Claire Carrucan, Jackie Gillies and Michelle Florenini

Astrid Haban-Ber, the outgoing Convenor, expressed her sincere thanks to the membership and she will remain on the Executive Committee next year as Immediate Past Convenor. VWL also paid tribute to retiring office bearers Jennifer Kanis, Anna Tang, Melanie Hodge and Susan Pryde for their extraordinary service over the years.

The newly elected office bearers along with the wider Executive Committee will meet in early December to plan VWL's strategy, priorities and events for 2011.

Click here for VWL's 2010 Annual Report:

http://www.vwl.asn.au/cms_files/VWL%20AGM%20Report%202010.pdf

Click here for photos from the Celebration:

<http://www.vwl.asn.au/gallery/2010-Members-End-of-Year-CelebrationAGM-1145/gallery.php>

White Ribbon Day Luncheon - 26 November 2010

VWL, in conjunction with the Law Institute of Victoria, held its annual White Ribbon Day Luncheon on 26 November at the RACV Club in Melbourne. Macpherson + Kelley lawyer and Geelong Football Club board member Diana Taylor moderated a discussion between the CEO of Collingwood Football Club, Gary Pert and the General Manager of Football Operations at the AFL, Adrian Anderson. Both Gary and Adrian are White Ribbon Day Ambassadors.

Over 200 attendees including judges, football officials, police officers, media and scores of lawyers were implored to take a stand against violence towards women. The AFL screened a brief video designed to prompt AFL players to not tolerate any violence against women and to show courage and leadership in the community on this issue.

VWL is proud to again support the White Ribbon Day Foundation

(<http://www.whiteribbonday.org.au/>) in campaigning for the elimination of violence against women.

Click here for photos from the Luncheon:

<http://www.vwl.asn.au/gallery/2010-White-Ribbon-Day-1146/gallery.php>

Launch of the WiG Network – 11 November 2010

The *Women Lawyers in Government* ('WiG') Network was launched on 11 November 2010. Victorian Women Lawyers was delighted to be joined by the Victorian Government Solicitor's Office and over 160 women practitioners to commence a challenging dialogue on what it really means to work as a woman lawyer in the government sector.

The audience was addressed by the Honourable Justice Karin Emerton of the Supreme Court of Victoria, who shared her own experiences of working in the cut and thrust of the public service. In Justice Emerton's inspiring career - as a government solicitor and ministerial advisor, as a woman barrister, as Crown Counsel and now as a Supreme Court judge - her Honour has seen, and even at times experienced, the effects of the many stereotypes, good and bad, and surprises, again good and bad, that come with working in association with the largest employer in the State of Victoria. John Cain, the Victorian Government Solicitor, was also on hand to lend his personal endorsement of WiG, stating that it is a great way to support the many valued women who work within the VGSO. Finally, the committee for WiG showed its eagerness to get this dialogue started by presenting the results of a participant survey, which clearly brought into question the justification for the inherent stereotypes and presumptions held about government lawyers.

VWL believes that the strong support for the WiG Network launch provides a great platform for an exciting series of events and activities in 2011. A full program of events will be released early in the new year.

Click here for photos from the Launch:

<http://www.vwl.asn.au/gallery/2010-WiG-Launch/gallery.php>

UNDERTHESPOTLIGHT

This month we profile Kate Ashmor, 2011 Convenor of Victorian Women Lawyers and Commercial Lawyer with the Department of Transport and Victorian Rail Track.

I became a lawyer because... at the age of 12, I decided that being a lawyer was the most logical way to channel my argumentative tendencies into making money.

I am really proud of... my family surviving the Holocaust and our fighting spirit that has endured through subsequent generations.

You can have it all... but you'll constantly feel guilty that you're not devoting enough time to someone or something.

I am extremely grateful for... my best friend and husband of nine years, Tom.

A key mentor who influenced my career is... my maternal grandmother (deceased), who was determined that I be educated and independent.

If I wasn't a lawyer... I'd be a dazed and confused. And annoyingly argumentative.

Before I started at my present position... I failed to appreciate the unique complexities and pressures female government lawyers face.

The best advice I ever received was... be a good listener.

One of the key legal initiatives I am involved in is... mentoring female law students and encouraging the next generation of female practitioners to be confident, ethical and courageous.

Outside of the law... I love yum cha, House MD, the West Coast Eagles, Masterchef, gardening, tennis, singing, trivia and playing with my dog Louis.

VWL COMMITTEES

Joining a Committee is a great way to become more involved with VWL. All Committee work is voluntary. The time commitment is flexible; we are looking for enthusiasm most of all. Please send your expression of interest in joining a Committee to our Secretary, Beth Hilton-Thorp at jthorp@bigpond.net.au.

Our Committees are:

Communications - organising this newsletter, coordinating the editing and publication of Portia, our annual magazine, maintaining VWL's website and liaising with the media.

Justice - dealing with all justice related issues including submissions to government, organising the annual sexual assault forums and supporting indigenous law students.

Law Reform - monitoring law reform proposals and coordinating submissions on behalf of VWL.

Membership - looking after our members' needs, leading VWL policy and protocol development and promoting VWL membership within the legal community.

Networking - organising events with affiliated organisations including the Women Barristers Association, liaising with regional lawyers' networks, and coordinating the annual events including the Members and Guests Evening and the VWL End of Year Celebration.

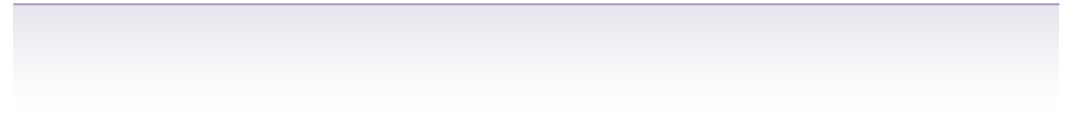
Women Migrants Legal Information Project - planning and producing various publications (in several languages) to assist women migrants with key legal rights and support.

Work Practices - addressing the important issues that affect women lawyers in the workplace, conducting research and holding forums.

MEMBERSHIPRENEWAL

To renew your VWL membership, please click here:

> http://www.vwl.asn.au/Portals/0/downloads/VWL%20Renewal%20Notice_2010.pdf



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