



**Victorian
Women
Lawyers**



WOMEN KEEPING IN TOUCH

VWL E-NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER 2011

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A WORD FROM THE CONVENOR

Greetings,

Last month we marked [fifteen years as Victoria's peak organisation for female lawyers](#). It's therefore timely to reflect on VWL's achievements over the years. Here's a snap shot of some of our key moments:

- > Launch of VWL on 29 August 1996 at the Snail 'n' Bottle restaurant by inaugural patron Chief Justice John Phillips, Attorney-General Jan Wade and special guest Eve Mahlab. The inaugural committees were Networking, Work Practices, Mature Age Practitioners, Communications and the 1997 Legal Convention Committee.
- > By 1997 VWL had signed on the following sponsors: Arthur Robinson & Hedderwicks, Coltmans Price Brent, Corrs Chambers Westgarth, Deacons Graham & James, Dunhill Madden Butler, Holding Redlich, Maddock Lonie Chisholm, Mallesons Stephen Jacques, Minter Ellison, Phillips Fox and The Shell Company of Australia.
- > 1997 was also marked by the launch of Australian Women Lawyers on 19 September and the addition of VWL's Justice Committee, whose inaugural Chair is our current LIV President Caroline Counsel.
- > On 16 September 1998 VWL launched its first flexible work practices guide entitled *Living & Working Together* in the 90s. This was to be the first of many important publications on flexible work that VWL would produce over the years.
- > On 21 April 1999, Chief Justice Phillips delivered the inaugural Lesbia Harford Oration on *Women in the Law: Progress and Challenge*.
- > In May 1999, VWL published a framework report entitled [Taking Up The Challenge. Women In the Legal Profession](#). The sponsor firms were briefed on the report in July of that year.
- > VWL also produced a practical [childcare assistance kit](#) that year as a guide for legal practitioner parents.



Kate Ashmor
2011 Convenor

Blake Dawson

middletons |
straight talking

Maddocks

CLAYTON UTZ

MALLESONS STEPHEN JAQUES

- > The inaugural Dame Roma Mitchell Memorial Luncheon was held in 2000 in conjunction with the LIV – it's now a cherished annual fixture on our calendars. Professor Hilary Charlesworth delivered the first address focussing on Australia's human rights record. The Luncheon has gone on to have a human rights focus every year since.
- > In 2000, VWL's Taking Up The Challenge report rose to greater prominence at two special forums, including a major symposium at the State Library. VWL's website was launched on 22 November 2000 and the Country Committee was introduced.
- > In 2001, Justice Kirby delivered the Lesbia Harford Oration on Women and the Law – What's Next? and VWL published another seminal report: [A Snapshot of Employment Practices](#). The Professional Women's Alliance was also launched, an informal network between VWL and the Institute of Chartered Accountants.
- > By our fifth anniversary in 2002, and thanks to the sound stewardship of the Executive Committee, VWL was in solid financial shape. Total annual income in the 2001-2002 financial year was \$67,000, half of which comprised sponsorship fees, and a further \$23,000 came from membership subscriptions. These figures confirm how vital the support of our sponsor firms is to VWL's ability to fund events and publications for members.
- > By 2003, the Lesbia Harford Oration had become an important biennial event and a much anticipated highlight on VWL's events calendar. Professor Loane Skene from the University of Melbourne's Law School presented the 2003 Oration on *Women's Reproductive Rights*.
- > In 2004, a pioneering precursor to the Law Student Mentoring Program, was launched. It was known as the Women's Mentoring Scheme and the Attorney-General delivered the keynote address at the launch event. This joint initiative between VWL and the WBA involved 60 law students and was the manifestation of a desire to combat the enormous gap that still existed between the numbers of female law graduates and the numbers of senior and leading lawyers in firms and at bar, a phenomenon that unfortunately hasn't progressed much today.
- > Among the busy calendar in 2005, VWL hosted a networking dinner in Ballarat, a Life in the Law networking event for practitioners in the Eastern Suburbs, an inspirational careers seminar and the Women's Achievement Awards. VWL's report: [A 360 Degree Review of Flexible Work Practices](#) was also launched.
- > In 2006, VWL held ground-breaking events on Pathways to Partnership for women lawyers and their mental health and well-being. Kirsty Sword Gusmao, first lady of East Timor, presented the keynote address at the Dame Roma Mitchell Memorial Luncheon.
- > Aside from the usual array of fantastic events and initiatives, 2007 was dominated by the hearing of our tax case in the Federal Court by, as he was then, Justice French. Freehills acted pro bono for VWL and we were brilliantly represented by Alexandra Richards QC and former VWL Executive Member Karen Streckfuss. In mid 2008, Justice French handed down his [judgment](#), finding that VWL is a charity for income taxation purposes and taking on judicial notice that female legal practitioners suffer disadvantage.
- > 2008 saw the launch of the Law Student Mentoring Program, which was then the only organised initiative available for female law students from all Victorian law schools to be paired with female practitioners. Her Honour Justice Marcia Neave AO of the Court of Appeal has been a wonderful champion of the Program since its inception and over 300 pairs of female law students and practitioners have successfully completed the Program over the last four years.

- > In 2009 we held our inaugural networking dinner in Geelong with the Geelong Law Association (something we've repeated this June).
- > In 2010, VWL launched the Women in Government and the Law Reform Committees, our revamped website and the important [Do You Manage?](#) flexible work practices report, as well as a scoping study into the alarming attrition rates among female practitioners. The Women's Achievement Awards were also held.
- > And among the many initiatives so far in 2011, Mary Kostakidis addressed the [Dame Roma Mitchell Memorial Luncheon](#) on Wikileaks and freedom of speech, we travelled to Warrnambool with the Women Barristers Association for a pioneering regional women lawyers networking and CPD event, we launched our presence on [Facebook](#) and we're working with the Law Council of Australia as the leading State contributing to a national strategy towards combating attrition among female practitioners.



2011 Convenor Kate Ashmor with past Convenors

What an extraordinary record of achievement! Congratulations and heartfelt thanks to each and every person who has passionately and generously contributed to VWL's success over the years – I salute you!

Sincerely,

Kate Ashmor
2011 Convenor

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UPCOMINGEVENTS

Women in Government Debate, 18 October 2011

VWL's Women in Government Committee invites you to a fantastic panel forum on 18 October 2011, to be kindly hosted by the Australian Government Solicitor at Level 21, 200 Queen St, Melbourne at 5:30pm.

Peter Stewart, the newly appointed Victorian Government Solicitor; Naomi Hodgson, barrister and former government solicitor; Susan Pryde, former Senior Executive Lawyer and Director at the Australian Government Solicitor; Alexandra Merrett, Principal Lawyer, Trade Practices Legal Unit, ACCC and Amanda Stevens, Workplace Diversity consultant and former principal lawyer at ASIC will tackle the topic: *Working in Government provides a door through the glass ceiling: women lawyers in government can progress. Myth or reality?*

What is really happening to women lawyers working in government? Are women smashing through that glass ceiling? Does it even exist in the government context? Does working in government mean that women really can 'have it all'?

Join our stellar panel for a thought-provoking discussion to be followed by networking over drinks and canapés.

This is a FREE event, open to members and non-members. Click [here](#) for further details including how to register, but be quick as places are limited.

Religion and the Law: Where to from here?, 20 October 2011

VWL invites you to learn more about the current debates surrounding the interaction between religion and the law, and where it is anticipated the law may head.

Join us at Mallesons Stephen Jaques on 20 October at 5:30pm and participate in a conversation about the role the legal profession plays in navigating through the tensions between human rights, criminal and civil law.

Speakers will include the Hon. Magistrate Goldsborough, Maria Dimopolous, Munya Andrews of Counsel and Tasneem Chopra, Chairperson of the Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights.

This event includes light refreshments and is free to VWL members, but registration is essential. Click [here](#) for further details or [register online](#).

Tips from the Trenches: Networking Luncheon with the National Association of Women in Construction, 27 October 2011

VWL in conjunction with the National Association of Women in Construction will present this frank and fearless panel discussion addressing the challenges facing women in the construction industry, and featuring practical suggestions and stories from the trenches. This is a wonderful opportunity for VWL members to network and forge new contacts with your colleagues in this area. Lunch provided will be provided.

The panel will include Marjorie Miller Legal Counsel, Construction for Grocon, and other speakers yet to be announced.

This event is free and exclusive to VWL and NAWIC members, but registration is essential.

Click [here](#) for further details or [register online](#).

Annual General Meeting and Christmas Party, 10 November 2011

Come and join us for an evening of fun as we celebrate our 2011 achievements and the festive season with fellow VWL members.

An email was recently sent informing members of our AGM and to seek nominations for the 2012 VWL Executive Committee. The AGM will start at 5.30pm, with the Christmas Party following from 6.00pm – 8.00pm.

Our guest speaker is Sarah Davies, CEO, Australian Communities Foundation and entertainment will be supplied by the Firbank Floral Quartet.

Click [here](#) for further details or [register online](#).

EVENTREPORTS

15th Birthday Party, 2 September

Victorian Women Lawyers celebrated its fifteenth birthday in style by hosting a party at the Melbourne Gallery at Melbourne Museum on Friday 2nd September 2011.

Just over 100 guests in attendance, including many past members of VWL Executive, enjoyed canapés amidst the elegant surrounds of the Gallery and myriad displays centering around Melbourne's history, including a life size replica of Phar Lap!

Kate Ashmor detailed the many achievements of VWL during its first fifteen years followed by reflections from previous Convenors in attendance. Georgina Frost (1998), Jo Renkin (2003), Sarah Coffey (2004), Rosemary Peavey (2005), Christine Melis (2008) and Astrid Haban-Beer (2010) all reflected with pride on their involvement with VWL and the personal and professional growth they had achieved during their year as Convenor.

The night was capped off by a toast and the ceremonial cutting of a birthday cake for VWL by Her Honour Justice Pamela Tate, who attended the event on behalf of our patron, Chief Justice Marilyn Warren.

Her Honour, who has long been a keen supporter of VWL, took the opportunity to comment on at least two recent instances which demonstrated the significance of women in the law- as recently as August of this year Her Honour sat on a full bench of the Court of Appeal composed entirely of women. This was the first time in the Court's 150 year history that a full bench had been constituted by three female judges. Her Honour also spoke briefly about the recent High Court case challenging the government's Malaysia solution. Whether or not one agreed with the majority decision, it was significant to note that the team of successful barristers was all female.

Her Honour's comments were reflective of those of Kate Ashmor who noted that whilst VWL's focus has evolved during its first fifteen years with many challenges seemingly conquered, there are further challenges ahead. We look forward to the next fifteen years of VWL!

Photos of the party can be viewed on VWL's [website](#) or Facebook [page](#).



VWL's Convenor Kate Ashmor celebrates our 15th birthday

The Road Less Travelled: Women in Partnership, 7 September

On 7 September, VWL held a special members-only, free lunchtime forum at Allens Arthur Robinson on Women in Partnership.

About 80 VWL members, including private practice lawyers and law students, attended as Nick Nichola, National Managing Partner at Middletons; Mary-Jane Ierodionou, Managing Partner at Justitia and Maryjane Crabtree (a late addition to the panel!), Executive Partner at Allens Arthur Robinson offered valuable strategic advice to partnership aspirants and shared their personal experiences. The discussion was facilitated by VWL's Convenor, Kate Ashmor.

Among the issues canvassed were the value of identifying a mentor and 'champion' within your firm early on, the critical importance of personal skills and negotiating flexible work practices without being derailed from the partnership route.

VWL was proud to partner with Allens Arthur Robinson in hosting this frank and fearless discussion.

Photos of the event can be viewed on VWL's [Facebook page](#).

Sexual Assault Forum - 'Knowing your Rights - Sexual Harassment in the Workplace', 14 September

Each year the Justice Committee holds a Sexual Assault Forum to highlight issues in relation to sexual assault and how to tackle this ongoing problem in the workplace. This year's theme was 'Knowing your Rights – Sexual Harassment in the Workplace'.

The forum was held on 14 September 2011 and featured an esteemed panel who shared their insights into this important issue. Kerin Leonard, Manager of the Legal Unit at the Victorian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, provided us with an overview of the issue and how the Victorian Equal Opportunity Act 2010 operates in relation to sexual harassment. Commissioner Michelle Bissett, of Fair Work Australia, provided insights into the Federal Fair Work Act 2009 and adverse action claims. Our third speaker Sara Summerbell, a solicitor in the Employee Relations group at Freehills, looked at both federal and state law and explained how sexual harassment cases operate in practice and how compensation is awarded. Kate Jenkins, partner in the Freehills Employee Relations group and the lead partner of the firm's national Equal Opportunity and Diversity practice, did a wonderful job moderating the event.

We would like to thank our speakers for such interesting and engaging presentations and to Freehills for generously hosting the event.

Photos of the event can be viewed on VWL's [Facebook page](#).

Migrant Women Speaking Out, 21 September

The Justice Committee was delighted to have Marion Lau OAM JP and Azmeena Hussain speak on the experience of female migrants in Australia. Particularly as migrant women, especially those from non-English speaking backgrounds, are still subject to stereotyping, still bear the brunt of settlement, transport difficulties and inter-generational culture clashes.

Both Marion and Azmeena identified key aspects of the role the legal profession and government plays in supporting female migrants, including the need for trust between ethnic groups as well as active support and integration measures.

The Justice Committee thanks our speakers for their hilarious anecdotes of being a migrant and a first generation woman in Victoria as well the wonderful support of Maurice Blackburn for generously hosting the event.

Photos of the event will be available online shortly.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Results of Mahlab's Annual Survey

Earlier this year, VWL encouraged members to respond to Mahlab's annual survey of the legal profession. At the time, we advised that we'd make the findings of the survey directly available to members.

The findings are now available to view via the [Publications page on VWL's website](#).

MEMBER UNDER THE SPOTLIGHT

Every month, WKIT features a profile of one of our members as well as a lawyer from one of our sponsor firms. This way, we will introduce you to a broad spectrum of female lawyers who are proud to be associated with VWL.

This month we profile **Katie Miller, Principal Solicitor** at [Victorian Government Solicitor's Office](#):

I became a lawyer because... I wanted to get into politics. I soon discovered that I was more suited to the logic and rationality offered by law than the machinations of politics. As a lawyer to government, I get to experience the interplay between legal and political issues – it's the best of both worlds!

I am really proud of... the clothes I have knitted and sewn. They're certainly not fit for any modelling runways but it's wonderful wearing something that you have made with your own hands. My latest project was a cardigan that took three winters to make – I won't be giving up my day job to become a fashion designer!

You can have it all... but you may get indigestion – it's as true at buffets as it is in life. I sometimes have to remind myself to slow down and that, just as there is a limit to how many chocolate mousses you can fit in at the end of a buffet, there is also a limit to how much you can fit into a day.

I am extremely grateful for... my family support. My family are very tolerant of my passion for all things. I don't do anything quietly and they are very good listeners.

A key mentor who influenced my career is... Libby Haigh of the Australian Government Solicitor. She has been an inspiration to many young lawyers and I was lucky enough to work with her during the early years of my career. Her legal knowledge and ability to always find the tricky legal point that no one has thought of, combined with her genuine concern for the people she works with, makes her a fabulous boss, lawyer and friend.



If I wasn't a lawyer... I would have a lot more time to finish Donkey Kong 64. I started it 10 years ago when I was at uni and I still haven't finished it.

Before I started at my current workplace... Before I started at my current workplace... I was a lawyer in the Administrative Law Team at the Australian Government Solicitor. Government solicitors' offices at state and federal level have a lot in common – they're filled with interesting and smart lawyers with a passion for the greater good. They are also well practised in the art of assuring people that, yes, government lawyers do bill!

The best advice I ever received was... a woman must be twice as good as a man to be considered half as good. Luckily this is not difficult'. My mum had this quote in our kitchen when I was growing up. As a young girl, I thought it was immensely unfair. It helped me to learn that things in life are not always fair but that doesn't mean that we stop working to make it fair.

One of the key legal initiatives I am involved in is... is advocating for privacy reform. I am intrigued by the challenges of an age where companies can millions of dollars out of selling our personal information while going to great lengths to persuade us that no one values privacy anymore. I am working with the LIV to develop a framework for considering privacy law reform issues. Privacy issues arise in a variety of contexts, including migration, law enforcement, consumer protection, employment law, etc. What is an appropriate approach to privacy depends on the facts, circumstances and context of the proposal. There are no easy answers in privacy, which makes it an endlessly interesting area of law reform.

Outside of the law I enjoy... I am the president of my local residents association, an embarrassingly passionate supporter of the Western Bulldogs and a doting owner of a spoilt and fluffy cat. I also enjoy cooking and gardening – I am much better at the former than the latter, but both are fun.

SPONSOR UNDER THE SPOTLIGHT

This month we profile **Gowri Kangeson, Partner, Litigation & Regulatory** at [DLA Piper](#):

I became a lawyer because... I was told that artists can't make a living.

I am really proud of... the small role we play in making a difference in people's lives.

You can have it all... really? Finding work/life balance can be hard. I have much respect and admiration for all the women out there who juggle children and work.

I am extremely grateful for... the friendships I have made over the years. I've met some of my best friends at work.

A key mentor who influenced my career is... the first person I worked for, Anantham Kasinather, currently a High Court Judge in Malaysia. He is smart, hard working, innovative, genuine, committed and inspirational.



If I wasn't a lawyer... I'd be trying to sell my paintings on the streets of Paris.

Before I started at my current workplace... I worked at Maddocks for 2.5 years and practised as an advocate & solicitor in Malaysia for several years.

The best advice I ever received was... "go for it" and "you get to where you are cos you deserve it" (contrary to my belief that luck plays a huge part in life).

One of the key legal initiatives I am involved in is... is education of young lawyers' at DLA Piper.

Outside of the law... I enjoy Melbourne life – family, friends, restaurants, a good cocktail.

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 [email](#) your expression of interest in joining a Committee to our Secretary, Beth Hilton-Thorp.

Our Committees are:

Justice - social justice events including the annual sexual assault forum and supporting indigenous law students.

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

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

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

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

Women in Government (WiG) – VWL's newest Committee, in conjunction with the Victorian Government Solicitor's Office, plans events and initiatives to assist female practitioners working for public authorities and agencies.

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

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