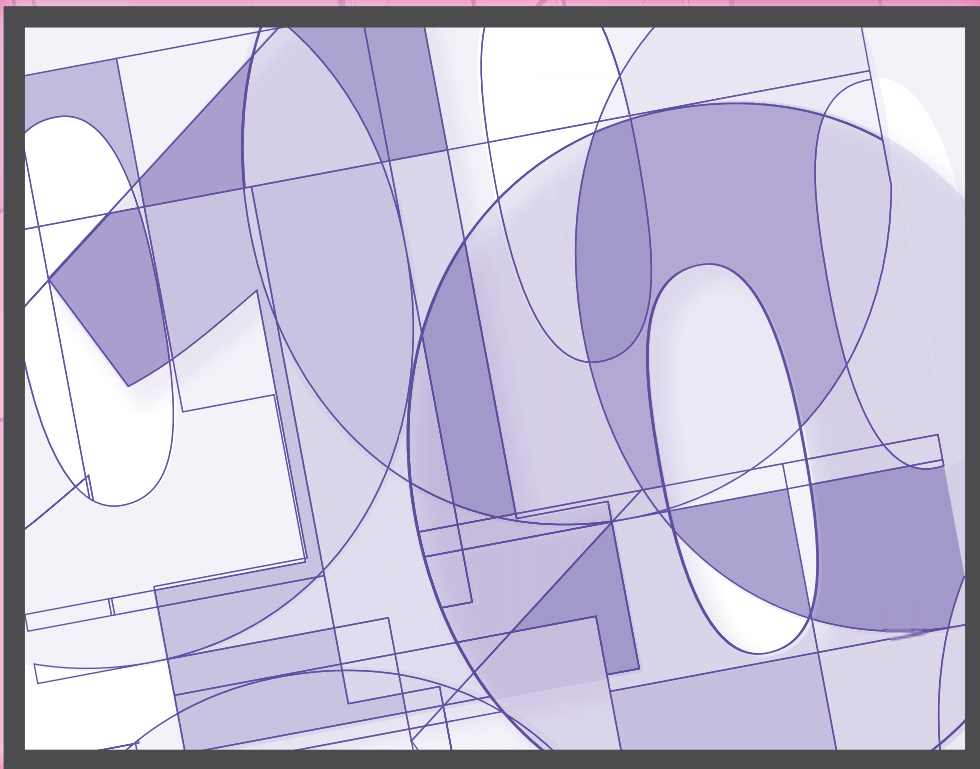


# *portia*

edition 34



**Victorian Women Lawyers  
Celebrating 10 years in 2006**

# portia

*A publication of*



*Edition 34, August 2006*

## Executive Committee

2006 Convenor	Virginia Jay
Immediate Past Convenor	Rosemary Peavey
Assistant Convenor	Justine Lau
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## Disclaimer

This journal is published by the Victorian Women Lawyers Association. The views expressed by contributors are those of the authors and not necessarily representative of the Victorian Women Lawyers Association or its members. No responsibility will be accepted by the Victorian Women Lawyers Association or its members for the accuracy of information contained in this text.

## The Objectives of the Association

- to provide a common meeting ground for women lawyers;
- to foster the continuing education and development of women lawyers in all matters of legal interest;
- to encourage and provide for the entry of women into the legal profession and their advancement within the legal profession;
- to work towards the reform of the law;
- to participate as a body in matters of interest to the legal profession;
- to promote the understanding and support of women's legal and human rights; and
- such other objectives as the Association may in General Meeting decide.

## Further, the Association also adopts the objectives of the Australian Women Lawyers and is a Recognised Organisation of that Association:

- achieve justice and equality for all women;
- further understanding of and support for the legal rights of all women;
- identify, highlight and eradicate discrimination against women in law and in the legal system;
- advance equality for women in the legal profession;
- create and enhance awareness of women's contribution to the practise and development of the law; and
- provide a professional and social network for women lawyers.

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# Note from the Convenor

Edition 34



Virginia Jay

**H**ello and welcome to this very special 10 year anniversary edition of Portia. In honour of VWL's tenth birthday, we have compiled a 'Happy Birthday' commemorative edition of Portia in which we celebrate a decade of work toward advancing the status of women in the law and pay tribute to those who have supported the association over the years.

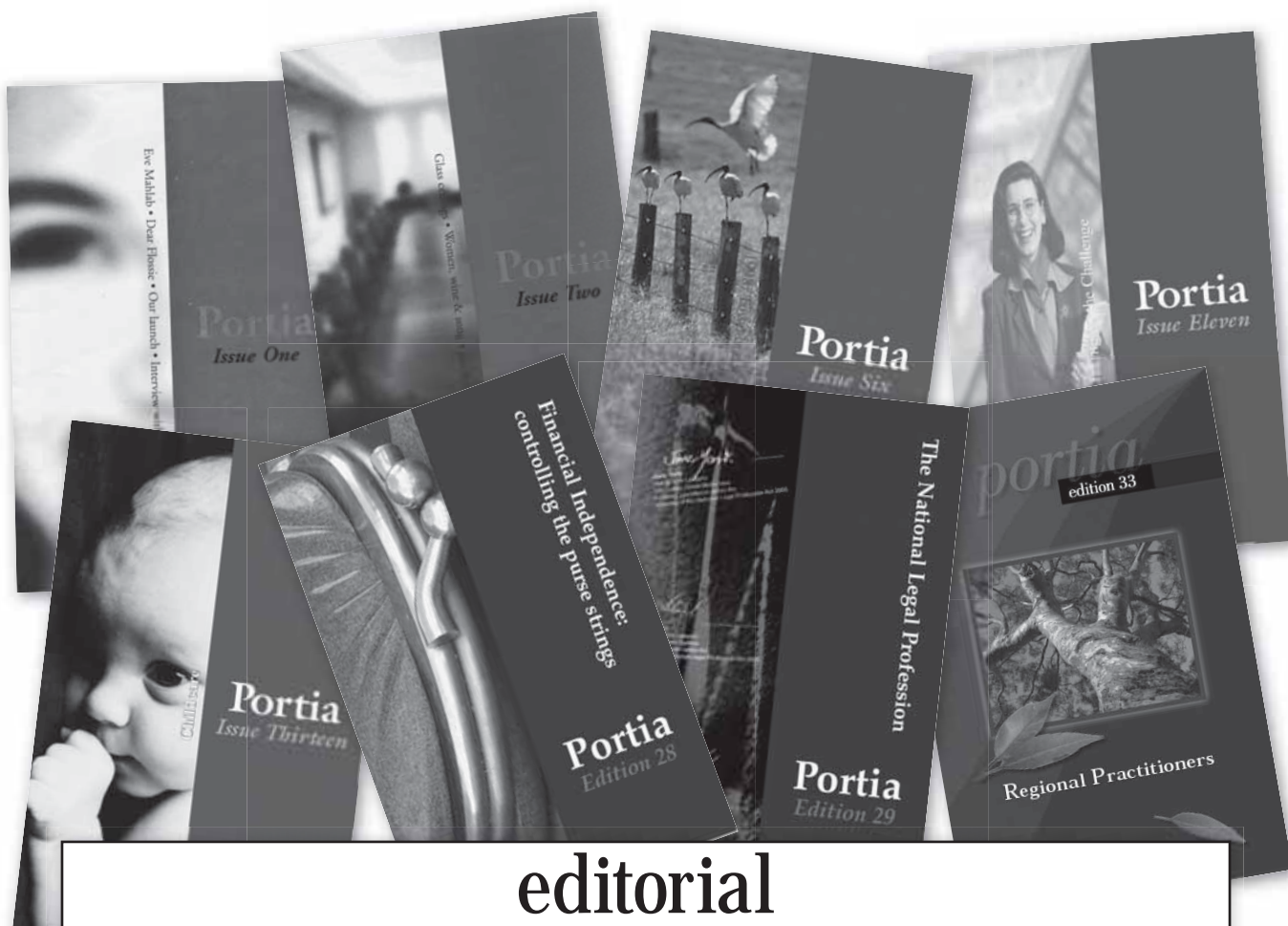
A significant galvanising force in the formation of Victorian Women Lawyers was a conference in 1993 on Women in the Legal Profession, convened by a group of young lawyers and chaired by the Honourable Mr John Phillips, former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Victoria.

The voicing of issues at the conference highlighted the benefit that women lawyers stood to gain by having a collective voice in the profession. The forceful and veracious voice which VWL has asserted in the profession and in the community on matters of importance to women is the underlying basis of its success in advancing the status of women in the law and in promoting women's legal and human rights. In this edition, you will have a chance to discover more about VWL's activities over its ten year history and the way it has expressed its voice on issues affecting women in the law and in the broader community.

Happy 10th Birthday VWL!

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## editorial

BY KATHRYN HAMILL – SOLICITOR, RUSSELL KENNEDY

**Many of you may be reading Portia for the first time – perhaps as a guest at VWL's tenth anniversary lunch, or having received a copy of Portia upon joining VWL after attending our recent Members and Guests night.**

By whatever means you acquired your copy, new and existing readers alike are welcomed to this special edition, dedicated to VWL's tenth anniversary celebrations.

As such, along with the reports from VWL's most recent events and publications featured in every edition, we also reflect upon past VWL events, publications and submissions, and feature congratulatory articles from VWL Patron the Honourable Chief Justice Marilyn Warren the Victorian Attorney-General, the Convenor of the Women Barristers' Association, the President of Australian

Womens Lawyers, and from some of our sponsors, including the President of our principal sponsor, the Law Institute of Victoria.

This edition also includes an interview with the former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and VWL's first Patron, His Honour John Harber Phillips, and Kriss Will, one of VWL's founding members, who enlighten readers on their roles in the conception and infancy of VWL.

In an exercise which - given the busy lives and career progression of each of VWL's ten Convenors - presented some challenges to complete, every Convenor was invited to submit an article on a topic of her choice. Each of the resulting articles offers a unique perspective on the writer's year as Convenor, her career in the law or the development of the profession, however each Convenor looks to the future with the same sense of optimism, but with the

belief that more needs to be done to achieve VWL's goals. Esther James' article on the World Women Lawyers' Conference in London provides a timely demonstration that these goals are not unique to Victorian women lawyers.

Finally, we have reproduced the covers of selected past editions of Portia above. Each edition of Portia represents the culmination of a great deal of work by contributors and editors alike - all of it voluntary, and most of it snatched from the precious few hours of spare time of the editors. In view of this, I would like to take this opportunity to thank contributors to, and editors of, Portia for the ten years of its existence, and, looking forward to Portia's next ten years, ask readers for contributions to the next edition of Portia, which will have a Justice theme.



## *Comment from Her Honour, Chief Justice Marilyn Warren the Patron of Victorian Women Lawyers*

---

**In 1996, a small group of tenacious and visionary women began the Victorian Women Lawyers. Their intentions were noble and ambitious; clearly they felt there was much to do. With support and encouragement from individuals and professional groups, the VWL has not only gone from strength to strength, but it has drawn a crowd of supporters and an increasing membership along the way.**

Today when I see the membership of the VWL number around 600 women lawyers I can only say that their energies have been well placed and their passion has struck a chord with women lawyers in this State and elsewhere.

Over the past ten years, the VWL has provided information, guidance, support, mentoring and networking opportunities for women lawyers. The quarterly publication "Portia" has its place in the profession as an informative and contemporary legal publication. The VWL enjoys a visible, professional and credible profile in the legal community.

The VWL has achieved a public profile as a informative and authoritative resource on issues not only faced by women lawyers, but by working families trying to manage the life work balance.

Its groundbreaking report, "360 Degree Review: Flexible Work Practices – Confronting the Myths and Realities in the Legal Profession" has provided a significant examination of the cultural and attitudinal obstacles facing women lawyers who attempt to negotiate flexible work options alongside their aspirations for career advancement. The VWL has garnered well deserved international and national acclaim for its research into the unclaimed issues and unfinished business of women seeking a long-term satisfying career in the law.

The VWL did not let these issues rest there. This year in collaboration with the Law Institute of Victoria, the VWL released "Bendable or Expendable" – a follow up on the "360 Degree" report. Bendable or Expendable found that despite the take-up by some firms of greater flexibility, women continue to be drastically under-represented in the older and more senior ranks of private practice as the profession grapples with thinking beyond the one-size-fits-all model.

Women lawyers in Victoria clearly still have some unfinished business with employers and firms, Governments and the profession. Women lawyers continue to seek accessible, flexible and affordable child care and a range of alternate

and flexible work practices that are more responsive to maintaining a healthy life work balance. I anticipate that the issue of life work balance will be of significant interest to women lawyers of generation X and Y as they move forward in their careers.

It is not unreasonable to ask "what is it about us that we have to have three meals a day at the office to work in the law?". Of concern are the recent reports of the "level of unhappiness" in the legal profession<sup>1</sup> and the mental health implications this poses. The challenge ahead for the VWL is to develop and promote alternate work models that sustain and positively support women in the workplace, that promote and encourage their visibility as a respected professional and one that rewards their efforts financially and intellectually.

On the 10th anniversary of the VWL I congratulate the Association for its many achievements. To its past and present members, office holders and supporters, I thank you for your dedication and commitment to advance the interests and concerns of women lawyers in Victoria.

**Marilyn Warren AC  
Patron**

1. These issues were raised in the article, Putting the Stress on Dealing with Depression: LIJ, March 2006, p26 (volume 80, No 3).



# congratulations

## Message to VWL from the Attorney-General, the Hon Rob Hulls

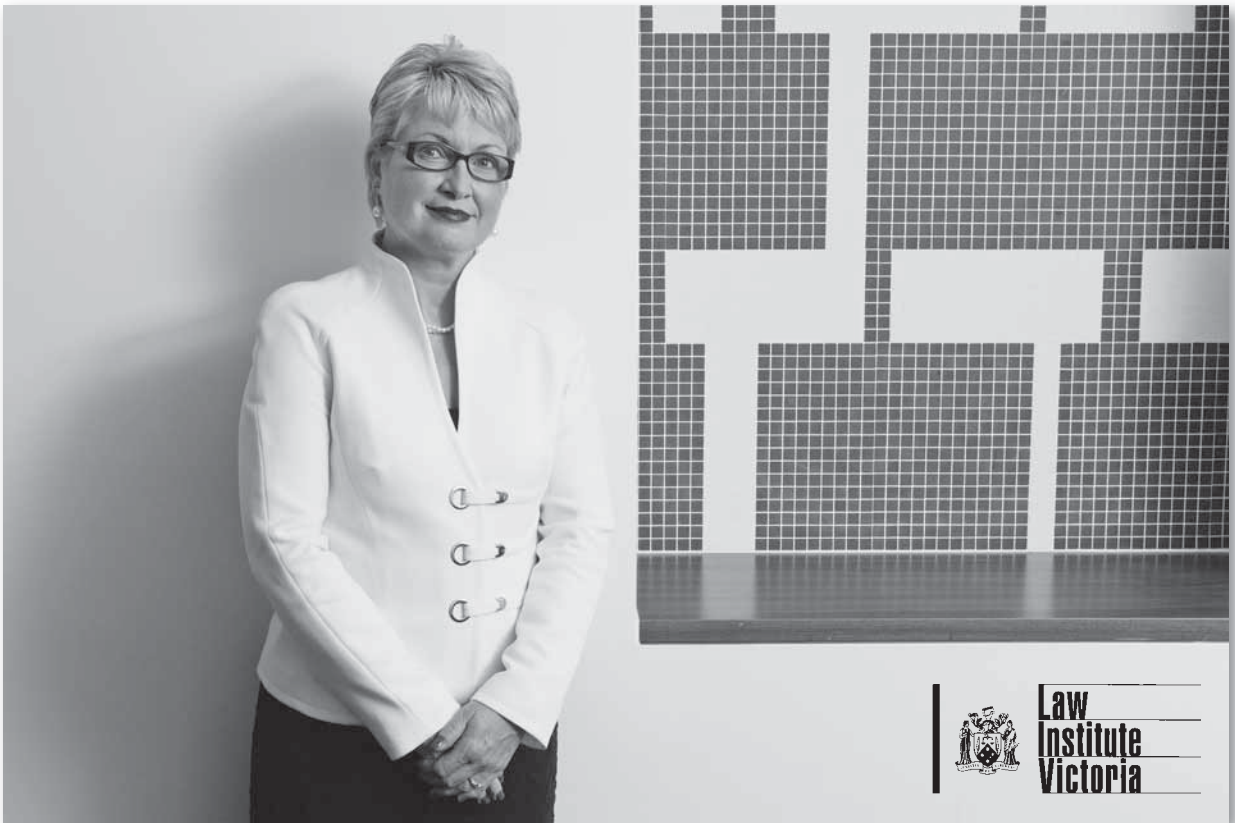
**I take great pleasure in congratulating Victorian Women Lawyers on ten productive years of advocacy. The last decade has, I believe, seen a quiet revolution in the ranks of Victoria's legal profession, with more and more women on Victoria's benches, equal opportunity briefing and employment practices a requirement of firms who provide legal services to Government, and cultural change slowly afoot. Women in the profession, I believe, feel more confident that their skills and talents will be recognised, and less alienated by the irksome traditions of the old school tie.**

We cannot kid ourselves, however, that we don't have a few more battles on our hands. Those of us brazen enough to put gender on the agenda are regularly accused of conspiracies of the highest order as, to our accusers, it is not enough that the two terms sound the same. Instead, they are apparently one and the same invidious phenomenon and clearly it will be some time before this fear of difference recedes with the hairlines of its peddlers.

As we fight on various levels to have the expertise and intellect of Victoria's many women legal practitioners recognised, we should not forget the enormous privilege that any of us involved in the law already hold. Just as

women practitioners have suffered at the hands of odious convention, so too, women as citizens have been without a voice in our power structures, civic institutions, or in the adversarial culture of our legal system. All of us in the law are in a position to change this.

We know that it is not enough to rely on the feted objectivity of the law, to assume that formal equality will produce genuinely fair results. For too long, the law has failed women in myriad ways, perpetuating stereotypes and assumptions about male and female behaviour that are steeped in misogyny. Irrational, unreliable, hysterical, even culpable - these are some of the perceptions that have historically been attributed to victims of sexual assault for example, and we have an obligation to interrogate the law and respond to the extremities of human experience with compassion and flexibility. This is why the Government has conducted a sweeping program of reform, changing the way the law responds to family violence, to sexual assault, to defences to homicide to name a few - to respond to and recognise women's experience. I hope that VWL members are excited by this reform and will continue to contribute to the cultural change it represents and other reform that improves the lives of all Victorian women in the years to come.



# Congratulations from the LIV

## LAW INSTITUTE OF VICTORIA

**On behalf of the Law Institute of Victoria, I would like to personally congratulate VWL on their tenth anniversary.**

The LIV is proud to be associated with VWL and we remain committed to supporting the organization and its work.

The advancement of women in the law has certainly come a long way since 1905, when Flos Greig was admitted in Victoria and became Australia's first woman lawyer.

However, there is still such a long way to go, with the need for increased numbers of women judges, barristers and silks, as well as the need for improved retention rates of our best and brightest women solicitors. I am only the fourth woman President of the

LIV and we have our first female Chief Justice. So change is afoot!

VWL is to be congratulated for a decade of work in which it has not only sought to advance the rights of women in the legal profession but has also worked to raise awareness of legal and social issues concerning women more broadly.

VWL was one of the first to put work flexibility on the agenda with its 2001 Report. This year I had great pleasure in launching the LIV and VWL's Bendable or Expendable Report into Work Flexibility in the legal profession, which built on the initial findings of VWL's earlier report.

Often when it comes to debating issues of work flexibility and barriers to partnership, we can only rely

on anecdotal evidence, but VWL together with the LIV, through its work in researching these issues, has produced the hard data to not only define the issues but to form a foundation for change.

I would like to congratulate the past and present Convenors of VWL and the many members who have given their time and expertise to advancing the organization's work. I hope VWL continues to play a leading role in Victoria legal profession and the wider community.

**Catherine Gale**  
President  
Law Institute of Victoria



AUSTRALIAN  
WOMEN  
LAWYERS



## *AUSTRALIAN WOMEN LAWYERS WISH VICTORIAN WOMEN LAWYERS A HAPPY 10TH BIRTHDAY*

*Happy 10th Birthday*

**A**ustralian Women Lawyers ('AWL') is the peak body for women lawyer associations throughout Australia. AWL was launched on 19 September 1997 at the Australian Legal Convention in Melbourne, just one year after VWL was established. AWL is managed by a board consisting of representatives of each State and Territory Women Lawyers' Associations. Individual members of these constituent bodies are automatically members of AWL and consequently AWL has over 1,800 members.

The VWL representatives on the AWL Board have been enthusiastic and hard working members of the AWL Board over the past nine years. During that time VWL has initiated a number of important research projects such as the "360 Degree" report reviewing flexible work practices and more recently the "Bendable or Expendable?" report on practices and attitudes towards work flexibility demonstrated by Victoria's biggest legal employers. AWL has assisted in disseminating information about these important studies and reports to each of the Australian Women Lawyers' Associations. The effect that these studies and reports have

had around Australia in generating discussion and initiating a push for cultural change in work practices is incalculable.

I would particularly like to thank Convenor Virginia Jay and the Executive Committee of VWL for their initiative in sponsoring the Inaugural AWL Conference, to be held in Sydney on 29 and 30 September 2006. The conference promises to be an exciting and historical event, with an unprecedented array of outstanding women lawyers presenting papers. The organisation of this event is only possible due to the tireless work of AWL Board members and the AWL Conference Committee members. In this regard, I extend my thanks to AWL Board member Rosemary Peavey and Conference Committee member Anne Winckel, both representatives of VWL, for their ongoing work in assisting with the organisation of the conference.

Happy Tenth Birthday VWL, and I look forward to seeing as many VWL members as possible in Sydney at the end of September!

**Caroline Kirton**  
**President**  
**Australian Women Lawyers**



AUSTRALIAN  
WOMEN  
LAWYERS

The Sheraton  
on the Park Hotel

Friday 29 - Saturday 30  
September 2006

# *The Inaugural Australian Women Lawyers Conference*

## *Celebrating Excellence*

*Keynote address by the Honourable  
Mary Gaudron QC, AWL Patron*

A most exciting initiative of the Board of Australian Women Lawyers has been to organise the Inaugural Australian Women Lawyers Conference, to be held in Sydney on 29 and 30 September 2006. 'Celebrating Excellence' is the theme of the Conference. The aim of the Conference is to gather together outstanding women speakers and to demonstrate the high degree of excellence that women are achieving within the Australian legal profession. The keynote speaker will be our Patron the Honourable Mary Gaudron QC, the first woman appointed to the High Court of Australia.

This will be the first conference of its type in Australia and it has attracted many outstanding speakers from across Australia, who will speak on areas of substantive law. The conference is not intended to address primarily 'women's issues', although some speakers will present papers on topics which will have particular relevance to women. The plenary sessions for the Conference will be on human rights and will cover a diverse variety of subjects, including: the impact of detention on the mental health of detainees;

the role of women in building a democracy after conflict; and human trafficking and slavery in Australia.

The Conference programme also has a further three streams: Property and Finance, Litigation and Corporate Governance. The Conference sessions in these streams will cater for the more specialised interests of registrants.

We have been fortunate in securing as speakers an unprecedented array of outstanding women from the judiciary, Government, academia and private practice. Many of these women are at the pinnacle of their area of expertise. Nicola Roxon MP, the Shadow Federal Attorney General, will be speaking on a human rights topic. Women judges from across Australia will be presenting papers, including Chief Justice Diana Bryant (Family Court), Chief Justice Marilyn Warren (Victorian Supreme Court), and Justice Margaret McMurdo (President of the Court of Appeal Queensland). From Government we have speaking: Jennie Granger, Second Commissioner of Taxation; Jennifer McNeil, Commissioner for the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission; and Rayne

de Gruchy, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Government Solicitor.

The conference is being organised by Sydney based DC Conferences and it will be held at the Sydney Sheraton on the Park Hotel. Registration and welcome drinks will be on the evening of Thursday 28 September 2006. New South Wales Supreme Court Chief Justice Spigelman will be attending the welcome drinks and will welcome delegates to the conference. The conference will then proceed on Friday 29 and Saturday 30 September 2006. The conference dinner is planned for the Saturday night.

The Conference promises to be an exciting and stimulating event and I encourage you to join us in Sydney. The Conference will be a marvelous opportunity to hear great speakers, to meet other lawyers from around Australia and to catch up with old friends. For registration details contact [www.dconferences.com.au/awl](http://www.dconferences.com.au/awl) or visit the AWL website [www.womenlawyers.org.au](http://www.womenlawyers.org.au).

**Caroline Kirton**  
**President**  
**Australian Women Lawyers**

*On behalf of the Women Barristers Association,  
we extend our congratulations to the VWL on  
its tenth birthday!*



**Message to VWL from the  
Women Barristers' Association**

**By Simone Jacobson, Barrister**

**2005 Convenor, Women  
Barristers' Association**

Coinciding with 10 years of your logo, WBA this year has launched its logo and banner (on a light green background). The WBA logo, like VWL's logo is purple, but bears the ribbon that ties briefs together. The WBA logo symbolises the tying together or unification by WBA of various parts of the legal community with the wider community. The work of VWL has been of great importance to WBA in achieving this goal.

VWL has forged ahead in its ten years of existence. VWL has been exceptionally well organised, and has put together groundbreaking research, recently in the area of flexible work practices (with the 360 Degree Report). The time and effort put into such reports means firms have to take them seriously and accommodate the needs of women working in the law in order to retain their services in the longer-term.

VWL's website and its publications are a huge resource for lawyers, law firms and journalists for legal publications.

WBA has had the pleasure in working together with VWL in

organising three annual Meet and Greet functions in 2004, 2005 and 2006, the purpose being to enable women solicitors and women barristers to meet each other and get to know each other better, which is hoped to translate into the development of a valuable resource for women solicitors and more work for women barristers. The most recent Meet and Greet function included a fashion-parade on a catwalk, with models including VWL and WBA members.

WBA has also worked with VWL in organising the Women Lawyer Achievement Awards held bi-annually at Parliament House. The third Women Lawyer Achievement Awards are being held in May 2007.

WBA congratulates VWL on its efforts in the past ten years, and looks forward to working with VWL over the next ten years to come. Through sharing of experiences with VWL, and by continuing to organise joint events, WBA with VWL aspires to and aims to achieve the advancement of the interests of women in the legal profession.

# interview:

## *Former Chief Justice and Kriss Will*

BY KATHRYN HAMILL - SOLICITOR, RUSSELL KENNEDY

**His Honour John Phillips, the former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and Kriss Will, consultant and one of VWL's founding members, spoke to Portia about their roles in the founding of VWL.**

The first edition of Portia featured an interview with His Honour John Phillips, the (now former) Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and VWL's first patron. His Honour was asked for his reaction to the suggestion that it was 'inappropriate' to have a man as patron of VWL; his response was: "It is important that the Chief Justice be seen to be strongly supporting the advancement of women in the legal profession – it just happens that there's a male in the job at the moment!"

*“His Honour has a longstanding interest in the development of women in the legal profession, and has devoted considerable time and effort to help create, and help VWL achieve, its goals”*

Apart from simply occupying the correct 'job' at the time, His Honour was not simply a figurehead of the Association. He has a longstanding interest in the development of women in the legal profession, and has devoted considerable time and effort to help create, and help VWL achieve, its goals.

Much has been said and written of the "old school tie" of the legal profession, and the discrimination

faced by those who did not own a tie was not lost on the young John Phillips. His Honour recalls when he joined the bar, it had around 75 members, so "the person with whom you read took you around and literally introduced you to every person. But I was told there was no reason to meet Mrs Rosanove, who had chambers 'up there somewhere'. As it happened, I had a number of junior briefs with Joan Rosanove. I didn't do a great deal; she had a very long gold cigarette holder, and I was allowed to light her cigarettes, but not much else. She was not only a very good advocate, but also a very interesting woman. There was very considerable prejudice against her, and against Miss Molly Kingston", who joined the bar soon after His Honour and who "also had a very successful practice".

His Honour's interest in the plight of women in the profession was also influenced by his choice to practice almost exclusively in criminal law – both as a solicitor advocate and after joining the bar. Despite being President of the Criminal Bar Association, which was "a very effective body underneath a peak body, which really advanced the fortunes of the criminal bar significantly... if you told someone you did criminal work, a very faint expression of disapproval would go over their features."

In 1993 - by which time His Honour had reached the pinnacle of his profession - he was invited, with several other members of the profession, to contribute to the 'Women in the Legal Profession'

seminar organised by the Law Institute's Young Lawyers' Section to consider the difficulties women faced in advancing their careers in the profession.

*“Quite early on, I must have been impetuous, because I was talking about a 'Victorian Women Lawyers' group and the other members said, 'Not yet, we need to do some more work – we need to ascertain the degree of support'”*

Following the seminar, the group continued to meet, in what His Honour describes as "a hot and stuffy room" on the sixth floor of the Law Institute. His Honour recalls the group's first task "was to prepare a manifesto of various points which, if implemented, would make the advancement of women in the profession easier. We prepared a document with about eight or nine headings, and we drafted a supporting paper for it, which went to the Law Institute Council, which adopted it as Law Institute policy.

"Quite early on, I must have been impetuous, because I was talking about a 'Victorian Women Lawyers' group and the other members said, 'Not yet, we need to do some more work – we need to ascertain the degree of support'. I had done a bit of research and there had been a Victorian Women Lawyers' society, I think in the 1940s and 1950s, but it had faded away. So we continued to talk about women's matters, and to judge the degree of support, it was decided to hold a meeting at the Law Institute".



His Honour, former Chief Justice John Harber Phillips & Kriss Will

Kriss was asked to speak at the meeting, which was scheduled to be held at the Law Institute basement in late November 1994, given her experience as Practice Manager and Human Resources Manager of a progressive city law firm. She was happy to do, but was sceptical about the level of support that could be expected: "I said you must be kidding – you're running something on a Friday night in November and you expect people to go? People go out to drinks in warm weather!"

*“His Honour asked those assembled, “Would someone like to make history by moving that Victorian Women Lawyers be formed?””*

Despite these expectations, the issue of women's advancement within the legal profession clearly struck a chord, as the meeting was attended by more than 200 people, and quickly became "standing room only". His Honour says, "We were so encouraged by the attendance that it was moved that night and resolved that a

Working Party be established". Kriss recalls His Honour was eager to formalise the Working Party into a formal organisation, but that the other members did not want to press the creation of such a group at that stage, and continued their work after the meeting, focussing on portfolios such as publicity, membership and work practices for a further year or so before a further meeting was held at the Law Institute to determine whether sufficient support existed to create VWL. This meeting was similarly well attended. His Honour chaired the meeting, and recalls it well for a number of reasons. The first was the auspicious occasion when he asked those assembled, "Would someone like to make history by moving that Victorian Women Lawyers be formed?"

The second, less auspicious moment took place as His Honour remained on stage completing some notes after the meeting had adjourned and attendees were enjoying refreshments in another room. The 'stage' from which the meeting

was held was constructed from a number of moveable 'cubes', and those on stage sat on stackable plastic chairs. His Honour says, "I must have moved my chair, because the chair legs went down a crack between the cubes. I went down and the chair jammed on front of me. I lay there for a while wondering what to do - very grateful no one was around. Then I heard the clickety-clack of high heels and Kriss appeared and said, 'Can I help you judge?' I said, 'Yes - get this off me!'"

In a telling example of the influence His Honour's name wielded, Kriss' call the following day to the then Law Institute CEO, Ian Dunn, to advise him that the Law Institute was "very close to having a personal injury claim made against [them] by the Chief Justice" resulted in the stage being fixed "within a day".

Fortunately, this shaky start did not prove an omen for the future of VWL, as His Honour recalls being "pleasantly astonished by a very rapid increase in membership and involvement after the meeting; I think it got to several hundred

within a matter of weeks". This was all before a formal launch of VWL, and whilst the founding members were in the process of drafting VWL's constitution and its objectives – a process which, according to His Honour took "a long time" given the number of lawyers involved.

***“Some of the women that started the organization were well on their way in their careers, but went on to spectacular things. I think learning some of those ropes in a safe environment was really very important”***

Kriss says the founding members "were very conscious that we didn't want to be a personality-driven association. It was very good in the end, because the longevity of the organisation is at threat if it is personality driven. We said things like, you must be a lawyer to be Convenor. I pushed for that, being the only person there who was not a lawyer, by saying you don't want to get hijacked by people with good intentions but who dilute what you are trying to achieve".

His Honour notes that the time VWL was created, the absence of women from leadership posts – including the absence of female judges in the Supreme Court – was a recurring theme: "I was regularly asked about it by journalists and I'd say, 'There are no women in the Court, but is there a woman the editor or a major newspaper or the CEO of a television station?' So it was a pretty constant theme, really. I think that kept it [the impetus for VWL] going, plus the individual successes of women in that climate got all the more prominence".

VWL's committee structure was created in light of this trend, and was designed to enable its members to take on leadership

roles. Kriss says, "We created the Committee structure to try to bring women into the organisation with an interest, which might later develop into a leadership role. We felt that many women didn't know the basics of how Committees ran, so we deliberately made a very large Committee structure to give as many women as possible an opportunity to learn those skills". Kriss believes the success of this structure is already evident: "Some of the women that started the organization were well on their way in their careers, but went on to spectacular things. I think learning some of those ropes in a safe environment was really very important".

***“I certainly had my fill of official engagements which were very, very boring, but the VWL functions didn't fall into that category, and tried to go to as many as I could. I don't think there's much point being Patron unless you get actively involved”***

His Honour's continued support of VWL as Patron gave VWL a welcome boost in publicity in its formative years. Despite the vast number of official engagements he was required to attend, His Honour made time to regularly attend VWL events, saying, "I certainly had my fill of official engagements which were very, very boring, but the VWL functions didn't fall into that category, and tried to go to as many as I could. I don't think there's much point being Patron unless you get actively involved."

As Kriss explains, His Honour's presence at VWL carried with it immeasurable advantages for VWL: "if you ever want to put a cat among the pigeons, say the Chief Justice is about to arrive at your

firm. [Firms hosting VWL events] had to tidy up before he arrived! It was really good for the profile of VWL, because if the Chief Justice was going to set foot in a firm's premises, the managing partner had to know; that's standard protocol".

Kriss recalls on one occasion "all hell broke loose" at a sponsor firm, as "the managing partner had been called away and wasn't able to welcome His Honour when he arrived". Kriss maintains that the current Chief Justice's commitment as Patron of VWL "continues to be very useful in terms of making sure that the profile is at the high levels of the firms, which it needs to be to effect change".

The past ten years have seen many changes for the fortunes of women in the legal profession in Victoria. From the time when His Honour was left professionally embarrassed when the visiting then-President of Ireland, Mary Robinson, when being introduced to the Court's judges, asked, "And where are your lady Justices?" (to which His Honour responded, "My wife said you'd ask that!"), the Court has seen the appointment of not only its first female judges, but its first female Chief Justice, and indeed, the legal profession as a whole has welcomed the appointment of women to several prominent posts.

Despite these advances, His Honour believes the objectives of VWL are still relevant today, and in VWL's next ten years would like to see membership double, "with strong links in regional areas. But otherwise, adhere to a formula which has been a proven success".

# Convenor: *Deanne Weir*



**D**eanne was employed by Telstra during 1991-1999 in a variety of roles, travelling to London for a year in 1994-1995 to complete her Masters at the University of London. She lived in New Zealand from 1999 to the end of 2001 whilst working for TelstraSaturn as Director of Corporate Development, and joined AUSTAR in January 2002, where she has responsibility for Programming, Corporate Strategy, Corporate Communications and legal and regulatory matters.

Can it really be 10 years since we decided to launch VWL? So much has changed and yet so much is still the same. Women are increasingly successful within business and the legal profession but the search for balance continues as we realise that trying to be Superwoman was a dumb idea, and that achieving balance for anyone is not just about what we do but the attitude of our partners at home and our colleagues and management at work.

*“One of the dangers of studying a vocationally oriented degree such as a Law degree is that from graduation we are tempted to think of ourselves as being limited by that vocation”*

While that search will go on for women and an increasing number of men, there is no doubt that a legal background is a very useful tool for a successful career outside of the legal profession. One of the dangers of studying a vocationally oriented degree such as a Law degree is that from graduation we are tempted to think of ourselves as being limited by that vocation. Yet lawyers have excellent training for business success; we are taught to think analytically, to organise, to consider all sides of an issue, to never assume, to look at contingencies. Indeed, one of the frustrations lawyers often have when involved with business transactions is a feeling that they could do more than just advise, and that they want to have an input on business issues. Working closely with corporate clients but within a firm is a beginning, but working in-house as part of the legal team takes you a step further. Even

*“In my earlier career I would never have imagined being able to move beyond the law in this way, but certainly the skills and experience I have had as a lawyer are invaluable to this broader role”*

so, the real way to have impact on a business is to take the step beyond just being an advisor and take on an actual business role.

Since my time as Convenor of VWL in 1996, my own career has moved into broader territory than legal issues. While I am still general counsel and company secretary of AUSTAR, an ASX 200 communications company, I also look after corporate strategy and business development, corporate affairs, and programming. Being responsible for decisions and new business initiatives, whether they turn out to be right or wrong, is an exciting opportunity. Every day is different; we are dealing with everything from new business strategies, to investor relations, to discussions with the media, or analysing television productions. This involves a huge amount of switching between left and right brain, and is a lot of fun. In my earlier career I would never have imagined being able to move beyond the law in this way, but certainly the skills and experience I have had as a lawyer are invaluable to this broader role. As lawyers, we have a toolbox of skills that can be used in many ways. Those skills give us a lot of options for the approach to our careers. Legal firms need to provide an opportunity for women lawyers to use those skills and have a reasonable approach to life, or they may face increasing skills shortages. There are certainly many alternative opportunities for women lawyers to pursue.

# Convenor: *Georgina Frost*



**G**eorgina was a Senior Associate with Minter Ellison in 1998 when she became the second Convenor of VWL. Her first child (Evie) was born in February 1998 so Georgina was able to combine her roles of Convenor and new mum while on maternity leave. Georgina returned to work with Minter Ellison in September 1998 on a part time basis. Following the birth of her second child (Dougal) in 2000, Georgina returned to work with Minter Ellison in its first job-share role for professional staff. She has remained with Minter Ellison as a Senior Associate (Dispute Resolution) in a job-share arrangement since that time.

I looked back at my year as Convenor and realised that the projects and activities undertaken by VWL at that time are reflective of the high level of output of the Association each year in order to meet its objects and effect change within the legal profession. For a decade VWL has identified,

highlighted and taken steps to eradicate discrimination against women generally, and within the legal profession in particular. VWL's activities and reports have had an impact on the Victorian and Australian legal profession. The work of VWL and the New South Wales Women Lawyers in particular have raised awareness in relation to issues and barriers faced by

*“For a decade VWL has identified, highlighted and taken steps to eradicate discrimination against women generally, and within the legal profession in particular”*

women in the legal profession both now and in the past decade. The continuation of this work is critical in a profession where there is now a belief among many male lawyers, particularly those in management and leadership positions, that gender bias is a thing of the past and that there is no longer a 'glass ceiling' or barriers to women's career progress in the profession.

VWL's activities during my year as Convenor are representative of the level of activity and achievement by VWL each year since its launch.

By December 1998 of its second year, VWL had over 450 full and associate members: male and female, solicitors, barristers, academics, students and non-lawyer professionals. There were seven active committees

with over 50 participants.

In September 1998 VWL launched the revised flexible work practices report 'Living and Working Together- Looking to the Future'. The original publication was produced by the Women in the Legal Profession sub-committee two years earlier. The report contained guidelines addressing practical methods law firms could adopt to introduce flexible work practices, as well as the perceived barriers to their introduction.

The 'Taking up the Challenge' project was commenced in 1998 with a literature survey which looked research into work practices

*“1998 was a Federal election year. VWL actively lobbied for change through public comment in relation to a number of significant issues including cutbacks to the childcare rebate, support for the tax deductibility of childcare, and the impact cutbacks to Legal Aid would have on women in our community”*

conducted by various organisations, including the Victorian Law Foundation and the Law Institute of Victoria, for the purpose of preparing a comprehensive report about the results of such surveys. The aim of the project was to: address issues such as why lawyers are dissatisfied working in the legal profession; explore the link

## Georgina Frost Cont.

between dissatisfaction, turnover and productivity; and ask, are there also gender and age related issues? The ultimate aim of the project was to create an action plan for change by summarising major findings from various research sources. VWL obtained a grant from the Victoria Law Foundation to assist with the project's funding. Gabby Trifiletti was contracted to undertake the research for the first stage of the project and the final report was launched in 1999.

1998 was a Federal election year. VWL actively lobbied for change through public comment in relation to a number of significant issues including cutbacks to the childcare rebate, support for the tax deductibility of childcare, and the impact cutbacks to Legal Aid would have on women in our community. VWL commented on the State Liberal Government's draft 'Two Year Action Plan for Women 1998 – 2000', highlighting: the need for equitable access to justice and the detrimental effect of the diminished access to Legal Aid; improving the physical aspects of courts and courtrooms, (eg: to accommodate people with parenting responsibilities); policing issues, including addressing the need for cultural change within the police force and the attitudes of some police officers to their female colleagues; and the need for women to take up leadership positions within the private and public sectors.

VWL also supported the Women Barristers' Association in their submission to the Victorian

Bar Council in response to the publication of the report 'Equality of Opportunity for Women at the Victorian Bar', in particular in response to the report's findings regarding gender bias in briefing practices. VWL and WBA have remained committed to increasing networking opportunities between the two associations with the aim of increasing our members' knowledge of women barristers practising in specific areas of expertise.

*“It is satisfying to look at the progress of the very committed group of women from the 1998 VWL Executive, not only through the Association but also their careers in the legal profession”*

The Christmas Party in December 1997 saw the launch of the VWL video 'Willpower'. The video format, scripting and interviewing was undertaken by a number of members of the Communications Committee. The video was produced by Video Education Australasia and featured the careers of five prominent Victorian women lawyers, celebrating their achievements and providing information and motivation to women about to start their legal careers, as well as those who were in practice.

None of the association's achievements would have been possible without the support of our sponsors and the dynamic group of committed people who

were prepared to contribute their time and energy voluntarily to achieve VWL's aims.

It is satisfying to look at the progress of the very committed group of women from the 1998 VWL Executive, not only through the Association but also their careers in the legal profession. VWL has provided many women lawyers with support in terms of mentoring, coaching and networking that they have otherwise lacked in their work environment.

Not only does VWL continue to raise the awareness of the legal profession to the issues faced by women lawyers, but it has also developed the tools and methodology to guide implementation of practices to address issues such as workplace flexibility, carer's leave (including paid maternity leave), mentoring of women lawyers, career advancement and development.

However, decisive action is required to affect systematic and long lasting change. The passage of time is not enough. If we adopt the assumption that our society and the legal profession values diversity and the participation of women throughout the workforce, then an organisation which lacks diversity is out of step and probably risks losing business. Law firms certainly risk the loss of trained lawyers, which has been calculated to be as high as \$500,000 per loss. The need for associations such as VWL exists today as much as it did a decade ago.

# Convenor: *Liz Bishop*



**D**uring her time as VWL Convenor, Liz was job-sharing the role of Senior Adviser to the Attorney-General and Minister for Women's Affairs. Following that, she worked as the Secretary to the Rules and Heads of Lists Committees of VCAT and as the Executive Director of the Alliance of Girls Schools. She is currently a Sessional Tutor in the Law and Medicine Faculties at Monash University and completing her doctorate - "Women in the Legal Profession 1996 -2006: A Time of Change or Time Stood Still?" Liz is a member of the board of Stride and the Comfort for Kids Foundation.

The first woman lawyer to complete a law degree at a Victorian university was Floss Greig, but she could not be admitted to practice until the law was changed to remove the restriction of gender by the optimistically named Women's Disabilities Removal Act 1905. Would that it were so easy.

Since then, many other women of intelligence, ability and merit have become members of Victoria's legal profession. But their rise through the ranks of the profession has not been indicative of this ability and merit. The 'disability' of women's entry to practice was removed in 1905, but not the disability of the perception that women remain interlopers in the profession:

*"Any professional group which, for 700 years, has comprised solely men is bound to have inherited attitudes which may sometimes seem unwelcoming to some new entrants. Unwelcoming to people who do not share precisely the same background attitudes and assumptions. Women lawyers. Aboriginal lawyers. Lawyers from non-Anglo Celtic backgrounds. Gay and lesbian lawyers. Lawyers with absolutely no family or other connection with our profession. Just as our country is changing, so too is its legal profession. It is inevitable that the new entrants will alter the ethos and the culture of the legal profession. But it will take time."*<sup>1</sup>

It has been said that women are disadvantaged not because of lack of merit, but because others are ignorant of their ability.<sup>2</sup> Ignorant or otherwise, it was clear from a survey published by the Law Institute of Victoria in 1993 that:

*"In spite of close to equal numbers of male and female graduates over the past five years, and a significant minority percentage before that, women still only make up a relatively small percentage of*

*solicitors in private practice. For a number of reasons, women elect not to continue, or even start to practice in the private profession...*

*One of these reasons might be their lack of progress in the law firm environment... far fewer women than men enter into partnership at any time in the full practice cycle. Of those who do enter into partnerships in the first 5 years in practice, 11% are women and 89% are men... All other things being equal, to properly reflect power and numbers in this bracket (5 years or less practice), one would expect to see 154 female partners [as opposed to 45]. In other words, women are dramatically underrepresented in the younger partnership stakes."*<sup>3</sup>

Not surprisingly, this trend of under-representation of women amongst partnerships was no better for those who had been in practice for longer. In fact, the percentage of female partners who had been in practice for between ten and fifteen years dropped to eight per cent.<sup>4</sup>

This study raised a number of questions about why women were electing not to enter or to persist with private practice and whether the legal profession was failing to recognise the merit of women as partners within law firms.

With a high proportion of young female members, unsurprisingly, it was considered important by the Young Lawyers Section to follow this question through. Accordingly, under the auspices of the Section, the 'Women in the

## Liz Bishop Cont.

Legal Profession' (WILP) Seminar was held on 26 November 1993.

That seminar brought together a number of women in prominent roles within the legal profession, including the Attorney-General, partners of law firms, a magistrate, QC, practice manager of a law firm, and prominent men including the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court (who was to become the Patron of Victorian Women Lawyers), and the President of the Law Institute of Victoria.

As well as discussion of the statistical evidence of the disproportionate negative correlation between the number of women admitted to practice and those who, in the typical five to seven year time frame, do not proceed to senior positions in private practice, there was anecdotal evidence of the barriers to women in private practice, and the often overt discrimination they experienced.

One speaker related the following incident:

*"I was discussing the firm's recruitment policy for six new articulated clerks for the next year with the personnel manager. I was informed that not only the top six, but in fact the top twelve applicants had been female. The firm had decided to accept three candidates from either sex. This 50/50 split was regarded as progressive, as there had been three women among the previous year's seven articulated clerks, and one woman among*

*the five the year before that."*<sup>5</sup>

Examples of the 'systematic discrimination' believed to lead to the invisible barrier halting women's progression in the legal profession included exclusion from career opportunities and from marketing initiatives; allocation of inferior or limited work types and experience; poorer supervision and lack of mentoring; and lack of network nurturing.<sup>6</sup>

Another reason given for the 'glass ceiling' phenomenon was:

*"[t]he reticence of law firms to come to terms with the flexibility of work practices required to facilitate the movement in and out of the practice of women lawyers during child-bearing and rearing years without penalty to the women lawyer's career progress."*<sup>7</sup>

The seminar recognised *"the plain unpalatable fact that the proportion of women in our profession... has not been reflected by corresponding professional advancement."*<sup>8</sup>

The first step in addressing any problem is to acknowledge that there is a problem in the first place. It was suggested that in some ways the problem had been hidden because people were not necessarily aware of issues they had in common: *"people working as individuals, they feel powerless, they do not necessarily know that these problems are widespread and can affect other people as well."*<sup>9</sup>

The Seminar itself was a very public acknowledgment of the problem by people in institutions

of authority - the Chief Justice, the President of the Law Institute and the Attorney-General - as well as by the constituency whose prospects were limited by the 'glass ceiling' - women.

The Seminar also attempted to canvas the structural change needed to bring about more flexible workplaces. It was noted that the cost of training lawyers should be an incentive to keeping them rather than letting them go simply because they have family responsibilities and want to work part-time. Strategies to create more flexible workplaces to enable women and men to do this were discussed.

The upshot of the seminar was a resolution to establish a working party with the aim of helping women lawyers break the glass ceiling by providing guidelines and strategies for change within law firms as well as support and mentoring for women lawyers.

The WILP Working Party met on many occasions over the following two and a half years, with the continuing support of Chief Justice Phillips, who often brought along his lunch and joined in the meetings.

When it was decided that in order to lobby for and implement the changes suggested by the Seminar a formal organisation would need to be formed, WILP became the Steering Committee for VWL.

VWL was launched in May 1996 with the Chief Justice as its Patron, sponsorship from several large Victorian law firms and a

membership of several hundred, predominantly women.

At the launch of the organisation it was said:

***“It will be the role of the new VWL to give voice to the interests of women; to overcome resistance to their full participation in the legal profession and to motivate those who can remove the barriers to do so.”***<sup>10</sup>

Overall, the aims are positive - to identify problems with the current system, so that the organisation might develop strategies to bring about solutions. Solutions that will not only benefit women lawyers but, indeed, any lawyer who wants more from life than a single-minded, all encompassing dedication to practice.

Part of the agenda of VWL has been to promote the difference of women and the value that their equal participation in the legal profession can provide, rather than merely to advocate entrance into the boys' club. The chief method of achieving this has been to provide practical solutions to barriers to their equal participation in the legal profession in Victoria, as well as a supportive network for women lawyers:

***“Broadly, the difference between the boys club and women lawyers' organisations is that the latter attempt to expose the exclusiveness of the legal profession, while the former seeks to maintain it.”***<sup>11</sup>

It is not just equal or greater numbers of members of the profession that women lawyers' associations are working towards, but equality of opportunity and

promotion through the profession. Not equality in the sense of merely achieving success equal to men within the established framework of the profession, but equality in a sense that accepts and celebrates the different strengths and approaches that women bring to the law.

For this reason, WILP decided VWL should have a Convenor rather than a President or Chair. It was considered that “Convenor” was a more inclusive term that harnessed the approach of a team working together towards a common goal.

It was also considered important that the Executive Committee of VWL continue to evolve, with the Convenor remaining on the Executive for the year following her term and then be unable to stand for re-election. In this way it was considered the passion for the causes of VWL would remain, and the opportunities for running an organisation and the accompanying skills and network gained would be available to all who shared that passion.

The close links of the members of WILP have not only led to lasting friendships but, also, to a vibrant organisation.

VWL was never intended to work in isolation from government and the profession nor of itself to implement change. VWL can, however, ‘keep gender on the agenda’ and create an environment for change, and drive that change with an interest that no other group, perhaps, shares as wholeheartedly.

1. The Honourable Justice Michael Kirby, AC CMG, Address to Women Lawyers Association of New South Wales, 18 June 1997, available at AWL website, [www.womenlawyers.org.au](http://www.womenlawyers.org.au)
2. The Honourable Justice Gaudron “A Happy Coincidence of Self Interest and the Public Interest” speech given at the launch of the Victorian Bar Council's launch of the Equality of Opportunity for Women report, 9 October, 1998
3. Carol Bartlett, Address to “Women in the Legal Profession Seminar” 26 November 1993, Transcript of Proceedings, p 8
4. Ibid, p 9
5. Rebecca Borden, address to the “Women in the Legal Profession” Seminar, op cit, p 18
6. Genevieve Overell, “The Glass ceiling – how and why” “Women in the Legal Profession” Seminar, op cit, pp 25-28
7. Ibid, p 29
8. The Hon John Harber Phillips, Chief Justice, Supreme Court of Victoria, Introduction, “Women in the Legal Profession” Seminar, 26 November 1993
9. Jane Patrick, op cit, p 45
10. Eve Mahlab, Speech given at the launch of VWL, May 1996. A women lawyers' organization existed in Victoria in the 1980s. However this organization lapsed prior to the 1990s.
11. Jennifer Batrouney, SC “Twenty Years of Women in the Law” paper presented at “Challenge, Change and Cha Cha Cha: A Conference on Women, Feminism and the Law”, Queensland 27 October 2004, p 29; K. Towers, “All we want is an opportunity to shine”, The Australian Financial Review, 5 March 2004, p 53.

# Convenor: *Angela Clelland*



**A**ngela joined Mahlab Recruitment in 1996. At the time of her term as Convenor of VLW, Angela was a Senior Consultant. In 2001 she was appointed Manager – Corporate (Vic). She specialises in executive general management roles with a legal focus, and general counsel, senior corporate lawyer and intermediate corporate lawyer roles in all industry sectors. She also provides consulting services, has extensive experience advising lawyers on managing their careers, and is a regular contributor to in-house and external publications on career management and the corporate legal market.

I am delighted to be part of VWL's 10-year celebrations, having attended the launch of the association in 1996.

In my year as Convenor in 2000, VWL's particular focus was to promote the findings of "Taking Up the Challenge", a report commissioned and launched by

*"In my final Convenor's column for Portia, I made the comment that VWL had made a good start by successfully increasing the level of discussion, awareness and understanding of the issues affecting the progression of women lawyers, but that we still had some way to go... I believe this is still the case"*

VWL in 1999. The report confirmed gender bias in the form of direct and indirect discrimination against women lawyers. It found that while women and men were entering the profession in almost equal numbers, their career paths were diverging dramatically within only five years of practice, with women lawyers being seriously under-represented at partner level, with just 12% appointed as partners.

*"It is pleasing to see that many law firms have adopted policies relating to flexible work practices"*

Employee women lawyers were found to be the least satisfied of the legal profession and were leaving private practice to join the corporate and public sectors. Sexual discrimination and cultural bias were found to be the main causes, but the failure of the profession to address lifestyle and family issues was also found to be a major contributing factor.

VWL distributed the report to all law firms with two or more partners in Victoria in order to highlight the issues and start the debate. We conducted a seminar, which aimed to provide practical advice on how to encourage change within the workplace, and hosted a major symposium for people in a position to lead change within the profession. The forum consisted of managing partners, general managers and human resources managers of law firms and members of the profession's various lobby and interest groups. In my final Convenor's column for Portia, I made the comment that VWL had made a good start by successfully increasing the level of discussion, awareness

*"Taking Up the Challenge" confirmed gender bias in the form of direct and indirect discrimination against women lawyers"*

and understanding of the issues affecting the progression of women lawyers, but that we still had some way to go. Despite the strong commitment and continuing efforts of VWL since my time as Convenor, I believe this is still the case.

It is pleasing to see that many law firms have adopted policies relating to flexible work practices, introduced mentoring and networking programs for their female lawyers, and that some have appointed part-time partners. However, this year's

partnership announcements made for disappointing reading. The Australian Financial Review partnership survey published in the newspaper on Friday 7 July 2006 highlighted “an alarming drop in the number of female partner appointments in the past year, despite a large number of appointments overall”. Since “Taking Up the Challenge” was launched, men and women have continued to study law and enter the profession in equal numbers, but this has not resulted in a significant increase in the number of women lawyers reaching partnership. The notion that “the numbers will improve; it is just a question of enough time passing”, has proved to be wishful thinking.

*“However, this year’s partnership announcements made for disappointing reading”*

I have interviewed many women lawyers over the 10 years I have worked as a Consultant at Mahlab Recruitment. My general impression is that too much lip service is paid to the programs and policies adopted by law firms, and that while management may recognise the benefits of implementing flexible work practices (ie: retention and higher productivity/satisfaction), they have yet to address the issues through positive concrete solutions with clear benchmarks to be achieved. I hear too often of women lawyers not being offered

*“I have interviewed many women lawyers over the 10 years I have worked as a Consultant at Mahlab Recruitment. My general impression is that too much lip service is paid to the programs and policies adopted by law firms”*

a part-time or flexible arrangement after maternity leave because of that age-old chestnut – that the clients require access 24/7. Many deal with negative attitudes to their so-called “special” arrangements, and tell me that they end up working a 5-day week in 3 days. There is also still a strong perception that your career progression in a law firm is going to be stifled if you work on part-time or flexible basis. Many of my observations were confirmed in the findings of VWL’s most recent report “A 360 Review: Flexible Work Practices”.

The corporate and public sectors remain the real beneficiaries of law firms not addressing the issues, with many women leaving to pursue their careers in these

*“While management may recognise the benefits of implementing flexible work practices (ie: retention and higher productivity/satisfaction), they have yet to address the issues through positive concrete solutions with clear benchmarks to be achieved”*

sectors. Women lawyers, as well as some male lawyers, advise me that their reasons for being attracted to working in-house include the perception that it offers greater work/life balance, a broad range of flexible arrangements and general support and understanding of family responsibilities. That perception is the reality, with many in-house lawyers advising me that these are some of the reasons why they enjoy their roles. I believe law firms would have retained at least some of these women lawyers had they addressed the issues.

Over the past 10 years VWL has been instrumental in researching the issues, has provided practical advice on how they can be addressed, and has generated the discussion. It is now time for the profession to take action.

# Convenor: *Wendy Kayler-Thompson*



**W**endy is an accredited family law specialist. After being a partner in two mid-sized law firms, in May this year and with two other family law specialists, she formed her own family law firm - Forte Family Lawyers. The firm has six lawyers, four of whom are women and one of whom works part-time – perhaps a small example of VWL policies in action! Wendy says setting up her own firm has been a challenging, but also tremendously exciting experience.

The years of my active involvement in VWL are some of my happiest and most fulfilling professional memories. VWL has a long list of achievements in advancing the position of women in the legal profession. One of its achievements which is not often rated, but is in my experience, one of its most enduring contributions, is the model it sets for a professional organisation. In my many years of involvement, there was not a hint of factionalism or internal bickering.

All members of the Executive and sub-committees strove not just for action and outcomes, but also an engaging, caring, happy and fun way of achieving of them. It is one of the reasons why I continue to be very grateful for the opportunity I was given to lead the organization. Whilst undoubtedly it was hard work that had to be done, I personally gained enormously from the experience. I made many friends. I met people in the profession I would not otherwise have had the opportunity to meet and was able to participate in events that helped me grow as a person and as a practitioner.

I have been reflecting on the highlights of my time involved in VWL... and the lowlights. During my year as Convenor, we were involved in four very special events. Justice Kirby of the High Court gave the Lesbia Harford Oration and spoke passionately of the need to increase the numbers of women participating in the higher levels of the legal profession. Cheryl Kernot spoke at the first Professional Women's Alliance luncheon, a loose association of women from a range of professional backgrounds. Professor Lowitja O'Donoghue gave a provoking speech on Aboriginal rights and reconciliation at the Dame Roma Mitchell memorial luncheon. And VWL actively participated in the Millennium Best Practice Conference at the invitation of our then-Patron, Chief Justice Phillips. The conference was attended by over 100 law firm partners and managers and addressed some of the sticky, often unspoken reasons

why women do not progress to the senior ranks within law firms. I recall that last event vividly - the Chief Justice suffered an untimely back injury and I had to present his paper to the audience. The first and last time I could speak as the Chief Justice of Victoria!

I have also been reflecting on some of the more unusual activities I participated in for the cause of VWL. As co-editors of Portia for a couple of years, Karen Streckfuss and I decided to write a series of articles on the places male lawyers go and to which women lawyers are effectively excluded. High on the list was men's clubs, but we decided to start with the unconventional variety - table top dancing clubs. After doing our research, we decided we had to see it for ourselves and made a lunch-time foray to The Men's Gallery. We took some male "protection" and both wore pants suits, which only lead to most of the staff believing we were police officers! It was an experience, to say the least.

And I suppose you would like to know the lowlights? I can still recall the sinking feeling of hearing that the Federal Government had not appointed a female judge to the High Court upon the retirement of Justice Gaudron. It still makes me angry that our government did not think it important that there be a female presence on the bench of our highest Court to preside over a population that is more than 50% female. The second lowlight: a student women's officer at a Law School telling me proudly that she was definitely not a feminist.

# Convenor: *Glenda Beecher*



**G**lenda was a Senior Associate at Maddocks, practising in employment, industrial relations and discrimination law when she was appointed Convenor of VWL. She has since been appointed as a partner of the firm. Glenda is now working part-time in that capacity, having had a child whilst a partner.

It may sound arrogant to say this, but I know flexible partnership does work. I know because I am a partner in a law firm working part-time. It is ironic that I am now living the experience of the report I launched in 2002 as Convenor of VWL entitled 'Flexible Partnership – Making it Work in Law Firms.' At that time I had no plans to have a family. Had you told me then where I would be now, I wouldn't have believed you. But here I am and I'm able to talk, from practical experience, about bringing that VWL Report into a life experience.

My experience has exposed to me a significant issue not discussed in the report: returning to the practice of law after a period of maternity

leave. For a partner, this is more difficult than first imagined.

In 1998 Marea Hickie brought these difficulties into the public domain when her experience returning to practice part-time as a partner in a law firm was scrutinized as part of legal proceedings against the firm. Ms Hickie made claims including that during her period of maternity leave, the firm:

- did not appoint another experienced or senior solicitor to maintain her practice;
- transferred her practice to another partner; and
- upon her return, required her to commence practice with virtually no file base or work-in-progress.

I believe this is the biggest challenge of commencing a family while a partner in a law firm. Where the absence on maternity leave is more than negligible, the maintenance and continuance of the partner's practice is hard - really hard.

Private law firms make little use of short-term contract legal staff. This means the person/s responsible for maintaining a partner's practice during her absence is usually another practitioner in the firm. The skills and experience of this person are critical to how well the partner's practice is maintained, or whether it is dissipated. Dissipation also results from the conflict between prioritising the person's own practice versus the partner's practice, knowing it must be returned to the partner at some stage. The attitude of the firm and that person is critical to whether the practice is in fact returned to the partner once they recommence work. To

further complicate matters, there is often a blurring of which work is attributable to the partner's practice and the person's own practice.

If, upon return from maternity leave, one's practice (or the work that flows from it during the period of leave) is not returned, the partner will need to establish a new practice. That is because work is not *delegated* to a partner. This fact distinguishes the more difficult position of a partner returning from maternity leave as opposed to a solicitor in the same position, and explains why so few partners in fact make that return successfully.

Building a practice is difficult at the best of times. It is nearly impossible when a woman has returned from a period of maternity leave: often still breastfeeding (ie: hormone affected), attending to a child who wakes regularly at night (ie: sleep deprived) and otherwise has a large number of responsibilities outside of the workplace (ie: unable to attend multiple evening marketing activities).

In Ms Hickie's case, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission concluded that "basic maternity leave policies should allow work practices to be developed which enable a partner, associate or employee to maintain their professional career and practice during and after maternity leave, with the full support of the firm".

My advice to anyone planning a family and a career – get a job with a supportive firm or make the changes now to convert your firm into one. If all else fails, work on Career Plan B!

# Convenor: *Joanna Renkin*



**Jo Renkin is a Senior Associate at Lander & Rogers working 2 ½ days per week, and is enjoying this “juggling whilst standing still”.**

Being Convenor of VWL makes one aware of the wonderful job VWL does advocating on behalf of women lawyers, challenging the profession, researching matters of importance, seeking new pathways forward for women lawyers and providing opportunities to meet others beyond one's desk. It is exciting to be involved in VWL and have the opportunity to work with and be inspired by others in the profession.

The year I was Convenor coincided with the birth of my first daughter. Three years later, I find myself with two. Like most working mums, my days are made up of juggling time with the family, managing the running of the household and navigating a career.

How does an ambitious female lawyer deal with her career ambitions after making the choice to have children and commit to part-time work? There is no escape

from the dilemmas posed by working part-time as a lawyer. From the domestic decisions: should I work or stay at home? Who will look after the children? To the office tensions: can I work part-time? Do I have a practice? How do I maintain it? How do I make partner? In my case, I am extremely grateful for the positive experience I have had in my workplace, having returned to work part-time after taking maternity leave (twice). There are many others not as fortunate as I.

*“ I am extremely grateful for the positive experience I have had in my workplace, having returned to work part-time after taking maternity leave (twice). There are many others not as fortunate as I ”*

Although great advances have been made in allowing flexible working practices to develop within many firms, when it comes to promotion to partnership I still observe that part-time solicitors are not being appointed. In this respect, things haven't changed much for part-time solicitors. Whilst part-time partners have a different but no less complex reality, it seems to me that firms are still grappling with the inherent tension between the traditional measurement of success (profit requirements, client base, business building) and a part-time commitment. The result is that I do not know of any part-time solicitor who has been offered partnership or indeed expects to be offered it until she returns to full-time (or nearly full-time) work.

It is difficult to maintain a client base and a practice if extended periods of leave are taken. Of course, both are vital to progression. Certainly prior to taking leave, time and effort needs to be spent putting in place arrangements to ensure that a practice survives on return to the office. Where a firm views you in relation to your colleagues also has an impact. By working part-time, are you considered to be on the partnership track or standing next to it, watching as it moves on without you? VWL reports have highlighted the impact of attitudes towards part-time work, (many of which are based on false assumptions), and the difficulties encountered in the search for promotion for part-time solicitors.

*“ It seems to me that firms are still grappling with the inherent tension between the traditional measurement of success and a part-time commitment ”*

Announcements in the press laud firms who have appointed a part-time partner to their ranks. But I am curious to know whether these appointments are made after the solicitor took on the part-time role (part-time solicitor to part-time partner) or whether the part-time hours are adopted after appointment to partnership (full-time solicitor becomes part-time partner or indeed full-time partner becomes part-time partner).

The promotion of a female solicitor already working part-time to partnership would I think be a really big step forward, and a welcome one!

# Convenor: *Sarah Coffey*



**While Convenor of VWL, Sarah was working part-time for Middletons on secondment as in-house Counsel to NEC. In May 2005, she commenced at B2B Lawyers in Abbotsford as a part-time solicitor in commercial practice. She works three days a week.**

Working part-time in a small firm presents its own set of challenges. By small firms, I mean a firm with less than eight partners. A lot of lawyers I came in touch with whilst I was Convenor of VWL were working or hoping to work part-time. They were, almost without exception, anxious about this decision, concerned about their practice and their standing within the firm, and almost resigned about their prospects for promotion.

One of the biggest difficulties faced by lawyers seeking to move out of the mainstream pressure-cooker environment of any firm, is keeping sight of your own value.

We all have very valuable skills, we have experience and by the very fact

that we want to come back to work, we are demonstrating our loyalty and our drive. The hardest part is persuading our employers of this.

*“One of the biggest difficulties faced by lawyers seeking to move out of the mainstream pressure-cooker environment of any firm, is keeping sight of your own value”*

However, in my view, it is much easier to ensure you are heard when you are working in a small firm. Your clients will know you and can know the hours you work, your principals know you and will eventually *learn* the hours you work. Your value is immediate and unmissable. However, there are less people to help you with the tail end of things, you need to be prepared to work out of the office, and most importantly, you need to be prepared to insist on realistic time frames.

*“We all have very valuable skills, we have experience and by the very fact that we want to come back to work, we are demonstrating our loyalty and our drive. The hardest part is persuading our employers of this”*

There are a few things I would seriously recommend if you want to work part-time:

1. Know your own value. I am not talking about how much

you bill, but how important it is to the firm that you are there - your skills, level of experience, commercial nous, drive for justice, relationship with clients, the speed with which you can turn work around, supervision of junior solicitors. Whatever it is that motivates you, make it loud and clear.

2. Be realistic about what you can do. It is going to take a while for your employer to get used to the fact that you are not available all the hours God sends. Communicate clearly what time frames you need, and if you cannot meet them, let everyone know as early as possible.
3. Be prepared to be available on the telephone out-of-hours. This is an unavoidable reality of being a lawyer working part-time. If you expect anything else you are going to be constantly disappointed.
4. Speak up for yourself. If you do not have a good relationship with your principal, try to find someone who does and who is willing to help you.
5. Get involved with VWL. You will meet women who will inspire, encourage and challenge you.
6. Know your own value.

# Convenor: *Rosemary Peavey*



**R**osemary is corporate lawyer with AWB Limited, focussing on major commercial disputes, chartering matters and international sale and marketing issues. Prior to joining AWB she was at Blake Dawson Waldron for 5 ½ years. She has been involved with VWL for the past 8 years and held a number of different positions, including Convenor in 2005. She has a BA, BSW and LLB (Hons), all from Monash University.

About 12 months before becoming Convenor of VWL, I moved from private practice to in-house counsel. Aside from wanting to work as in-house counsel, I had a perception that this move would enable some flexibility for commitments outside of work. How wrong was I? Very. My legal skills were in commercial litigation, and I had moved to a company that introduced a significant workload with many interesting and challenging issues. It simply meant that when I was Convenor I had an extremely busy year, so I had to manage my time

effectively to focus on the significant issues for VWL at that time. This was all made possible by the incredible support and motivation of the women who made up the VWL Executive for 2005.

“*Aside from wanting to work as in-house counsel, I had a perception that this move would enable some flexibility for commitments outside of work. How wrong was I? Very*”

I have remained in-house, as I enjoy working closely with the business. You get to know the people within the business and how the business runs, which puts you in a better position to provide commonsense legal solutions to commercial issues.

It is often suggested that there is a lot more flexibility in the workplace for in-house counsel compared to private practice. My personal experience suggests that a lot depends on the management and business culture, as some organizations can be quite accepting of flexible work arrangements. My own perception is that the need to be “seen” for long hours in the office is more prevalent in private practice than with in-house roles. What the business tends to focus on is the quality and timing of legal advice rather than a lawyer’s physical presence.

Flexibility in the workplace has always been a critical issue for VWL, however it received a stronger focus last year when I was Convenor with the launch of its report ‘A 360

Review: Flexible Work Practices, Confronting myths and realities in the legal profession’. This report provides insight into what those working within the legal profession actually think about flexible work practices. It explores the perceptions of those dealing with lawyers who work flexibly, including their clients, and focuses on identifying the key myths operating in relation to those perceptions. It is clear from the research behind the report that flexible work practices are more acceptable in Government and in-house legal positions than in private practice, however I am of the view that there is no reason why it cannot work in private law firms. It appears that flexible work practices tend to operate best in a work environment where there tends to be a team-based approach and where management are supportive and knowledgeable about these practices.

“*It is often suggested that there is a lot more flexibility in the workplace for in-house counsel compared to private practice. My personal experience suggests that a lot depends on the management and business culture, as some organizations can be quite accepting of flexible work arrangements*”

The report finds that clients are not deterred by lawyers who engage in flexible work practices. Let us reflect on this finding. Often in private practice, lawyers are told

that they must be accessible to the client at all times, otherwise the client will go elsewhere. The report shows that clients reject this assumption and tend to view flexible work practices as a neutral or irrelevant factor when considering advice from a lawyer. Clients tend to focus on the quality of legal advice, the cost, and overall result for the business. At the end of the day, clients want the best person for the job. Legal capability and knowledge does not depend on whether a lawyer is working full-time. Interestingly, clients see that the real barriers to flexible work practices are lawyers themselves and the culture of the law firms.

“ *I hope that law firms embrace the findings and recommendations flowing from the 360 Degree report to not only ensure that they retain their talent, but also to improve services to their clients, many of whom are in-house counsel* ”

Work flexibility in today's society is not just a woman's issue. It affects a large part of our community and with the changing demographics and expectations, it will become a much more significant issue in the future. I hope that law firms embrace the findings and recommendations flowing from the 360 Degree report to not only ensure that they retain their talent, but also to improve services to their clients, many of whom are in-house counsel.



Virginia Jay & Rosemary Peavey



Glenda Beecher & 2006 Assistant Convenor Justine Lau



Networking Committee Chair Mandy Bede  
& 2006 General Member Rebecca Anselmi

# Convenor: *Virginia Jay*



**Virginia Jay is a full-time lawyer at Minter Ellison in its Human Resources and Industrial Relations group. Prior to joining Minter Ellison five and a half years ago, she was the Associate to Justice Wilson in the Supreme Court of Queensland. Virginia has a BEcon (Hons) and LLB (Hons) from the University of Queensland and is soon to commence studying for her LLM at the London School of Economics.**

Having always been very interested in the topic of women, parenting and paid work and the forces that influence women's decisions on how to allocate time between the two, it was a logical step for me to join the Work Practices Committee of VWL on commencing my professional career. The Work Practices Committee undertakes research into the way the profession works and the effect on women in particular, and investigates how we can do things differently. VWL, through its Work Practices Committee, has published a

number of reports, submissions and surveys which have been directed at bringing about change in a very conservative profession.

*“In 2006, do women lawyers need a collective voice in the profession, advocating for culture change and promoting and supporting women's advancements?”*

Determining how successful VWL has been in this task is not a simple matter. Culture change is an incremental and uncertain thing. But standing at the end of ten years, we must now ask ourselves: where are women in the law today? In 2006, do women lawyers need a collective voice in the profession, advocating for culture change and promoting and supporting women's advancement? At a time when approximately 60 per cent of law graduates and articulated clerks are women, is there a need, as her Honour Chief Justice Marilyn Warren put it in 2003, to 'keep gender on the agenda'?

The view of some in the profession is a resounding 'no'. Rather than remedying gender imbalance, some take the view that women's organizations such as VWL confer an unfair advantage on women through affirmative action where there is no need for such action. On this view, any inequality experienced by men and women comes down to individuals' hard work and ability, or lack thereof. While no lawyer, male or female, would disagree with the proposition that hard

work and ability are fundamental prerequisites to success in the law, how does this argument stand up against the fact that in Victoria in 2005, 56 per cent of lawyers with practicing certificates under the age of 40 were women compared with 24 per cent of lawyers over the age of 40 who were women? And that in 2005, a mere 14 per cent of partners in private practice in Victoria were women? Certainly no one is suggesting that women, per se are less able or hard working?

An alternative explanation is that this statistic merely reflects the 'catch up' women are still playing. Where women have only been entering the profession in equal numbers for a short time, equal representation of men and women in the older and senior ranks of the profession is something that has not yet, but will soon eventuate. A quick examination of the relevant figures provides some illumination on this theory. Given that 1993, some 13 years ago, was the first year in which women outnumbered men in the number of persons admitted to practice, and presuming that in the years leading up to 1993 the number of women admitted to practice was incrementally approaching fifty per cent, and presuming that most women admitted in 1993 and in the decade leading up to it were in their mid-twenties, then right about now we should be witnessing women ascending to the older and senior ranks of the profession in equal numbers to men.

If only this were true.

In the absence of other compelling arguments, we are thrown back onto the well-worn notion of 'choice': there are fewer older women in the profession occupying positions of seniority because the majority of women simply choose to stop practicing. Their choice is exactly that, their choice, and the profession is not responsible for women exercising their freedom to choose in this regard.

This argument is superficially very attractive. However, there is an inherent fallacy in the failure to distinguish between choices which are unconstrained, and choices which are constrained - or dictated - in the case of family responsibilities. The net effect of this is to validate the status quo and to obviate what is, in fact, a

*“Victorian women lawyers is concerned with examining women's choices in the legal profession and with expanding those choices”*

compelling need to re-evaluate the way the profession works.

But the notion of choice is insidiously; I daresay many women lawyers faced with working the long hours required in the law in the peak career-building years between 25 and 45, which coincide with women's reproductive and nurturing years, will not wax lyrical about their abundance of choice.

VWL is concerned with examining women's choices in the legal profession and with expanding

those choices. Through its research and educative activities, its networking and mentoring programs and profiling of prominent women and women's issues in the profession, VWL works assiduously toward effecting long overdue culture change in the legal profession.

Far from there being no need for a collective voice for women in the profession given the large number of women law graduates and young lawyers, the attrition rate of women from the profession indicates a more pressing need than ever for the collective voice of VWL to educate the profession on how it can afford women lawyers more real choices - primarily the choice to stay in the profession.



Attendees at VWL's Past Convenors & Present Executive Breakfast, held in May 2006

# empowering women in law...

## *...the journey continues*

BY ESTHER JAMES - BARRISTER



**What persuades a junior barrister, having signed the Victorian Bar Roll three weeks earlier, to fly to London at short notice? A scholarship to attend the Third World Women Lawyer's Conference, presented by the International Bar Association - this conference offered opportunity and challenge – starting with a race to juggle briefs, book airfares and renew passports for departure within five days!**

More than 250 women in law attended the Third World Women Lawyers Conference, including lawyers, barristers, judicial officers, politicians and international and non-governmental agency representatives. We came from Africa, Northern & Latin America, Europe, Australia, the Middle East, and Asia: each of us brought our diverse experiences and perspectives on challenges and opportunities for women in law. Participants included women who have quietly created history - such as Baroness

Report on the Third World Women Lawyers' Conference  
International Bar Association - London, 8-9 June 2006

*“Participants included women who have quietly created history - through to more recently qualified legal practitioners, whose choices will influence legal practice in years to come”*

Hale, the first woman to be appointed to the Court of Appeal - Ordinary, House of Lords; and senior private practitioners who are forging a positive future for women in law; through to more recently qualified legal practitioners, whose choices will influence legal practice in years to come.

Keynote speeches and elective seminars spanned legal practice areas such as public-private partnerships, working with corporate counsel, women and boards of directors, marketing and trans-national legal practice, and international issues such as promoting the rule of law, access to justice, global environmental and human rights issues, such as immigration, reproductive rights and child-trafficking. While many papers had a strong transactional and advisory emphasis, the seminars also touched on issues in litigation and advocacy.

A recurrent theme of the conference was how women have effected meaningful change in their spheres

of practice. This was tempered by a persistent exploration of ways to respond to issues of disempowerment and inequality. Speaking with peers from around the world, I felt challenged by the 'rule of law' issues that practitioners face in countries where judicial corruption and bribery of government officials still prevails.

I was impressed by African women lawyers expressing their passionate desire to see women of colour taking authoritative places alongside other speakers - a powerful reminder that work toward equality of gender must include a concern for equality relating to ability, belief, race, sexual orientation, social and political affiliation. I was moved by conversations about human rights issues of reproductive rights, and female genital mutilation; and concerned at anecdotes about inequality in migration, such as when women are trafficked into the UK, or when African women lawyers are harassed by officials during travel across some borders without a husband or supervisory male figure.

*“A recurrent theme of the conference was how women have effected meaningful change in their spheres of practice. This was tempered by a persistent exploration of ways to respond to issues of disempowerment and inequality”*

It was implicit rather than explicitly stated that women in law face issues unique to our gender. It emerged in keynote addresses about reproductive rights, and in confronting presumptions that some women lawyers see themselves as constrained to limited reproductive and child-raising choices when developing their career. Sometimes, the views expressed seemed at odds with the strong and clear encouragement to women lawyers to develop and forge new ways of achieving our goals.

At many points, the stories were a contrast to my own observations and experience as a woman legal practitioner in Australia, where women can promote equal opportunity in law without risking their physical safety, although not without less tangible (but real) costs. This reminded me that a broader perspective is vital for change to grow and translate across local, national and international spheres.

This conference reinforced that equality is a journey rather than a destination, and one that we cannot take alone. Highlights included the diversity and genuine commonality of interests among women in the legal profession, no matter our region and fields of practice.



The Royal Courts of Justice, approached from Lincoln's Inn/Chancery Lane

Second, the opportunity to meet Baroness Hale, and other women leaders whose accessibility and wide-ranging knowledge and reflective perspectives lent a positive focus to discussions. I appreciated the opportunity offered by this scholarship to meet some international peers, to learn and be challenged – and while in London, to spend a day exploring the Inns of Court, and watching

the Royal Courts of Justice in action, pondering just how ‘world women lawyers’ will mobilise our skills to advance legal equality for women in years to come.

*“This conference reinforced that equality is a journey rather than a destination, and one that we cannot take alone”*



Esther James with Rt Honourable Baroness Hale

*After a career in Nursing, Esther studied law at the Australian National University, and enjoyed pro bono advocacy, tutoring and being a research assistant at the Centre for International & Public Law. Esther completed articles at Deacons in 2003, and was appointed Associate to Her Honour Judge Cohen at the County Court of Victoria. In 2004 she joined the Department of Human Services’ legal branch and joined the Bar Reader’s Course in March 2006.*

# a history of...

## VWL reports & submissions



### **BENDABLE OR EXPENDABLE: PRACTICES AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS WORK FLEXIBILITY IN VICTORIA'S BIGGEST LEGAL EMPLOYERS**

LIV and VWL, 2006

The report surveyed the largest employing

law firms in Victoria and employee solicitors on women's representation in partnership, work practices and the use of flexible work arrangements. The survey responses of employers were compared with those of employees, in addition to comparing the findings with those of the VWL 2001 Snapshot survey.

### **A 360 DEGREE REVIEW: FLEXIBLE WORK PRACTICES. CONFRONTING MYTHS AND REALITIES IN THE LEGAL PROFESSION** VWL, 2005

The report examined the nature of flexible work practices used in the legal profession, perceptions of those practices and the impact on career progression for persons with flexible work arrangements. It was based on the results of surveys and data obtained through focus groups of

lawyers with flexible work arrangements in private practice, government and corporate sectors, their clients, legal co-workers, support staff and partners and/or managers.



### **A 360° Review: Flexible Work Practices**

Confronting myths and realities in the legal profession



### **SUBMISSION TO THE HUMAN RIGHTS AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITY COMMISSION ON ITS DISCUSSION PAPER: 'STRIKING A BALANCE: WOMEN, MEN, WORK AND FAMILY'**

VWL, 2005

The submission responded to questions posed in the EOC discussion paper and sought to provide an insight into the experiences of women lawyers working in private firms in metropolitan Melbourne; the difficulties they face in balancing their paid and unpaid work, what domestic arrangements are in place within their families and the issues which attend their seeking to obtain flexible and family-friendly working conditions.

### **SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE INQUIRY INTO VOLUNTARY STUDENT UNIONISM**

VWL, 2005

The submission examined the effect on women as a sub-group within Universities of prohibiting Universities from levying non-academic services and amenities fees from students in terms of the likely reduced availability of student services and student representation in Universities.

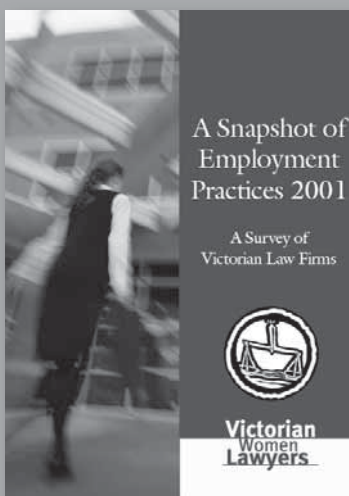
### **VICTORIAN CHARTER OF HUMAN RIGHTS SUBMISSION**

VWL, 2005

The submission was in response to the human rights consultation committee's discussion paper. The committee consulted with the community about whether the law should be changed to better protect their human rights and, if so, what form this should take.

The Justice Committee of the VWL prepared a report that reflected on our support for legal reform which promote understanding and support of women's legal and human rights, including justice and equality for all women; and the importance of identifying and eradicating discrimination against women in law and in the legal system.

Insomuch as a Victorian Charter of Human Rights would further these objectives, VWL tendered its submission in support.



### **A SNAPSHOT OF EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES 2001 - A SURVEY OF VICTORIAN LAW FIRMS**

November 2001  
VWL, 1999

In an Australian first, VWL surveyed Victorian law firms and in-house legal teams regarding their employment policies and practices relating to work/life balance and family-friendly practices.



**Flexible Partnership-  
Making it work  
in Law Firms**



**FLEXIBLE PARTNERSHIP – MAKING  
IT WORK IN LAW FIRMS**

**VWL, 2001**

The report examined the barriers to partners in law firms working part-time and how they can be overcome. It reviewed Australian and US literature and reported on interviews with 10 Melbourne law firms of varied size and structure. It made recommendations for the successful implementation of part-time work arrangements at the partner level based on the findings of the research and stakeholder feedback from interviews.

**CHILD  
CARE  
is a  
FAMILY  
ISSUE**

Written by Jan Barrett for the  
Community Child Care Association of  
Victoria on behalf of the  
**Victorian  
Women Lawyers  
Association**

guide to assessing, selecting, using and  
valuating child care options for families.

**CHILDCARE IS A FAMILY ISSUE**

**VWL, 1999**

The report outlined the child care options available together with their relevant benefits and disadvantages, emphasised the shared responsibility between parents for selecting appropriate care and for ensuring the best child care situation for your child.

**TAKING UP THE CHALLENGE – WOMEN  
IN THE LEGAL PROFESSION**

**VWL and the Victorian Law  
Foundation, 1999**

The report reviewed research and literature on women in the legal profession which recognised the cost to the legal profession of not keeping women, and developed an action plan for change.

**Taking  
up the  
challenge**

women in the legal  
profession



**WILLPOWER**

**VWL, 1999**

A video about the professional paths and experiences of 5 women with varied legal careers, highlighting the challenges and obstacles they have faced in the legal profession.

**SUBMISSION TO THE VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT ON ITS DRAFT  
'TWO YEAR ACTION PLAN FOR WOMEN 1998-2000'**

**VWL, 1998**

The response highlighted:

- the need for equitable access to justice and the detrimental effect of the diminished access to legal aid which is a State and Federal issue;
- improving the physical aspects of courts and courtrooms (eg: to accommodate people with parenting responsibilities);
- policing issues, including addressing the need for cultural change within the police force and the attitudes that some police officers have to their female colleagues; and
- the need for women to take up leadership positions within the private and public sectors

**LIVING AND WORKING TOGETHER**

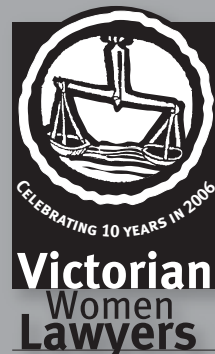
**LIV, VWL, Office of Women's Affairs  
and Victorian Law Foundation, 1998**

The report contained guidelines which addressed practical methods law firms could adopt to introduce flexible work practices as well as the perceived barriers to their introduction.

**SUBMISSION TO THE VICTORIAN BAR COUNCIL ON EQUALITY  
OF OPPORTUNITY FOR WOMEN AT THE VICTORIAN BAR**

**Women Barristers' Association and VWL, 1998**

Submission in response to the publication of the report 'Equality of Opportunity for Women at the Bar. The findings in the report directly relevant to solicitors concerned gender bias in briefing practices.





*The Dame Roma Mitchell Memorial Luncheon, held annually on International Women's Day, has quickly become one of VWL's most popular events. The Luncheon commemorates the life of Dame Roma Mitchell, the first female appointed as Queen's Counsel, first female Supreme Court Judge and Governor of South Australia. This year's speaker was Kirsty Sword Gusmao, First Lady of East Timor. Past speakers have included: Professor Hilary Charlesworth, (2000) Professor Lowitja O'Donoghue (2001), Dr Helen Durham (2002), Dr Kim Rubenstein (2003), Justice Mary Gaudron (2004), Judge Felicity Hampel (2005)*

# Dame Roma Mitchell

## LUNCHEON

### Mothering an Infant Nation

**N**early 500 people attended the annual Dame Roma Mitchell Luncheon to hear East Timor (Timor-Leste) First Lady Kirsty Sword Gusmao give an account of women's lives in the world's newest nation.

The luncheon, hosted jointly by the Law Institute of Victoria and Victorian Women Lawyers, was held on 10 March to mark International Women's Day.

Guests were a who's who of the legal profession, including 18 members of the judiciary, LIV president Cathy Gale, VWL Convenor Virginia Jay, Victorian Bar CEO Christine Harvey, Solicitor-General Pamela Tate SC and

Commonwealth Deputy Director of Public Prosecutions Mark Pedley.

Ms Sword Gusmao's speech focused on life as it affects women in Timor-Leste and the Alola Foundation, which she established in 2001.

"Alola is helping women to survive, quite literally, given that Timor-Leste has one of the world's highest maternal mortality rates. We keep girls in school with our scholarship programs. We provide advocacy on issues of domestic violence, sexual assault and those that affect our rights as women. Lastly, and probably most importantly, the Alola Foundation runs a small but growing handicraft project as

part of our overall commitment to women's economic empowerment."

Ms Sword Gusmao said she wanted to convey a little about the lives of women in Timor-Leste and what it means for her to be considered the "mother" of a small but extremely needy infant nation.

She shared with her mainly legal audience the legal developments, positive and negative, but set the achievements against what she called the stark statistics of life in Timor-Leste.

She said the key challenges for the women of Timor-Leste are the challenges facing women in developing countries everywhere.



photographs by John Sones  
(reproduced with permission  
from the Law Institute Journal)



2006 Dame Roma Mitchell Luncheon speaker Kristy Sword-Gusmao



Luncheon attendees Hishani Prabakaran & Linda Berkahn  
from the Australian Stem Cell Centre



Kim Shaw and Elizabeth O'Doherty from Maurice Blackburn Cashman, 2006  
VWL Convenor Virginia Jay and luncheon organiser Brooke Dellavedova

"They are education and economic empowerment. These alone will transform women's lives. As the education and economic status of women increase, so too do health outcomes, life expectancy etc.," she said.

**This article first appeared  
in the Law Institute Journal  
(2006) 80(5) LIJ, p. 17.**

**The full version of Kirsty Sword  
Gusmao's speech can be found on  
the VWL website at [www.vwl.asn.au/portals/0/downloads/  
Kirsty\\_Sword\\_Gusmao\\_Speech.  
pdf](http://www.vwl.asn.au/portals/0/downloads/Kirsty_Sword_Gusmao_Speech.pdf). More information about  
the Alola Foundation can be  
found on its website:  
[www.alolafoundation.org](http://www.alolafoundation.org)**



Some of the handicrafts produced by Timor-Leste women  
as part of the Alola Foundation's programs

# healthy, happy & organised *in 2006*

By ALEX NESKES - MANAGER - PRIVATE PRACTICE, MAHLAB RECRUITMENT

**H**ealthy, Happy and Organised was VWL's first member-focused function this year. On 28 February, members enjoyed the hospitality of Clayton Utz in the firm's boardroom whilst listening to three successful businesswomen speak.

Katrina Edwards, former dancer and proprietor of the National Pilates Centre spoke about the postural and other benefits of Pilates, Brigitte Benge, proprietor of meskinandbody in South Yarra talked about the importance of a good skincare and Deborah Maxwell, spokeswoman for the Professional Women's Investment Service spoke about the impact of generational differences on our investment profiles.

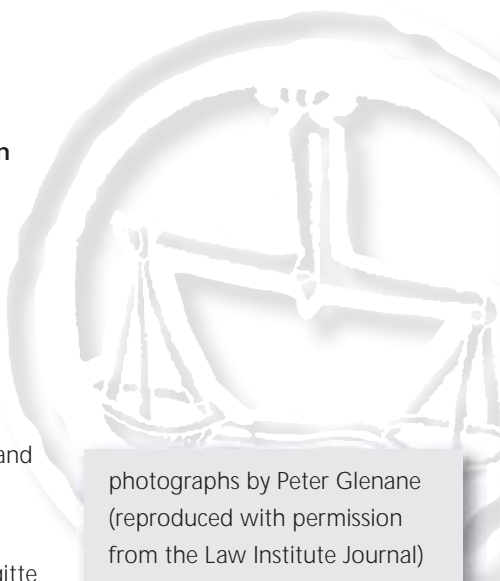
The fabulous door prizes including 6 sessions of pilates and pampering packs from PWIS were enthusiastically received as were the showbags with skincare samples provided to all attendees, and we all left vowing to take better care of ourselves!

For further details about the services offered by the Healthy, Happy & Organised speakers, contact:

**Katrina Edwards** on 9642 4500 or visit [www.nationalpilates.com](http://www.nationalpilates.com)

**Brigitte Benge** on 9867 8448 or visit [www.meskinandbody.com.au](http://www.meskinandbody.com.au)

**Deborah Maxwell** on 9690 1844 or visit [www.professionalwomensinvestments.com/contact](http://www.professionalwomensinvestments.com/contact)



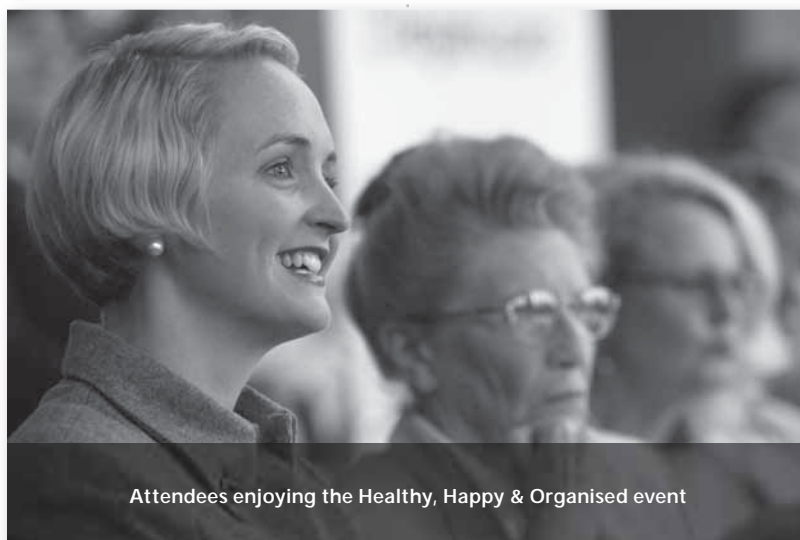
photographs by Peter Glenane  
(reproduced with permission  
from the Law Institute Journal)



Alex Neskes introduces the speakers



Speakers Brigitte Benge, Katrina Edwards and Deborah Maxwell



Attendees enjoying the Healthy, Happy & Organised event

# navigating your accidental career

## *with Anne Winckel*

By REBECCA ANSELM - SOLICITOR, MIDDLETONS

**T**he topic for VWL's careers seminar on 11 May 2006 was "Navigating Your Accidental Career". The event, hosted by Middletons, was a "hands on" seminar presented by Anne Winckel, National Director of Legal and Executive Recruitment at Jones & Koller. Clearly, Anne's choice of topic was of great interest, with around 60 VWL members attending.

Anne gave a very useful and interesting presentation on the types of navigational tools that can assist in getting your career ship back on track, or provide assistance when the ship has sunk. It soon became apparent that the metaphors used by Anne were based on personal experience and it was revealed she is an avid sailor!

Anne shared some of her own personal experiences, explaining how her own career has been a combination of "accidental" voyages rather than a pre-planned path.

Not only did Anne's presentation provide valuable career advice, but it also left everyone with the knowledge that not every career in law has to be conventional and that an "accidental" career can be just as fulfilling and successful as a conventional career path.



Pirate Anne Bonny (born 1697), the poster child of accidental careers, was born the illegitimate daughter of an Irish lawyer. After her father relocated to the Carolinas with his mistress, Anne ran away as a teenager with her new husband, and then ran away from her husband to sail with the "pirate elite" in the Caribbean. Her exploits in the Caribbean - known as "pirate central" at the time - led her to be sentenced to death along with her pirating friends. The moral of that story is that poor mentoring may lead to poor career choices.

# bendable or expendable

## *Practices & attitudes towards work flexibility in Victoria's biggest legal employers*

BY VIRGINIA JAY - CONVENOR, VICTORIAN WOMEN LAWYERS



**In July 2006, the Law Institute of Victoria and VWL released a report entitled *Bendable or Expendable: Practices and attitudes towards work flexibility in Victoria's biggest legal employers*.**

The report contains findings from surveys completed by 57 of the largest employing law firms and by 335 employee solicitors in Victoria on women's representation in partnership, work practices and the use of flexible work arrangements.

The survey responses of employers were compared with those of employees, as well comparing the findings with those of the VWL 2001 Snapshot survey.

On 28 and 29 June, the author of the report and Head of Marketing at the LIV, Alicia Patterson, and Virginia Jay, Convenor of Victorian Women Lawyers, conducted information sessions on the Bendable or Expendable report findings and on

VWL's 2005 "360 Degree Review of Flexible Work Practices" report.

The sessions were attended by partners and human resources managers from respondent law firms to the survey.

The report is available on the publications page of the VWL website ([www.vwl.asn.au](http://www.vwl.asn.au)): a summary of some of the report's key findings follows.

### Key findings

The employer survey response findings included that family responsibilities are the main driver for establishing a flexible work arrangement and, most often, flexible work arrangements come about as a result of an existing full-time employee wanting to change the terms of their employment. Part-time work is the most common non-traditional work arrangement, with job-share the least common. Just over half of the law firms surveyed have policies or guidelines in place for part-time work arrangements, however the number of firms with policies in place for other flexible work arrangements is significantly less. Communication by firms to employees of policies on working flexibly is largely limited to making them available on an intranet.

The employees surveyed were 90% women, and 64% were in full-time employment. Almost 80% of respondents were younger than

40 with the largest respondent group being at the Associate/Senior Associate level. Half of the respondents knew of between 1 and 5 lawyers in their firm working part-time; three-quarters did not know of anyone working in a job-share arrangement; and half did not know of anyone working from home. Equal numbers of respondents working flexibly agreed and disagreed that working flexibly had been a 'career limiting move', whereas 60% of respondents working full-time considered working flexibly as having an adverse impact on career progression. The majority of respondents working flexibly indicated that the establishment and continued success of a flexible work arrangement primarily depended on the attitude of the supervising partner, rather than it resulting from the application of uniform policies or practices across the firm.

Compared to 2001, more non-traditional arrangements are on offer, but there has been a decline in the range of options offered to those returning from parental leave. Fewer lawyers working in flexible work arrangements are being promoted. There is a decline in formal policies and/or guidelines in place on working flexibly. There is an increased propensity for lawyers to work during lunch breaks. More firms offer flexible start and finish times.

# Work Choices inadequate for family friendly policy

## Comment

Virginia Jay

**O**ne of the biggest issues facing women in the legal profession is the availability of flexible working conditions. Greater flexibility in the way we work is fundamental to women's ability to move between periods in and out of the labour force to bear children and raise a family. Such flexibility, we're told, is now imminently more possible post Work Choices.

If all the flexibility that employers and employees need can be delivered via negotiation, why then do women lawyers, who are trained in rights-based negotiation and who negotiate everyday for a living, continue to experience such difficulty securing flexible and family-friendly working conditions? If women lawyers are having such difficulty, what hope is there for women in other occupations?

Results of a survey of flexibility in law firms by the Law Institute of Victoria and Victorian Women Lawyers released this week shows that some firms are making strides in this area, but flexible work arrangements in private practice are still a long way off.

While most employers say working flexibly is an option, it is more of a privilege bestowed on the lucky few who have a sympathetic partner. Working flexibly has its penalties: a decline in the quality of work along with prospects of career advancement. In fact, according to the report, lawyers working flexibly in 2006 are less likely to be promoted than they were in 2001.

So where flexible work is almost exclusively the domain of women caring for children, the inescapable conclusion is that



More than negotiation required.

having children is a bad career move. "An email was sent throughout our group telling lawyers they had to be at their desks from 8am to 6.30pm regardless of current work requirements and family responsibilities," said one respondent to the survey.

"There is usually enough people, usually men willing or able to make horrendous demands and work horrendous hours so that the status quo continues," said another.

The responses of women surveyed on how they felt about the impact on their career of working flexibly ranged from frustration about the cost of having children, to acceptance of the choice they had made.

The notion that all women must choose between children and a career; and that those who buckle under the strain of trying to do both have only their own selfishness to blame for wanting to have it all, holds some sway at present in our society. Current economic rationalist orthodoxy says life is all about choice.

But it is a bitter pill to swallow

when the unavoidable fact remains that someone must raise our children, and women by far continue to get the raw end of the deal. This is particularly so when women's freedom to choose in this context is characterised by a distinct lack of options.

But putting gender equity considerations to one side, the Business Council of Australia has said that greater flexibility in the way we work in order to reduce the penalties faced by women wanting to combine paid work and raising a family, is needed to increase women's workforce participation rates, which are relatively low by OECD standards. It says that increasing female participation is necessary to help manage our impending ageing population and to counter declining fertility rates.

Therefore, it would seem sensible for the government to introduce measures to induce employers to be more flexible about the needs of their employees to work and care.

Minimum standards applied across the workforce entitling employees to flexible work on return from parental leave, or requiring employers to at least consider such requests from employees according to specific criteria, would help bring about a much-needed change to our mindset. But there is nothing of this sort in the new Work Choices, presumably because negotiation is considered to be the answer. But if we are counting on negotiation alone to deliver family-friendly work arrangements to assist Australian workers, the experience of women lawyers should alert the government to the fallacy of this presumption.

■ Virginia Jay is convenor, Victorian Women Lawyers.



# Women Lawyers Achievement Awards

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**V**WL and the Women Barristers' Association have twice teamed to host the Women Lawyers Achievement Awards (Victoria), awarded bi-annually to outstanding women in the profession. Both awards nights have been held at Queen's Hall in Parliament House, with inspiring keynote speeches being offered by Her Honour (as she was then) Justice Warren (2003) and Pamela Tate, SC, Solicitor-General of Victoria (2005).

## Winners of the 2003 awards

- Tina Millar – Former President of the Law Institute of Victoria
- Natalie Bannister – Senior Associate at Blake Dawson Waldron (Private Practice/Solicitor category, and 'rising star')
- Judge Rachelle Lewitan – Judge of the County Court of Victoria (Judiciary/Barrister category)

## Winners of the 2005 awards

- Judge Felicity Hampel – Judge of the County Court of Victoria (Judiciary/Barrister category)
- Dr Vivian Waller – Maurice Blackburn Cashman (Private Practice/Solicitor category)
- Fiona McLeod, SC – Barrister (Judiciary/Barrister category, and 'rising star')



2003 Award Winners: Tina Miller, Natalie Bannister & Judge Rachelle Lewitan



2005 Award Winners: Dr Vivian Waller, Fiona McCleod, SC & Judge Felicity Hampel

# Lesbia Harford Oration

*The Lesbia Harford Oration, organised by VWL's Justice Committee, is the brainchild of former VWL Patron and former Chief Justice, His Honour John Phillips. The oration is named in memory of Lesbia Harford (1891-1927), one of Victoria's first female lawyers, who delayed her articles of clerkship to work in clothing factories and domestic service and to devote her time to women's causes, and who died of pneumonia soon after being admitted. The focus of the oration is issues of human rights and justice in both the legal profession and wider community.*

photograph by Scott McNaughton  
(reproduced with permission  
from the Law Institute Journal)

## SPEAKERS

- 1999 His Honour Chief Justice John Phillips, who called for an overhaul of the 'defence' of provocation
- 2001 His Honour Justice Michael Kirby, who spoke of the obstacles facing women lawyers and what could be done to improve the representation of women in the profession
- 2003 Professor Loane Skene (pictured), who spoke of the legal limits to women's reproductive rights
- 2006 The Hon Senators Allison and Troeth will speak about transcending party politics to bring about change on women's issues.



# pathways to partnership

BY MARIKA HUBBLE-MARRIOTT - PARTNER, RUSSELL KENNEDY



The Pathways to Partnership panel – (from left to right) Charles Power, Lara Block, Glenda Beecher, Paul Montgomery, Robyn Campbell and panel chair Kriss Will

**O**n 31 May 2006, VWL convened a diverse and experienced panel to explore the criteria for partnership and examine the realities of life as a member of the legal firm's upper echelon.

The panel chair, Kriss Will from Kriss Will Consulting, facilitated an open discussion and encouraged attendees to ask questions throughout. Glenda Beecher contributed her experiences as a Partner of Maddocks, as did Charles Power, Partner of Holding Redlich, and Lara Block, Partner of Wodonga firm Harris Lieberman Boyd. Former Managing Partner of Freehills, Paul Montgomery, and Robyn Campbell, Principal of executive search and management company Campbell and Dean, completed the panel.

The strong attendance at the seminar was indicative of the fact that, despite sobering media reports about the elusive nature of partnerships for women, women lawyers are actively considering or seeking a seat at the partnership table. The discussion on the risks and rewards of partnership

did not specifically address the difficulties in translating a higher percentage of women lawyers in the profession to the senior ranks of salary and, in particular, equity partnership. It did provide practical advice to aspiring lawyers on how to achieve partnership and realistic insights as to the life of a partner.

*“The strong attendance at the seminar was indicative of the fact that, despite sobering media reports about the elusive nature of partnerships for women, women lawyers are actively considering or seeking a seat at the partnership table”*

The recurring themes for the golden pathway included developing specialist expertise, having exposure both within and outside the firm, and locating a sponsor who can act as a career mentor and champion your cause within the firm. A key aim was to develop a business case for your appointment. The panel emphasised the need to prove to the existing partners that you make an overall contribution to the firm and

not just a financial one. You need to demonstrate that you are capable of performing at the level of a partner. Some firms have a structured assessment and nomination process, which you can discuss with your sponsor. The first steps along this pathway can be commenced from 1-2 years post-admission.

An interesting insight was offered in relation to the advantage of having a sponsor from outside your own team. If your sponsor is from within your team, there may be a conflict in terms of your respective interests on the issue of control of fees. Whilst your impressive financial performance may bathe your sponsor partner in reflected glory, your ascension to partnership removes your fees from the pool of fees for which they are responsible, and potentially, financially rewarded.

*“You need to demonstrate that you are capable of performing at the level of a partner”*

Partnership models vary from firm to firm. The current models were



Glenda Beecher and Robyn Campbell



Lara Block and Charles Power

said to incorporate both salary and equity partnerships. Salary partners are generally on a fixed draw, which is negotiated at the start of the financial year. Equity partners have a financial stake in the firm to the extent that they profit-share either equally or based on a lock-step arrangement. The lock-step arrangement was seen to be the norm, whereby a newly-appointed equity partner is given a percentage share and each subsequent year progresses towards 100% equity.

*“A partner, either salary or equity, is not an employee. This has implications in terms of annual, sick and long service leave entitlements, taxation and superannuation”*

The options available to women on maternity leave or working part-time are subject to the terms of the Partnership Deed, or may be negotiable. Panel members discussed some positive experiences with part-time work due to family commitments and the ability to negotiate a pro rata draw. There was, however, a cautionary word that some Deeds allow maternity and other leave, whereas others provide that you cease to be a partner if you are absent for over a prescribed period of time. This would apply to any extended absence.

A partner, either salary or equity, is not an employee. This has implications in terms of annual, sick and long service leave entitlements, taxation and superannuation. The general view of the panel was that most firms required partners to secure income protection insurance, as they are not covered by Work Cover. Professional advice should be obtained and considered in relation to the financial and other consequences attendant on becoming a partner.

The most vexed issues appear to be those of liability and communication. Liability goes with both salary and equity partnerships. Communication and access to information may not. In terms of liability, the world at large does not differentiate between salary and equity partners. All partners are jointly and severally liable for the partnership endeavours. The panel noted that salary partners usually hold an indemnity from the equity partners, although this may be worthless, as equity partners do not usually have any assets in their names. In terms of communication and access to information, the equity partners may not differentiate between salary partners and employee solicitors.

The financial incentives of partnership are well documented in Mahlab and related salary surveys. Members of the panel highlighted the rewards of involvement in

the decision-making process and in the direction of their firms.

This was tempered by internal firm politics and the increase in administration requirements. Partners are expected to write fees, generate work for others, supervise, mentor and be responsible for their part of the business and management of the firm.

*“Overall it was the quintessential work/life balance of a partner that was seen to be more elusive than partnerships for women”*

Some tips to arrest the career stall of women working part-time and with family commitments included teaming up at work akin to job-share arrangements, delegation being available at home, both online and on the mobile, and engaging the services of a nanny.

Overall, it was the quintessential work/life balance of a partner that was seen to be more elusive than partnerships for women. This was highlighted in the experience of all panel members. Lifestyle choices are firmly on the agenda as a broader community concern. Legal firms need to be responsive to this challenge if they are to facilitate and encourage more women along the pathway to partnership.

photographs by Richard Jupe  
(reproduced with permission  
from the Law Institute Journal)



# Meet & Greet

By Kaajal Fox

Articled Clerk,  
Russell Kennedy

**O**n Wednesday, 14 June 2006, the Women Barristers Association in conjunction with VWL, hosted a Meet & Greet event at the Essoign Club.

The theme this year was 'Refresh Your Contacts & Your Wardrobe'. Women in the legal profession were encouraged to donate new or used work suits and accessories to donate to 'Fitted For Work', an invaluable service that assists and supports disadvantaged women in all walks of life trying to gain employment by providing

them with clothing and educating them with resume building, interviewing and presentation skills.

Women barristers and lawyers attended the function not only to mingle and interact with other women, but also to sit back and enjoy a spectacular fashion parade from leading Australian designer Tiffany Treloar whilst savouring magnificent wines provided by Baddaginnie Run Wines and enjoying scrumptious Asian finger food.

Tiffany Treloar, whose style is synonymous with unusual eye-catching patterns and matching double-layered skirts, whilst still combining practicality and elegance, exhibited her wares





on volunteer models, including barristers Jane Forsyth and Michelle Sharpe, Rosemary Peavey (2005 VWL Convenor and Corporate Counsel - AWB), lawyers Christine Melis, Caitlin Tiernay and myself. At the end of the parade, Tiffany spoke to the attendees about how she started in her profession and how creativity and perseverance led her to become a prominent Australian designer.

During the evening, Simone Jacobson, Convenor of the Women Barristers' Association, provided the attendees with her insights and thought on women in the profession. Marion Webster, the founder of Fitted For Work spoke about the amazing work that the organisation does for

disadvantaged women. Winsome McCaughey spoke on behalf of Baddaginne Run winery, and VWL Convenor Virginia Jay welcomed the attendees on behalf of VWL.

To end the evening off with a bang, Chris Melis was the lucky winner of the fabulous door prize - a handbag worth over \$300. The other lucky prize winner was Shirley Power, a final year law student, who won a hamper of Ecotanical products.



# Happy Birthday VWL

FROM SOME OF OUR MAJOR SPONSORS

## CLAYTON UTZ

*VWL has clearly made a significant contribution to the legal environment beyond our firm and even beyond Victoria. Although it may not be apparent to many in the profession, VWL has been a major instigator of change and reform within the industry. VWL has provided a forum for issues to be raised and debated, and agendas for reform created. This has occurred through the significant projects that have been undertaken by the volunteers at VWL and the detailed submissions that have been made on behalf of VWL on issues such as maternity leave and part-time work. A recent example is the "360 Degree Review of Flexible Work Practices," although there have been many other valuable reports that have been produced over the last 10 years. This work has assisted women in the legal profession by identifying these challenges (and dispelling some of the myths in doing this), raising the issues and creating debate and suggesting ways to address these issues. This work has meant that critical issues such as retaining female lawyers, offering them meaningful alternative career paths and providing them with flexibility have captured the attention of the people within law firms that can instigate change. VWL should be incredibly proud of this.*

*Further, VWL has provided great opportunities for women within the profession to get together and hear inspirational speakers*

*such as Kirsty Sword-Gusmao and Leone Skene. It also has educated us - either through the pieces in Portia or events such as the recent Pathways to Partnership seminar.*

*Clayton Utz would like to congratulate VWL on all it has achieved in the last 10 years and is looking forward to continuing its involvement with VWL as a sponsor firm*

## Freehills

*Freehills congratulates VWL on ten years of valuable work in our profession.*

*Freehills is proud to be a sponsor of VWL, and supports its work to ensure that the legal profession recognises the contribution of female lawyers and supports their career development.*

*Over the last ten years, VWL has played a significant role in supporting women lawyers. It has worked with the profession to raise awareness of challenges faced by female lawyers and has provided valuable opportunities for them to expand their networks and to seek out role models and mentors. Freehills was delighted to support VWL with its networking events by hosting the 2005 VWL Christmas party.*

*Freehills encourages its solicitors to actively participate in women lawyers' committees and events, and looks forward to maintaining close ties with VWL over the coming*

*years. Freehills' Women in Business program which runs nationally offers opportunities for our female lawyers and clients to expand their business networks and encourages them in the development of their business skills. The program reflects the changing face of the profession and acknowledges that some of the challenges our female lawyers face are unique to them. It, like VWL, provides a forum for discussion of new ideas and issues which is integral to ensuring that the legal profession continues to advance the environment which encourages the professional development of all lawyers.*

*Congratulations VWL and best wishes for the many years ahead!*

## BLAKE DAWSON WALDRON L A W Y E R S

*We congratulate VWL for increasing awareness and developing constructive ways of addressing issues facing women in the legal profession.*

*Often it can simply be the sharing of information and experience which forms links between individuals and can be a source of empowerment to women lawyers. VWL has contributed to this sharing of information, whether through Portia, its social functions or seminars. VWL has made a positive difference to the legal profession as a whole, and we hope it will continue along this path for many years to come.*

Blake Dawson Waldron is a proud sponsor of VWL and over the past decade has enjoyed a close relationship with VWL, in particular through our involvement representing the Women's Electoral Lobby of Victoria in the landmark IVF case, *Re McBain*; Ex parte Australian Catholic Bishops Conference [2002] HCA 16 (18 April 2002).

We continue to support the objectives of VWL, in particular through the recent establishment of our own Women Lawyers Initiative, which aims to create a network of women lawyers within our Melbourne office and a forum for identifying and discussing issues regarding women lawyers, and development of ideas for addressing these issues.

Congratulations VWL, and keep up the good work.

**Lisa Jarrett and Vicky Alexiou**  
on behalf of  
**Blake Dawson Waldron**

**middletons**  
lawyers

On this significant occasion, Middletons takes the opportunity to congratulate Victorian Women Lawyers on ten wonderful years of supporting the advancement and recognition of women in the legal profession.

Through its long-term sponsorship of VWL, Middletons has had the opportunity to embrace and promote VWL's objectives within our firm. We are now approaching 50% female lawyers and partners across the firm, and we are proud of the progress we have made and will continue to make with VWL's assistance. VWL's objectives

focus on providing female lawyers with networking and mentoring opportunities and encouraging education, advancement and reform in the legal profession.

During our relationship with VWL, Middletons has aspired to not only promote the activities of VWL within our firm but to also adopt practices that are consistent with VWL's values. Examples include the establishment of the Middletons Women's Information Network, which provides female lawyers with the opportunity to network and interact with professional women from our client base, the development and implementation of flexible work practices and the promotion of equal opportunities for women within the firm.

At Middletons, we consider ourselves fortunate to have had the opportunity to be a sponsor of VWL, an affiliation of which we remain immensely proud.

We congratulate VWL on its achievements of the past 10 years and look forward to continuing and building on our relationship with VWL in the future.

**phillips**  
**fox**

Over the past ten years, VWL has emerged as a significant organisation not only for women lawyers, but within the legal profession generally. Phillips Fox has been delighted to have the opportunity to support VWL and to participate in its activities. Apart from VWL's vital role in identifying the issues and helping women lawyers meet the challenges, it is also an organisation which

provides great networking and collegiate support. VWL has also managed to foster and promote an understanding of these issues in a way which has been constructive and non-confrontationist.

The work of the organization in recent times in respect of flexible work practices has been invaluable, not only for women lawyers, but for the legal profession of which these lawyers are such a vital part.

We look forward to VWL's continuing success.

**Peter Rashleigh, Partner**  
on behalf of **Phillips Fox**

**MALLESONS STEPHEN JACQUES**

We congratulate VWL on reaching this significant milestone.

Over the past 10 years, VWL has been at the forefront of research to understand the issues faced by women in the law, as well as offering important events and networking opportunities. VWL's work to support women in the profession has been invaluable. It is, of course, just the start.

Mallesons recognises that women in the law face unique challenges and opportunities. Making flexible working arrangements successful is a "two-way street" between firm and employee, and requires a real commitment to reciprocity and to honest and continuous communication.

We wish VWL every success for the future in continuing to support women lawyers to achieve their objectives.

**Nicola Wakefield Evans**  
Managing Partner, on behalf  
of **Mallesons Stephen Jacques**

