



MEDIA RELEASE

Thursday 20th October 2016

Australian Bar Association adopts LCA Equitable Briefing Policy and considers practical measures to implementation.

The President of the Australian Bar Association, Patrick O'Sullivan QC, has today confirmed the ABA's commitment to promoting excellence, diversity and inclusion at the Bar by adopting the Law Council of Australia's Equitable Briefing Policy.

"The ABA has and always will promote the high quality and specialist skills of the Bar and by adopting the LCA's equitable briefing policy we are working towards ensuring that applies to all of its members."

Last week, the ABA's Diversity and Inclusivity Committee, chaired by Kate Eastman SC, held a roundtable forum at Allens in Sydney, with barristers, law firms, corporate counsel and government representatives. The forum presented an opportunity to openly discuss some of the barriers to equitable briefing and to identify practical measures that may assist clients, law firms and the wider profession meet the policy's objectives.

"In some areas of the law and in certain sectors, we're witnessing excellent progress. It appears that the common theme amongst those implementing equitable briefing policies successfully, is a genuine commitment to cultural change, to the policy and to its objectives starting from the top of an organisation."

The Equitable Briefing Policy includes the objective of briefing women in at least 30 per cent of all matters and paying 30 per cent of the value of all brief fees by 2020.

Ross Drinnan, Head of Litigation at Allens said, "There are extremely talented women at the bar and, in order to ensure we offer the best representation to our clients, we need to make sure we are identifying and working with of all of those women. Policies that help us identify and work with excellent barristers, regardless of gender, is in everyone's best interests."

Sue Laver, General Counsel Dispute Resolution, at Telstra said: "There is no doubt the legal profession has changed and has become a more accurate reflection of our society. However, while we are seeing more female law graduates than men – women still remain under-represented in senior levels within the industry, and at the Bar.

“Telstra has been actively leading equitable briefing for many years now and has a strong record in this space. The profession and society as a whole benefits from giving men and women equal opportunities.”

Among the practical measures discussed to assist equitable briefing practices include:

- Annual promotion of new readers coming through the Bar
- Directives from organisational leadership teams to identify and brief women barristers with relevant expertise and experience
- Referrals and recommendations from Silks for highly skilled junior women barristers
- Improved online directory of barristers and their experience

“The ABA forum was an excellent opportunity to discuss the challenges and opportunities of equitable briefing practices and has provided the ABA with a number of tangible and realistic measures to explore and develop in order to assist the bar in its work towards the objectives within the equitable briefing policy”, said Patrick O’Sullivan QC.

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