

WOMEN BARRISTERS FORUM

REPORT OF THE CHAIR ON ACTIVITIES 2014 - 2015

In the last year, our activities have been varied. Highlights are indicated below.

EQUITABLE BRIEFING WORKING PARTY

Since 2014, the WBF has been working in conjunction with the Bar Association on the Equitable Briefing Working Party. The Working Party was established as part of the Bar Association's response to the Law Council of Australia's National Attrition and Re-engagement Study. WBF has published on its website "A guide to Implementing the Equitable Briefing Policy. A copy of the guide is available [here](#).

RESPONSE TO LAW COUNCIL'S NATIONAL ATTRITION & RE-ENGAGEMENT STUDY REPORT (NARS)

A WBF sub-committee is working with Ms Julia Baird SC, who has been appointed to the Bar Council NARS Working Group. Bar Council has delegated to WBF the role of organising an Alumnae Programme for women barristers and former women barristers with a view to fostering stronger networks within the profession. As part of its remit and at the request of Bar Council, the WBF has made valuable contribution to the content of the Bar Practice Course and the promotion of the Best Practice Guidelines adopted by Bar Council in June 2014, and by numerous barristers' chambers.

EOC LIAISON

WBF continued to work with the Equal Opportunity Committee of the Bar Association on initiatives responsive to the NARS Report and other matters of importance to practising women barristers. WBF thanks Brenda Tronson and Amy Douglas-Baker for their contribution to the successful working relationship between the WBF and the EOC.

CPD

The CPD Subcommittee of WBF (Brenda Tronson, Amy Douglas-Baker, Kavita Balendra, Christine Melis, Theresa Dinh) has organised and held a series of

successful evening and lunchtime CPDs covering each of the Ethics, Practice Management, Advocacy and Substantive CPD strands.

The purpose of the CPD programme is to showcase to the Bar and the broader legal community the breadth and depth of talent among the women at the NSW Bar. In the last year the following barristers have participated in the CPD programme as either presenters or chairs: Trish McDonald SC, Kate Williams, Catherine Gleeson, Amy Douglas-Baker, Christine Melis, Kelly Rees SC, Louise Jackson, Penny Wass SC, Aditi Rao, Emma Beechey, and Michelle Painter SC. The topics addressed by speakers have been diverse covering administrative law, mortgage fraud and responding to professional conduct complaints.

THE SALVOS LEGAL CONFERENCE

In addition to facilitating CPD events for barristers, the WBF has been involved in the organisation of continuing legal education events outside the Bar. The WBF sourced and organised each of the speakers at the Salvos Legal Conference in Commercial Law entitled “Women of the Law” held on 14 March 2015. The Conference was highly successful and it is hoped will feature as an annual event for both Salvos Legal and the WBF.

The following barristers (and former barristers) participated as speakers at the conference: the Honourable Justice Ruth McColl AO, the Honourable Justice Patricia Bergin, the Honourable Judge Elizabeth Olsson SC, the Honourable Justice Melissa Perry, NCAT Senior Member Sabine Thode, Jane Needham SC, Liz Cheeseman SC, Carol Webster SC, Michelle Painter SC, Penny Wass SC, Elizabeth Raper, Kate Morgan, Kate Richardson, Stephanie Patterson, Michelle Dolenec, Vanessa Bosnjak, Verity McWilliam, Jennifer English, Catherine Gleeson, Michelle McMahon, and Emma Beechey.

PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION REPORT

The WBF and EOC worked together on a submission to the Productivity Commission in relation to Childcare and Early Learning on behalf of the Bar Association. The submissions provided an overview of the nature of practice at the NSW Bar, including the comparative workforce participation and attrition rates of male and female barristers, and a summary of key results of a child care survey conducted of

its members by the Bar Association in early 2014. The submission addressed those parts of the Commission's Draft Report relevant to barristers at the NSW Bar. WBF acknowledges the valuable contribution to the submission made by Amy Douglas-Baker (WBF/EOC), Anna Perigo (EOC) and Kavita Balendra (WBF).

INFORMAL DRINKS

The WBF Social Subcommittee (Amy Douglas-Baker, Theresa Dinh, Caroline Dobraszczyk, Ishita Sethi, Susan Kluss, Mary Rebehy, Tamara Phillips) organised and held its inaugural informal drinks at Verandah Bar on 22 April 2015. The drinks evening was well-attended by both men and women barristers and judicial officers, despite deteriorating weather conditions in Sydney that evening. The Subcommittee especially thanks Judge Robyn Tupman for attending and offering her support to this initiative. The Subcommittee intends to hold informal drinks on a number of occasions throughout the Law Term, to which men and women, barristers and judges will be invited.

JANET COOMBS LUNCH FOR FEMALE READERS

The WBF co-hosted with Women Lawyers (NSW), a biennial lunch for women readers from each of the intakes of readers in 2014 and 2015. This event provides new women readers a warm welcome to the network of women barristers at the NSW Bar and also affords new women readers an invaluable opportunity to meet women solicitors and women members of the judiciary.

WOMEN SILKS DRINKS

The Annual Cocktails and Canapés Function to celebrate the appointment of Women Silks was held on 13 November 2014 to celebrate the appointment in 2014 of Rashda Rana SC, Belinda Rigg SC, and Gabrielle Bashir SC. The event was well-attended and is an annual fixture in the Bar Calendar. WBF looks forward to hosting another event in November this year.

THANKS

I wish to acknowledge the hard work of the members of the Executive of the WBF over the past year, which has been greatly appreciated.

The WBF wishes to acknowledge, with great thanks, the real support of the Bar Association for the work of WBF, expressed particularly through the provision of the services of Ms Megan Black, to liaise and work with the WBF. Megan has made a great contribution to the work, both in policy terms and in practical support, for which we are most grateful. We also thankfully acknowledge the work of Ms Katie Retford, Ms Roshana Wikramanayake, Mr Chris D'Aeth, and Ms Bali Kaur who have assisted Ms Megan Black from time to time in work involving the WBF. We really appreciate the consistent support of the Bar Association that has been shown to the WBF.

GOING FORWARD

We look forward to further progressing some of the matters referred to above with the Bar Association, especially promotion and implementation of equitable briefing, work on sexual harassment and bullying and on business structures to facilitate retention of women at the Bar. We would appreciate opportunities for further consultation, through meetings with Bar Council or a sub-group thereof and the Executive of the Bar Association.

Michelle Painter SC

Chair, Women Barristers Forum