

## **SHORT STATEMENTS REGARDING QUESTION OF WHETHER WBF SHOULD REMAIN A SECTION OR BECOME A COMMITTEE.**

### **ADVANTAGES OF BECOMING A COMMITTEE.**

The NSW Bar Association website says that “The Bar Association's committees regularly advise and assist the Bar Council in the preparation of detailed submissions regarding draft legislation and current issues in the administration of justice. The expert commentaries of our committees are sought by governments and opposition political parties, as well as parliamentary committees and law reform agencies”. By way of contrast, a section is generally a group of members of the Bar Association drawn together by a common interest. While the WBF has operated differently from other Sections, there is a view that the importance of women’s issues within the Bar requires a body with the standing within the Bar Council structure of a Committee.

Currently any submissions which are sought to be made to Council must be made through the EOC. This can be unwieldy. Additionally, any issues which are currently remitted for consultation to the EOC are generally done so in conjunction with the EOC, and this bifurcated approach may not always result in the two bodies holding the same view. It may be preferable for a focus on women’s issues, and a consequent streamlining of the terms of reference of both the EOC and the WBF, to be achieved by both bodies having the same level of standing within the Association.

Finally, the elevation to Committee status would enable the Association to provide the same level of support that is currently provided to other Committees. This includes assistance with:-

- Administration, including the organisation of meetings and subcommittee meetings, preparation of agendas and minute-taking.
- Administration in relation to yearly membership applications and renewals.
- The organisation and funding of social and networking events.
- Assistance with research and drafting for policy submissions.

### **ADVANTAGES OF REMAINING A SECTION**

At present, notionally, all women at the Bar are members of the Women Barristers Forum. The present structure enables women barristers at all stages of their careers to “opt in” and participate in the work of the WBF as they are able, over time, either through attendance at functions and seminars of the WBF, participation in a sub-committee or the Executive Committee of the WBF. This participatory structure provides an opportunity for women at the Bar to be part of a community at the Bar without waiting to be selected by others for a role. There is an opportunity for a greater number of women to be involved in the work than would be likely if the WBF were a committee.

If the WBF remains a section, WBF can continue to retain and develop good relationships with the Bar Association and its various committees and sections, especially the Equal Opportunity Committee (‘EOC’) as well as with organisations such as the Women Lawyers Association of NSW.

Whilst submissions to Bar Council are made through being submitted to the EOC before going to Bar Council, Bar Council is free to seek the views of the WBF directly at any time and does so from time to time on matters affecting women at the Bar, as well as consulting the EOC.

The Bar Association has been generous in providing staff assistance, advice and counsel in the past and we trust that would continue whether the WBF is a committee or a section, as women at the Bar are part of the association.

As a section, the WBF retains its own bank account and the ability to decide upon hosting events without having to seek grants from the Bar Association to do so.