

2021 President's Report

Tēnā koutou, and welcome to the end of the 2021 AWLA year.

We've had another interesting, and at times challenging year – but on the whole a successful one. We're disappointed to be ending the year with this meeting on Zoom, rather than in person with our usual celebration, but we hope to be able to resume our social events as soon as it's safe to do so.

Membership this year was significantly up on last year to just under 500 members. Last year we had around 390 members, and that was an increase on 2019, so this is a really pleasing trend to see. I hope this shows a level of support for AWLA's activities that we can continue to build on, and I'm really pleased that people are seeing the value of AWLA membership, and want to support an organisation like ours.

On the advocacy front this year, we have worked on a number of initiatives, many of which are ongoing.

- We have continued to work on a resource on parental leave, so that women who are considering having a family, are pregnant, or are trying to negotiate parental leave options with their employers have some material and support in engaging in this process. This is a work in progress, which we had hoped to release this year, but it's obviously a big job, and we're now aiming for an initial release in the first half of next year.
- At the end of last year we published the first iteration of the table on our website showing a gender breakdown of partnership numbers in a range of Auckland law firms. We then updated that table as at 1 July, with the expectation that it will continue to be updated every July to reflect the changes in partnership each year. We've found that table to be a very interesting and valuable resource, providing one metric for helping to understand the progression of women in law firms. Of course it does not tell the whole story, but we are pleased to see a number of firms making significant progress on increasing the number of women in partnership.
- The amendment to the Rules came into force this year, to better deal with harassment and bullying. We provided NZLS feedback on its proposed guidance in relation to the new Rules. As part of this, we considered our previous intention to compile a selection of policies that law firms could adapt to their own purposes, including covering things like harassment and bullying. On reflection we considered that it would be preferable for NZLS to instead be providing this kind of resource, and we provided that feedback, as well as a suggestion that NZLS also provide guidance to firms on how to deal with misconduct-type issues as they arise. We just yesterday received a response from NZLS, who thanked us for considering these issues. It adopted some of our recommended changes to the draft guidance, and in particular added a resource to the section about how firms should respond to issues as they arise. We were also pleased to see that NZLS recently held a seminar aimed at small to medium sized firms to help with the drafting of appropriate harassment and bullying policies, which is still available on its website. We hope to be able to continue to work with and encourage NZLS on this type of initiative going forward.

- Following some feedback from a member in relation to a woman who was in the gallery being asked to leave court because she was breastfeeding her (non-disruptive) baby, we wrote to the Chief District Court Judge asking him to implement a policy where breastfeeding is welcome in all courts, and to consider other actions that could be taken to improve the ability for people with children to attend court with fewer obstacles. We have not yet had a substantive response to that letter (which is understandable in light of the Court's current Covid workload), but we hope to see action being taken on this issue as part of the Te Ao Mārama model, and we will continue liaise with the courts as necessary. In the meantime we welcome any further feedback from anyone on issues like this as they arise, so that we can keep an eye on these kinds of problems.
- We filed two short submissions to select committees this year. The first was in support of the safe areas legislation in relation to abortion providers, and the second in support of the legislation against 'revenge porn' or the non-consensual sharing intimate images.

More generally in relation to advocacy, following some feedback from a member earlier in the year who was disappointed that we had not commented on a Bill, we've also spent time this year thinking about how we can best manage the advocacy function of our role. There are a myriad of issues relating to the treatment of women and children under the law, and unfortunately it is simply not feasible for us to stay across and comment on every one of these. To help manage this, this year we have made a real effort to increase our communication to members, so that they understand what we are working on and can then hopefully raise issues with us that might not be on our radar. As part of this, we started sending a monthly email update to members with an update on advocacy, events, and any other items that might be of interest to our members. We hope that this has been a useful way for members to be able to easily keep track of what we are working on and provide feedback on this, but without increasing the number of emails we send to an annoying level.

We have had another good year for events, despite the disruptions of the last few months.

- In February we held the President's function, where we were fortunate to have Justice Harland speak. She was very well received by attendees.
- In March we held an event on the promotion of women. For this we invited representatives from seven firms, each of which is a signatory to the Gender Equality Charter and who provided information to us about how they try to comply with the Charter. This provided the basis for a really interesting discussion about how a range of firms are trying to address equitable promotion. A summary of what was discussed at that event is on our website.
- In May we held an event called 'Building careers through confidence'. This was facilitated by Briony McKenzie, a qualified coach and ex-lawyer. Having an event with a facilitator means that we don't break even on these types of events, but I think this was a really valuable session. Briony provided a large amount of extra material to attendees, and we hope this as continued to be a useful resource.



- In June we held a 'meet the judges' event featuring two new District Court Judges who sit in Auckland – Judge Lummis and Judge Sellars QC.
- In June we also held a political panel, featuring women MPs from every party in Parliament (other than the Māori Party, who we invited to send non-MP representative but unfortunately they could not). This doubled as a fundraiser for our scholarship fund.
- In August we held a panel event featuring Māori women lawyers. This was very well received, and the feedback from this event and the one we held last year featuring Pacific women lawyers shows that there's a real demand for events that discuss and showcase intersectional diversity in the profession, which hopefully we can continue to build on.
- In October we held the annual Dame Silvia Cartwright lecture, though unfortunately this had to be on Zoom. We were very fortunate to have Ranjna Patel give this year's lecture, which was a really interesting discussion of her work in the health sector and with her foundation addressing family violence in the community.
- And just this week we held our second 'meet the judges' event featuring three recent District Court Judges who sit in Manukau – Judge Tan, Judge Yelavich and Judge Grau.
- When we could, we held our popular breakfast clubs. We were really pleased this year to open these up to also hold breakfast clubs in West Auckland, South Auckland and on the North Shore, as well as our regular one downtown. We hope we can continue this.

For students this year:

- We once again offered the writing prize and the Margaret Wilson scholarship. This year the writing prize was won by Nina Pinkerton-Bennett with her piece 'The Harmful Digital Communications Act 2015: Does the Act Protect Victims of Image Based Sexual Abuse Adequately?'. The Margaret Wilson scholarship was won by Heloisa Hartuwig De Freitas, who really impressed the selection committee out of another impressive group of applicants.
- We once again delivered the mooting competition via Zoom. This was won by Azita Nafissi and Tula Khanna. Our thanks to the moot problem writers, the coach and mentors, and to all those who helped judge this moot competition. And our thanks to Te Kāhui Kaiwhakawā Wāhine o Aotearoa, the New Zealand Association of Women Judges who provided the prize money for this moot.
- We held our students' evening in August, where students can talk to a range of lawyers about what practice is like. Our thanks to all the lawyers who assisted with this.

We also this year are very pleased to have launched the new law student scholarship. This is a major commitment for AWLA, but one way that we hope we can make a real contribution to increasing the diversity of students who are able to attend law school and into the profession. As part of this we have set up a dedicated account for scholarship fund raising, to fund the scholarship. Through this fund we raise the money to offer the scholarship as frequently as we can. This year

(including through a kick start donation from AWLA) we hit our initial target of \$20,000 for a first scholar, which means that we are offering the scholarship to a new law student starting in 2022. As part of the scholarship we hope to continue to work with and support this student as they progress through university, and hopefully into the profession if they so choose. We are very grateful for the support the AWLA community has given us in relation to this scholarship and scholarship fund. I encourage everyone to visit the scholarships page on our website for more information about this.

On the mentoring front, we facilitated a number of new mentoring matches this year. We also continued our very popular Chance Coffees initiative, which has been a great success. The ongoing popularity of these parts of our work I think helps show that part of the real value in AWLA remains its community and networking opportunities.

In May, I was fortunate to represent AWLA at the International Association of Women Judges conference, which was held in Tāmaki Makaurau. I wrote a summary of this very worthwhile event, which is on the website.

I would like to finish by offering some thanks.

Firstly, to all the firms who have supported us this year by hosting events for us. The generosity of these firms, which this year was Russell McVeagh (several times), DLA Piper, Simpson Grierson, Meredith Connell, Dentons Kensington Swan and Bell Gully, enables us to use our resources for all our other initiatives. And a thank you to the firms of our committee members, for hosting our committee meetings, and providing many other resources.

To the AWLA committee of 2021. You're such an impressive group of women, and it's been my pleasure to work with you this year. A special shout out to Rachael Judge, who has been on the committee for many years, but who is stepping down this year – thank you very much for all your work for AWLA over the years. And thank you to the student reps this year – Dani Clements-Levi from AUT and Reilly Polaschek from Auckland Uni – you've been great to work with again this year.

I'd also like to thank our wonderful administrator, Moe Saulala. Moe is the person who makes so much of what we do happen seamlessly, through her management of the website and our emails, and we're very grateful for all her work.

And finally, to the AWLA community. The committee could not do what we do without the support of our members and the community, and it's a privilege to be a part of this. I would also like to acknowledge the support I have personally received from a number of senior members of this community over the last two years – I really appreciate the willingness you have shown to assist me and the committee whenever I have needed a sounding board or some support.

Nō reira, ngā mihi nui ki a koutou

Laura Carter

AWLA President