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## WORD FROM THE CONVENOR

Dear Member

August was extremely busy - with great events and travels to Brisbane (AWL Conference), Mildura (Regional Sexual Assault Forum) and of course a great turnout for our recent Members and Guests night in Melbourne.

There are a number of interesting events that VWL is presenting to you this September. I commend them all to you, starting off with the Lesbia Harford Oration on 8 September at Blake Dawson Waldron. Lesbia Harford was an activist, poet and law graduate. The Lesbia Harford Oration is hosted by VWL bi-annually, and is an event which focuses on an issue of importance for women. This year, in a break from the tradition of a single keynote speaker, the Oration will be held in a panel format, with a number of speakers addressing the topic, Do We Measure Up? Protecting Women's Rights in Australia. This year, the Public Interest Law Clearing House (PILCH) is hosting this event with us. In July, a delegation from the Australian government addressed the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) Committee in relation to Australia's report on the implementation of the CEDAW in Australia. The Oration is an excellent opportunity to hear from people who have been involved in observing Australia's women's rights progress, and to contribute to this discussion yourselves. This is an excellent event to bring friends, colleagues and clients to, and a great opportunity to network over a drink and nibble as well.

On 14 September we are teaming with the Medical Women's Society to bring you Happy Healthy Women - an important forum on the medical and legal challenges involved in dealing with sexual assault. A line-up of great speakers from the medical and legal professions is not to be missed.

I am also pleased to announce that VWL has a new intern working with us, through the Victoria Law Foundation's internship program. Kathryn Sharpe is a Monash University law student, who is working with our Women Migrants' Legal Information Project Committee and is based at Corrs Chambers Westgarth, one of our generous sponsor firms who is sharing its facilities with us to enable our intern to have a professional workspace available to her.

In artistic news, make sure you check out Fern Smith's art. Fern is responsible for the beautiful and provoking artwork in our *Portia* annual magazines - make sure you see her website details below. I'd also like to send a big congratulations to Mary Edquist,

Maurice  
Blackburn  
Lawyers  
Since 1919

DLA PHILLIPS FOX

CORRS  
CHAMBERS  
WESTGARTH  
lawyers

partner at Monahan + Rowell, who recently opened an exhibition of her acclaimed art at The Essoign Club in Owen Dixon Chambers. It's fabulous to see and hear of VWL members doing great things outside of the law, so please so send us your news.

This month we profile Wendy Rees, from Clayton Utz who, while slogging it out at work and being a movie buff, also puts the effort into her exercise. She does Zumba! I'm with you Wendy - Zumba is muy divertido. Just goes to show that you can fit it all in if you plan it out - family, work, health and enjoyment.

Finally, I would like to advise you that Mary-Anne Ryan, of Tasmania Women Lawyers has recently been elected President of our peak body, Australian Women Lawyers. We look forward to welcoming AWL members to all of our events, whenever they are in Victoria.

Look after yourselves,  
Astrid.



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## PROFILE OF ARTIST FERNSMITH

The 2008, 2009 and 2010 editions of VWL's annual publication, '*Portia*', contain cover artworks by artist Fern Smith. Fern's art is humanist and feminist, drawing from the influences of myriad twentieth century art and social movements. Fern has extensive experience in working in collaboration with various community organisations. Her contribution in multimedia and visual art has had an impact both nationally and internationally. To find out more about Fern's work, please visit <http://www.fernartz.com> or sign up to the soiree and exhibition mailing list email via: [fern@fernartz.com](mailto:fern@fernartz.com). VWL sincerely thanks Fern Smith for her beautiful artwork for the last three years.



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## UPCOMING VWL EVENTS

### 2010 Lesbia Harford Oration - 8 September 6pm

*Supported by Blake Dawson Waldron*

Lesbia Harford is recognised as a pioneer of women in the legal profession and a champion of workers' rights. This year's Oration will be a panel discussion featuring four leading contributors to the national women's rights agenda and Australia's international human rights obligations in respect of women's rights. Register for this fantastic event by [clicking here](#)

### Violence Against Women - Report Launch and Panel Discussion - 14 September 2010

ANZ Centre Docklands at 6pm

*Supported by VWL, Victorian Medical Women's Society, AFMW and AWC.*

On 14 September, VWL and the Victorian Medical Women's Society are joining forces to consider the question "Are we responding well to the challenges of sexual trauma?" and launch the report "Happy Healthy Women not Just Survivors". We have a terrific line up of speakers, including Caroline Worth on Centre Against Sexual Assault services, Angela Williams on forensic examination, Caroline Taylor and Jan Coles on medical and social justice survivor perspectives and Vivian Waller on legal remedies available to victims. The event will also provide an exciting opportunity to meet with members of the medical profession. The invitation can be [viewed here](#).

### Women's Business in the Law - 14 October 2010

*Celebrating the contribution of Indigenous women in law and justice.* VWL warmly invites you to join us for this special event, proudly supported by Maurice Blackburn, Tarwirri, and the City of Melbourne. Seats are limited, so book fast! Event details can be [viewed here](#)

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## EVENT REPORTS

## 2010 AWL Conference - report by Alexia Staker, VWL member and Legal Trainee at Baker & McKenzie

On 6 August 2010, over one hundred women lawyers from across the country converged on sunny Brisbane for the Third Annual Australian Women Lawyers Conference. With an emphasis on access to justice and gender discrimination, practitioners, academics, politicians, barristers and judges shared their wisdom and insights on topics as varied and far-reaching as reform of the legal profession, the ALRC's family violence inquiry, and the long term effects of the GFC.

Highlights included a step-by-step guide to dealing with family violence cases from barrister and solicitor Mary-Anne Ryan, and a keynote address from the Honourable Chief Justice Bryant of the Family Court. The Chief Justice spoke about the need to improve the mediation process in family law disputes and reminded delegates that despite the growing numerical significance of women in the public sphere, gendered views about women's place in society are still pervasive.

High tea with Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce AC was an elegant affair. Amidst elaborately frosted cakes, towering croquembouche and flashing cameras, Her Excellency launched a new book edited by Patricia Easteal, *Women and the Law in Australia*. Her Excellency spoke of the law's "capacity to influence lives and whole societies" and praised the authors for urging us to re-examine gender bias present in legal processes.

I left Brisbane feeling elated and inspired. While a recurring theme for a number of the speakers was the continued prevalence of systemic discrimination against women, the general tone was uplifting. The Conference was a reminder that there are many talented and passionate women lawyers who are committed to pursuing justice for all, and for those of us just starting out, many encouraging words were offered. In her speech on legal professional reform, Dr Fiona Lum acknowledged the presence of many great leaders in the room and concluded by saying, "I hope one day it will not be just one room that is filled."

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## OPPORTUNITIES

### VWL Webmaster

VWL is keen to appoint a Webmaster who would be responsible for maintaining our website. The position is a voluntary one. If you have web skills or an interest in acquiring them, please contact Communications Committee Chair Liza Powderly at [lpowderly@vicbar.com.au](mailto:lpowderly@vicbar.com.au).

### Call for submissions for *Portia* 2010

Preparations are well underway for VWL's annual magazine, *Portia*, to be published on 1 December 2010. This year, to complement our diverse membership and the diverse range of VWL events on offer, *Portia* will focus on the theme 'diversity'. We welcome all written contributions from members based on this theme (500 to 2000 words in length). Please submit articles in Word format to Liza Powderly at [lpowderly@vicbar.com.au](mailto:lpowderly@vicbar.com.au) by 5pm on Friday 1 October 2010.

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# UNDERTHE SPOTLIGHT



This month we profile *Wendy Rees, Senior Associate, Energy & Resources at Clayton Utz.*

**I became a lawyer because ...** I always enjoyed studying history, legal studies and politics, and law seemed to be a mix of all of these. I also occasionally like to get on my 'high horse', and being a lawyer gives me plenty of opportunities to do that!

**I am really proud of ...** being the first person in my family to graduate from university.

**You can have it all ...** if you are very organised and work with equally organised people to whom you can delegate tasks (both at work and at home!).

**I am extremely grateful for ...** my husband's support around the home.

**A key mentor who influenced my career is ...** (at the risk of being labelled a sycophant), my supervising partner, Emma Covacevich. Emma is efficient, organised, understanding, always has a positive attitude and has great taste in shoes.

**If I wasn't a lawyer ...** I would work in a DVD store, which would enable me to not only watch movies, but alphabetise them as well (in the appropriate movie genre, of course).

**Before I started at Clayton Utz ...** I did not know what mudlogging, a semi-submersible rig, centrifuge, sidetracking or workover was.

**The best advice I ever received was ...** to be diligent and strive for excellence in all the work you do, because no matter how large or small a matter may be, it is important to someone.

**One of the key legal initiatives I am involved in ...** is to coordinate and chair our team meetings which provides everyone with a great opportunity to share knowledge in a variety of areas including legal and business developments.

**Outside of the law ...** I like to Zumba, travel, watch movies and catch up with friends and family.

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# VWLCOMMITTEES

Joining a committee is a great way to become more involved with VWL. All committee work is voluntary. The time commitment is flexible; we are looking for enthusiasm most of all. Please send your expression of interest in joining a committee to our Secretary,

Beth Hilton-Thorp at [jthorp@bigpond.net.au](mailto:jthorp@bigpond.net.au).

Our committees are:

**Justice** - dealing with all justice related issues including submissions to government, organising the annual sexual assault forums and supporting indigenous law students.

**Work Practices** - addressing the important issues that affect women lawyers in the workplace; conducting research, and holding forums.

**Networking** - organising events with many organisations including the Women Barristers Association, liaising with regional lawyers' networks, and coordinating the annual

members and friends event and Christmas party.

**Communications** - organising this newsletter, coordinating the editing and publication of *Portia*, our annual magazine, and liaising with the media.

**Women Migrants' Legal Information Project** - planning and producing various publications to assist women migrants with key legal rights and support, in several languages.

**Law Reform** - monitoring law reform proposals and coordinating responses on behalf of VWL.

**Membership** - looking after our members' needs and promoting VWL membership within the legal community.

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## MEMBERSHIPRENEWAL

To renew your VWL membership, please [Click here](#)