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WORD FROM THE CONVENOR

Dear Member,

I trust everyone is getting back into the swing of things after a relaxing holiday period. There have been many events happening to mark the commencement of the legal year, in both the religious and secular contexts. I hope you have been able to attend such an event to welcome in the legal year and reflect on the important role that each of us has in promoting justice, doing justice and being just.

I attended the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) Community Observance for the opening of the legal year at Queen's Hall. The Governor, Professor David de Kretser asked the legal profession to think of the community we serve in carrying out our functions in pursuit of justice. The Hon Catherine Branson, the Australian Human Rights Commission President, encouraged us to prioritise the consideration of human rights in our work. David Toovey, the Former CEO of the Oaktree Foundation, encouraged the legal profession to open our hearts and to give. Community, human rights and giving are key elements of VWL's programme for the year ahead, and we hope we can encourage you to be part of this in any way you can. This may be by joining a committee, or attending an event, or letting us know what inspires you, or what bothers you. VWL is a voice for women lawyers in Victoria and we want to make sure that we can represent you in the best way possible.

I also attended the legal laneway breakfast hosted by the Victoria Law Foundation and supported by VWL and a number of organisations. This informal event provided many of us with an opportunity to listen to the Attorney-General's welcome and encouragement to pursue social change, and to eat a free croissant or two. I was glad for my croissant and juice, and happy to connect with people I had not seen in some time, but the breakfast got me thinking about lawyers and 'free things.'

Many lawyers are fortunate enough to be the beneficiaries of a range of 'free' things such as free breakfasts, free lunches, free drinks and free attendance at events. Who doesn't like a freebie?? We tell ourselves that this is part of being a professional - it's totally normal if it's work related, right? It's for the benefit of a client, or a celebration of a good outcome, or to say goodbye to a colleague. Of course all of this free consumption, is ultimately paid for by someone somewhere - someone else has covered the cost, assumedly because they think it's valuable that I am part of that function. Or the food or drink has been donated, but for the same reason - because there is some value in having me consume that item. Lawyers are great at being hospitable, and at enjoying hospitality (I certainly

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thank all of you who have been so hospitable to me).

All jobs have perks, and of course we are grateful for them. But it might be worthwhile considering the effect of these perks and freebies upon our attitude to valuing things in general. Do we value a free lunch? I'm sure a free lunch is valued in some way, because of what you might have achieved during it - you met a new client; you engaged in a good catch-up; you heard an interesting speaker - sure, but a free lunch to a lawyer might also be just another few hours out of the office. What about a free lunch to someone who is homeless? I think it might mean a lot more to them.

Thank you for being giving people.

Enjoy this edition of WKIT.

Astrid Haban-Beer



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Dame Roma Mitchell Memorial Luncheon 11 March 2010

Each year VWL and the LIV host the [Dame Roma Mitchell Memorial luncheon](#) in celebration of the life of Dame Roma, a pioneer and leader of women in the legal profession. This year's luncheon will be held on Thursday 11 March 2010 at the RACV Club, with Clare Martin, the CEO of the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) as our guest speaker. This event is always popular and thought provoking, and provides you with a great opportunity to meet and re-connect with your colleagues in the legal profession. A raffle will be held to raise funds for the Hutt Street Centre.

There are early bird rates for registering prior to 25 February. To register your attendance [click here](#).

[Australian Women Lawyers Third National Conference 6-8 August 2010.](#)

To be held at the Stamford Plaza Brisbane. Please [click here](#) for further details.

OPPORTUNITIES [\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

New Law Reform Committee 2010

VWL will increase its law reform activities in 2010 through the creation of a new law reform committee. This will enable VWL to further its objectives of working towards reform of the law and promoting understanding for women's legal and human rights. The new committee will take an active and coordinated approach

to law reform with a particular focus on:

- Access to justice;
- Human rights;
- Work related rights for women.

The committee will be led by Melanie Hodge, current co-chair of the Justice Committee.

Expressions of interest in being involved in the law reform committee are sought.

The committee will welcome members with expertise in any area or a general willingness to be involved. At this stage it is envisaged that the committee will meet on an ad hoc basis when law reform projects arise.

For further information please contact Melanie on melanie.hodge@justice.vic.gov.au.

Women Migrants Legal Information Project (WMLIP) - Co-Chair opportunity

An exciting opportunity has arisen to co-chair a VWL committee, the Women Migrants Legal Information Project (WMLIP). This committee oversees the work of interns in scoping and preparing a series of publications aimed at informing vulnerable women migrants of their legal rights. The majority of work will be undertaken by interns and/ or a project officer.

The co-chair role would include organising meetings, checking interns' work, delegating tasks to committee members, and overseeing grant applications. The role is supported by one other co-chair and a committee of enthusiastic and experienced women who are passionate about women's rights and justice. The committee reports to and is further supported by the VWL Executive Committee. The role is voluntary and would require at least one hour per month for meetings. The work has already been supported by a Victoria Law Foundation grant.

VWL is seeking nominees with good organisational and communication skills and a keen interest in justice issues. Experience in migration law or issues would be helpful but is not essential. Co-chairs are also required to be VWL members. If you have always wanted to contribute to the community and assist vulnerable women migrants, this is an excellent opportunity to get involved with an achievable time commitment. For further information please contact Melanie Hodge on hodgemelanie1@gmail.com, or Astrid Haban-Beer on astrid.haban-beer@ags.gov.au.

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*This month we profile **Malwina Peacock, Senior Associate, Property Construction & Environment***

I became a lawyer because... potentially it paid better than acting. I wasn't sure what I wanted to do after finishing year 12 and a law degree combined with a performing arts degree (which was novel at the time), seemed like a good balance between having a creative outlet and a job at the end of the day. Thankfully, it was definitely the right decision!

I am really proud of... my family, my husband and my children.

You can have it all... if you have an advanced juggler's degree. If not, then you will fumble along like the majority of us, day by day, having good days, bad days, mediocre days, and at the end, it is enough to make a very happy life. And you must be prepared to draw the line sometimes.

I am extremely grateful for... the opportunities to work on very complex and interesting transactional work in conjunction with people who are leaders in their field and who I have the utmost respect for.

A key mentor who influenced my career is ... my former boss, who was an experienced property developer and negotiator. He was a non-lawyer who helped me with understanding the commercial drivers of the property world.

If I wasn't a lawyer... I would be happily at home with my family.

Before I started at mallesons stephen jaques... I was an in-house lawyer at Coles Group.

The best advice I ever received was... In terms of work - if you are sending out complex advice or involved drafting, always have a final look over it in the morning. In terms of life - get your priorities right.

One of the key legal initiatives I am involved in... is being involved with the Law Institute leases committee. I am also looking forward to being involved with the international graduate program at Mallesons this year - it is a fantastic opportunity to facilitate the development of our graduates.

Outside of the law... I hang out with my family and friends, remain active in the Polish community, play the piano, read.

VWL COMMITTEES [\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

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(s) to our Secretary, Beth Hilton-Thorp at jthorp@bigpond.net.au.
Our committees are:

Justice - dealing with all justice related issues including submissions to government, organising the annual sexual assault forums, supporting indigenous law students, spearheading the Women Migrants' Legal Information Project.

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 encouraging members and friends events.

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

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

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