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## WORDFROMTHECONVENOR

Dear Member,

March is a month of varying weather conditions, but one can definitely notice when the days get a touch shorter, and you start eyeing off pricey trench coats that would be a perfect addition to your autumn wardrobe. That being said, it's still early in the year and the long range forecast for VWL continues to heat up with plenty of events that aim to inform, educate, and celebrate women in the law.

If you have not already registered, don't miss out on the Dame Roma Mitchell Memorial luncheon at the RACV Club on 11 March, just a few short days away. This is your opportunity to celebrate International Women's Day, and the life of Dame Roma, our first female silk, Australian court Judge, and Governor of an Australian state. Visit our website for registration details.

Also coming up is the Women's Achievement Awards, a joint initiative between VWL and WBA, the Women Barristers Association. This is your chance to nominate a woman in the law for excellence; nomination details will be sent to you shortly. This grand dinner event is certainly one not to be missed, and the Chapter House venue is sure to provide an appropriate backdrop to honour the achievements of all women lawyers. Keep the date free - it's the 18th of May 2010.

VWL is also teaming up with our friends at Monahan + Rowell Lawyers to hear some insights from Justice Dodds-Streeton. This invite only event is open exclusively to our members and friends of Monahan + Rowell, and numbers are almost at capacity. You can find RSVP details on our website if you've misplaced your invitation.

On the policy side of things, VWL is arranging the first of its sexual assault and law forums, to be held in Mildura. If you are a lawyer practising in Mildura, we would love to hear from you to get some local contact information in relation to this event; if WBA can assist, please get in touch with us.

These are just a few of the things keeping the bees at VWL busy, so stay tuned to our website for information about other events.

It is not lost on me that many of our members are already so busy that they will find it difficult to attend our events. This is understandable, but keep in mind that at each and every event of ours, you will have the opportunity to connect with people who are in like situations. To boot, you will learn something and have a nice time and you deserve it! Keeping connections is positive not just for your

Allens Arthur Robinson



MinterEllison

Blake Dawson

CLAYTON UTZ



Maddocks

MALLESONS STEPHEN JAQUES

middletons  
straight talking

career, but for yourself.

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.

To register your attendance to go to [click here](#)

Women's Achievement Awards 18 May 2010

The VWL and WBA biennial Women's Achievement Awards nights celebrating the achievements of women have always been great events. This year the dinner will be held at a new location, Chapter House, and our guest speaker is former lawyer and now investigative journalist on Four Corners, Liz Jackson. Invitations will be emailed out in April. (Nomination forms for the awards will be sent out this month.) Get a group together for a table to hear a great speaker and to celebrate the achievements of your colleagues.

Australian Women Lawyers Third National Conference 6-8 August 2010

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

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Call for a columnist

The Law Institute Journal is seeking a bi-monthly columnist to write its monthly feminist legal column entitled "According to Merit?". The column appears monthly in the LIJ but the role is shared by two columnists, writing on alternate months.

The successful candidate will be required to contribute 600 to 750 words every second month, by a specified deadline. The position is unpaid, but columnists have the opportunity to put their spin/perspective/passion into print on feminist legal and legal-related issues to an attentive audience of more than 12,000 predominantly Victorian solicitors. The LIJ is also closely read by Victorian judges, barristers, academics, and allied professionals, and is well-received nationally and internationally.

If you are interested to change the approach from its current content, format etc,

the editor Mick Paskos is happy to discuss it. But, at present, the column focuses predominantly on Victorian legal/socio-legal issues and cases and to a lesser extent on national legal and socio-legal issues. Some international content is also welcome.

The idea is to avoid preaching to the converted. Instead, the aim is to engage and encourage those who are unaware or resistant to changing the law, legal practice and more widely, society, to ensure women are not unfairly treated.

At times, the column can 'digress' into general social and political issues but there is a need to be mindful of the audience and keep the content relevant to the majority of readers: Victorian solicitors.

The editor asks that the columnists please be conscious of being equally scathing and/or praising of all sides of politics - when deserved of course - to avoid claims of bias.

As previous columnists will attest, there is little editorial interference unless the editor feels the column contains inaccuracies, poor writing, overt bias or is way off the track. In all such instances, if they arise, the editor or a member of the publications department will contact you to discuss the concerns.

Copies of the column can be found in the hardcopy LJJ or online (if you are an LIV member or subscriber) at <http://www.liv.asn.au/News-and-Publications/Law-Institute-Journal/Archived-Issues.aspx>

If you are interested, please email your CV and a short accompanying letter to Mick Paskos at [mpaskos@liv.asn.au](mailto:mpaskos@liv.asn.au). You can also call him to discuss the column on 9607 9319 [wk] or 0412 201 044 [mb]. Once the columnist is chosen, all CVs will be deleted.

### 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](mailto:melanie.hodge@justice.vic.gov.au).



*This month we profile **Astrid Haban-Beer, Convenor, VWL, and lawyer, litigation team at the Australian Government Solicitor.***

**I became a lawyer because...** I loved social justice issues and problem solving, and I was always battling to speak over my sister and brother, who loved to gang up on me for no good reason! It seemed like the most natural progression from family life. I also used to steal my father's John Grisham novels and read them until the early hours - I was shocked when I realised my practice of the law was nothing like the novels I'd read.

**I am really proud of...** the work that VWL does, and my involvement in that. I think it takes dedication to continually arrange events, keep on top of changes in policy, and read a lot of different materials. Of course it is much easier when you have a supportive team like the current VWL executive committee.

**You can have it all...** Nothing in life is easy, and I certainly don't believe that it's possible to 'have it all,' all at the same time, but I'm generally optimistic...I think the most important thing one can do for themselves is to achieve a balance that one is happy with, but always keep in mind that the balance is easily tipped - so keep working on that.

**I am extremely grateful for...** my family, my health and my happiness. Nothing is more important, because if I didn't have that, it would be difficult to be grateful for the other good things in my life.

**A key mentor who influenced my career is ...** I am lucky to have many important mentors in my life, and also great friends who have provided great feedback for the various ideas and changes I've made throughout my career so far. But I'm very grateful for my first boss in the field law, Brendan W, who practised in crime. I worked with him as a paralegal when I was a student. We still have an excellent relationship and he has been very supportive of everything I've done. He's always been very frank in telling me what he thinks, but also stressing that ultimately, each decision I make is my own.

**If I wasn't a lawyer...** I would be a foreign correspondent or photojournalist, focusing on either issues in South America or the Middle East.

**Before I started at the Australian Government Solicitor...** I was an associate to Justice Bongiorno at the Supreme Court. This was a fabulous job and I would recommend it to every law graduate - I think it's an excellent way to learn about the effect of law on society and the process of law. I was involved in some pretty incredible cases as well.

**The best advice I ever received was ...** keep calm and carry on. I only realised recently that it was an official WWII 'public message'. Also helpful (but somewhat contrary to the first advice) is 'take your time and a holiday if necessary.'

**One of the key legal initiatives I am involved in...** is the Women Migrants' Legal Information Project. This is a publication I have been working on for a few years with VWL. VWL will be producing an easy to read document in several languages that provides women migrants with key legal information

regarding marriage and divorce law, assault, work rights, human trafficking, and where to get legal assistance, amongst other things. It has been a long process and we are in the process of seeking funding for the project. We've also had the pleasure of engaging some wonderful interns and talking with people from different community groups, to assess the need for the information. All of VWL is looking forward to this, and I personally hope that it manages to provide some helpful information to women who might otherwise be in the dark about their rights.

*Outside of the law...* I'm pretty busy - first of all I'm 'helping' fix up my apartment which I just bought and moved into - this provides for some nice domestic chaos. I'm also undertaking honours study in History part-time. I'm writing a thesis relating to the migration of Filipinos to Australia in the 1980's - focusing on women of course. And, I'm also committed to running a half-marathon later in the year (the more I tell people the more I have to actually do it - so now it's out there).

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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](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, supporting indigenous law students, spearheading the Women Migrant's 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.