

The women who lead our profession

Awards night recognises outstanding contributors



Queensland's outstanding women lawyers were recognised on 30 October at a glittering awards event in Brisbane.

The Women Lawyers Association of Queensland (WLAQ) Annual Awards Dinner named Rosslyn Monro as WLAQ Woman Lawyer of the Year, Kristin Meikle as Regional Woman Lawyer of the Year, and Abbey Richards as Emergent Woman Lawyer of the Year.

Townsville solicitor Michelle Morton received the 2015 Queensland Law Society's Agnes McWhinney Award from QLS president Michael Fitzgerald, who also announced two Outstanding Achievement Awards for solicitors Penny White and Sarah Atkinson.

Some 200 people attended the awards event, including Attorney-General Yvette D'Ath, founding WLAQ president and former Governor Leneen Forde AC, Supreme Court Justices Debra Mullins and Justice Ann Lyons, and the Honourable Margaret White, Judge Susan Purdon-Sully of the Federal Circuit Court of Australia, District Court Judges Deborah Richards and Sarah Bradley,

and Magistrates Annette Hennessy, Kerry Magee, Maxine Baldwin, Cathy McLennan, Wendy Cull, Bronwyn Springer, Kay Ryan, Jacqueline Payne and Tina Previtiera.

WLAQ president Amelia Trotman called on the Bar Association of Queensland and the state's law firms to do more to assist women at the private Bar and emphasised the importance of flexible work arrangements and paid parental leave in private practice.

"The support and promotion of women at the Bar is not just an issue for the Bar Association to address," she said. "It is incumbent on the solicitors' branch of the profession – private, government and in-house – to adopt and

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promote equitable briefing practices within their firms, departments and organisations.

"Despite a number of Queensland law firms adopting the equitable briefing policy, none of them currently publish statistics on the number of women briefed and I, on behalf of the WLAQ, implore them to do so."

Ms Trotman said the lack of workplace flexibility had been identified as a key factor in driving women away from private practice, particularly those who have had children.

"In 2015, where we have endless resources at our disposal such as remote desktops, laptops, tablets, smart phones, Skype and virtual offices,

there is no excuse for a lack of flexible work practices," she said. "While I accept that, from an employer's perspective, flexible work arrangements may require some adjustment to traditional practice and necessitate a level of trust between employer and employee, I believe those are challenges that can easily be overcome and it is essential that we do overcome them in order to retain our brilliant women lawyers who have so much to contribute to the profession and the practice of law."

She said the Flexibility Working Group, a joint WLAQ and QLS initiative, was gathering the necessary qualitative and quantitative data on flexibility in the workplace to develop protocols

to assist with the implementation of flexible work practices in Queensland law firms and organisations. The WLAQ had also committed to the formation of a working group to develop a model paid parental leave policy.

The evening's guest speaker was Mamamia associate editor and former lawyer Georgina Dent, with key sponsors including Queensland Law Society, Queensland Independent Costing Services, Bar Association of Queensland, Shine Lawyers, Brisbane BMW, Auscript, Medico Legal Insurance Group, Maurice Blackburn Lawyers and McCullough Robertson Lawyers.



WLAQ Regional Woman Lawyer of the Year

Bechtel senior counsel

Kristin Meikle

While all regional, rural and remote (RRR) practitioners face issues caused by their location, what are the major issues for RRR female practitioners?

"Resources are the biggest issue; RRR practitioners have limited access in many cases to quality resources, which will impact their ability to access training, attend networking functions, secure mentors, etc. Female practitioners can be challenged to access the types of resources that may serve to help advance their careers even in urban centres, so for RRR female practitioners this may put them at a double disadvantage."

What is your message to all regional women lawyers?

"Look for creative ways to address the resource issues through existing social media platforms, Chatter, online learning, etc. Build your 'virtual' network through these connections, and seek ways to maintain contacts outside of your immediate sphere. Encourage the belief that a diversity of views – both regional and urban, male and female – enhances the profession as a whole, and that we all benefit from a more inclusive legal profession."



WLAQ Woman Lawyer of the Year

Women's Legal Service coordinator

Rosslyn Monro

What motivates you to go 'above and beyond' in your legal practice?

"My career in the community legal sector has given me the privilege of working with marginalised and disadvantaged groups, including older people, young people and women. Their experiences and resilience motivates my work."

"Women's Legal Service provides legal assistance to almost 4000 women each year whose lives are affected by domestic violence and complex family law matters. This year alone we have received a 40% increase in demand, meaning we are only able to help one in 10 women."

"It is a privilege to work with these women and lead an organisation that is dedicated to ensuring women and their children receive the help they need, when they need it most."

In terms of female practitioners, what will the legal profession look like 10 years from now?

"We know that women are studying law in increasing numbers, however that increase is not necessarily reflected in the numbers of women who practise and who are in positions of leadership in the profession. It is my hope that with time those inequities would be addressed by recognising the unique qualities women bring to the practice of law."

"I also look forward to a future in which technology can provide more flexible working conditions for women in the legal professional so they are able to enjoy employment continuity with their non-paid caring roles."

Pictured: Woman Lawyer of the Year Rosslyn Monro, centre, with TC Beirne School of Law academic dean and head of school Professor Sarah Derrington, left, and WLAQ president Amelia Trotman.

WLAQ Emergent Woman Lawyer of the Year

Caxton Legal Centre
employment law coordinator

Abbey Richards



What is the biggest professional issue for emergent women lawyers?

"Commencing a career within the legal profession while maintaining one's personal identity and self-confidence (and the ensuing assertiveness) can be a difficult balancing act for emergent women lawyers. The desire to be respected and valued in the workplace can often translate into a mistaken belief that one must necessarily fall into a particular 'model' or behave in a particular manner.

"Emergent women lawyers must recognise their value within the profession; while they may be new to practice, their contribution can still be significant. Work hard, act with integrity, take care of yourself, give back, and don't be afraid to bring your personality to work."

What can young female practitioners bring to the profession that their male colleagues can't?

"I generally do not subscribe to the view that women and men bring vastly different attributes to the legal profession; I am of the opinion that all individuals bring with them their own history, ethics and motivations. Having said this, I think women have been, to a certain extent, identified as a 'collective' within the profession;

whether that be in relation to conversations concerning the gender pay gap, representation in positions of leadership or flexible work practices.

"Where I think female practitioners can add additional value, however, is through the consideration of the female lawyer as an individual and, more so, an individual that is defined by more than simply her profession.

"There are some incredible women within this profession – singers, artists, philanthropists etc., and we should celebrate and encourage female practitioners for all that they encompass. The creation of a professional culture of diversity, individualism and acceptance is, in my opinion, something that female practitioners can contribute to."



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Queensland Law Society Agnes McWhinney Award 2015

Agnes McWhinney Award winner Michelle Morton is managing partner of 120-year-old Townsville firm wilson/ryan/grose Lawyers, where she commenced her legal career as an articled clerk in 1985. She became one of the first two women partners with the firm in 1999.

QLS president Michael Fitzgerald said she was an exceptional contributor to Queensland's legal profession.

"She is one of a few legal practitioners to become an accredited specialist in two areas with the Society, personal injuries and workplace relations, and is involved with numerous local community organisations," he said.

"Michelle is currently deputy chair of the Townsville Hospital and Health Service Board; she is acting chair of the WNBL's JCU Townsville Fire, and she has played a vital role in the development of the Townsville Business Women's Network.

"In 2003 Michelle was awarded the WLAQ's Regional Woman Lawyer of the Year award. In addition to raising five children, Michelle also finds time to volunteer for a number of community activities and is a member of the Salvation Army's advisory board. For the past three years, Michelle has volunteered her time and expertise to act as a mentor to emerging leaders and Indigenous youth ambassadors in the Townsville Enterprise Limited Emerging Leaders Program, and Indigenous Youth Ambassador Program."

From left, QLS CEO Amelia Hodge, Michelle Morton, Penny White, Sarah Atkinson and QLS president Michael Fitzgerald.

The Agnes McWhinney award recognises outstanding professional and community contribution from a female practitioner. This year's presentation marks 100 years since Ms McWhinney became the first woman to be admitted as a Queensland solicitor.

Mr Fitzgerald said that, due to the number of quality nominations this year, two Outstanding Achievement Awards were also presented tonight to solicitors Penny White of Peter Shields Lawyers and Sarah Atkinson of Maurice Blackburn, who had also made high-calibre contributions to the profession and community.