

AUSTRALIAN LAW LIBRARIANS' ASSOCIATION

PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2023-24

Summary

The Australian Law Librarians' Association (ALLA) is the professional association representing the interests of those working in the legal information sector in Australia. The Association aims to promote and provide a national focus for law librarianship and to support the interests of law libraries, collections and legal information services to both legal and public communities.

This President's Report for 2023-24 describes the activities of the Association through its members, Board and Office Bearers in meeting this aim during the past year.

The Board members for 2023-24 have been:

President: Laurie Atkinson

Vice President: Kate Freedman

Treasurer: Phil Mullen

Secretary: Amanda Surrey

Past President: Paula Everett

Director: Carole Hinchcliffe

Director: Khym Lam-Fidler

Director: Emma Joneshart

Director: Lisa Capps

Director: Amber Cowen

Member survey

In October 2023 members were offered the opportunity to complete a survey. Some questions on the survey were intended to gather feedback on specific topics, while others were more general and open-ended – inviting both positive and constructive comment from the membership. Forty members submitted responses, representing thirteen per cent of the membership. The Board considered this a representative sample, and from the responses formed an action plan. The responses indicated an alignment of views across the membership for most issues.

The action plan formed based on survey results included reviewing the organisation's objectives by consulting with members and presenting revised objectives for adoption

at an AGM. While work on this project has commenced, further time and consultation is necessary before settling on proposed revised objectives for consideration for adoption.

Reviewing and improving the website remains a priority for the Board and membership alike. Some changes have been made to the website, but the shortcomings of the current platform do not permit resolving all the issues experienced by members. The Board has resolved to transition to a new website and has formed a subcommittee to explore options and make recommendations to the Board. In the meantime, the Website Coordinator performs services to a high standard, responding swiftly to requests for change. An up-to-date, useful membership database is a core requirement for any new website platform.

Survey responses indicated concerns about resource-sharing via the mailing list. The Board sought legal advice on this matter and introduced a new code of conduct in February. The changes introduced have addressed matters of concern, with any direct requests for document supply on the mailing list managed by the Mailing List Coordinator in accordance with the Code of Conduct.

Other matters raised in the survey acknowledged the high quality and frequency of the Australian Law Librarians Journal, and the professional development and networking organised by our Association and its members.

The Board continues to improve communication and advocacy, with the Board having reviewed an ALLA Communication Strategy to assist with this goal.

Volunteers and honorariums

The Association is run by members and thrives on volunteer effort. Some volunteer roles receive a modest honorarium, recognising that the role is critical to the operation of the Association. The honorarium is not compensation for the hours of service to the Association, and the recipient of the honorarium is required to contribute many volunteer hours. Thank you to all who have assisted the Association through volunteer effort in the past year, and especially to the following roles formally appointed by the Board:

Website Coordinator: Bruce Boyes (honorarium)

CPD Coordinator: Melissa Mills (no honorarium)

Vendor Relations: Khym Lam-Fidler (no honorarium)

Journal Editor: Damaris Olea (honorarium)

Journal Business Manager: Fiona Macdowall (honorarium)

Membership Coordinator and Administrator: Abby Ward (honorarium)

Mailing List coordinator (Kate Freeman, previously Amber Cowen, Robin Gardner, Kirsty Wilson)

FLO Editor: Anastasia Stepanovic (honorary)

Conference Committee: Paula Everett (no honorary)

Acknowledgements and Awards

The Association awarded two life memberships in 2023. One was to Michael Gavan, in recognition of his tireless contribution to ALLA (including terms as President, Treasurer, Vice President and Past President) during which time he has been pivotal in bringing the Journal under the direct ownership of ALLA and made significant effort with regard to professional development through conference organising committees and FLO. The second life membership was awarded to Josie Cox recognising her championing, encouraging, supporting and inspiring all who know her, and for her consistent contribution to professional development for the benefit of all members of the Association.

The Law Librarian of the Year for 2023 was awarded to Phil Mullen, recognised by his peers as someone who shares his knowledge generously, and helps connect people. Phil has actively contributed to the Association over many years, currently as Treasurer, and previously as CPD Coordinator. The Law Librarian of the Year award is a great honour, and Phil is a more than worthy recipient. Congratulations Phil, and thanks for all that you do for our Association.

Chapters and Divisions

One of the pleasures of the role of President of our Association is the opportunity to meet monthly with the Presidents of State and Territory Chapters and Divisions. Thank you very much to our Vice President, Kate Freeman, who coordinates these meetings. This group is a terrific peer support, enabling ideas sharing and exploring solutions to various issues present in our profession. The Chapters and Divisions Presidents form the ALLA Advocacy Advisory Committee (AAAC), gathering ideas from membership and formulating policy positions for the Board's consideration. The AAAC considers the audience for messages and helps formulate those messages. All members who wish to contribute ideas about advocacy can do so by firstly contacting their local President:

Australian Capital Territory: Trung Quach

New South Wales: Melissa Mills

Northern Territory: Lisa Capps

Queensland: no current chapter

South Australia: Lucy Brown

Tasmania: no current chapter

Victoria: Michael Coats

Western Australia: David McDowell

On behalf of the Association, I thank Trung, Melissa, Lisa, Lucy, Michael and David for contributing the time and effort required to effectively run local chapters/divisions, especially where local members continue to operate as an incorporated association which requires additional governance obligations on the part of the local Presidents and other office bearers. Good on you all.

Journal

Four issues of the Australian Law Librarian Journal have been released in the past year. This represents a significant effort for our Association, and I express my thanks and admiration for Damaris Olea for pulling each issue together each quarter, and to Fiona MacDowall for managing the business of the Journal. Thanks also to the regular columns and contributors: Robin Gardner, Fiona MacDowall, and all the members who've written articles in the past year. The breadth of topics covered in the Journal reflect the complexity of our profession and emphasises the importance of peer-sharing knowledge and professional development.

Professional Development

Melissa Mills has overseen an active program of professional development, some initiated by the national body, and some organised by divisions/chapters and open to all to attend, where possible. As well as contributing to all members' professional development in this way, Melissa made a major investment in her own development in the past year. Melissa was successful in her application for the Petal Kinder International Travel Fellowship for 2023-24. This Fellowship allows a member of our Association to attend an international law library conference, and Melissa's choice was the British and Irish Association of Law Librarians conference in Leeds in June 2024. Furthering her development, and in a great example of international engagement, Melissa was also selected by that conference organising committee to deliver a paper at the conference. I was fortunate to be in the audience for Melissa's presentation – it was a very interesting paper, and well received with lots of questions asked until the moderator had to call an end to questions as it was time for all to move on to the next session. Well done Melissa – a great example to us all.

Finance

The Treasurers Report speaks to the detail of the Association's finances. On behalf of the Association, I thank Phil Mullen who has prepared the Report for 2023-24 and does so as his final Report as Treasurer. Phil has managed his obligations responsibly and presented the Board with sufficient information for decision-making to occur to meet

operational needs. The Board considers revenue and expenditure with a focus on the medium-long term sustainability of the Association, as well as the immediate need. Prospective agreements are scrutinised, and where necessary, the Board takes a responsible approach in sourcing legal advice.

Governance

The Board continued to improve the governance of the Association and have reflected on the importance of the Board's responsibility for the strategic direction of the Association. Introducing two streams of meetings is to try to achieve a better balance for Board members between the critical strategic focus and the operational imperatives of the Association. Board meetings are held monthly throughout the year, and alternate between a strategic agenda and an operational agenda. This structure has facilitated progress on such initiatives as the member survey, introducing a new code of conduct for the mailing list, and finalising the launch of FLO.

In an increasingly complex technical environment, the burden for Board members to run the organisation relying solely on volunteers and honorariums remains heavy. With the President acting as both Chair of the Board and (unpaid) Chief Executive Officer, it is difficult to meet member expectations.

The Board has sought governance and/or legal advice on three issues:

1. Governance professional development offered to all members in leadership roles for the Association
2. Review of Constitution and relationship between the Board and state/territory chapters/divisions
3. Review of Mailing List activity, and revision of Code of Conduct and creation of template emails.

Australian Library and Information Association

In May 2024 I enjoyed meeting with the Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Library and Information Association to discuss the strategic direction of our organisation and revisit the memorandum of understanding between our organisations. Paula Everett, our Past President, accepted a gratis invitation to attend the ALIA Conference in Adelaide in May. Cathy Warburton, CEO of ALIA will similarly be attending our conference. This arrangement is made possible through the MOU between our organisations.

I encourage all members of our Association to consider the benefits of being members of ALIA as well.

International representation

I have been pleased to accept invitations to attend, as President of ALLA, conferences of the British and Irish Association of Law Librarians, the International Association of Law Librarians and the American Association of Law Librarians. In these forums I have promoted the innovation and professionalism of Australia's law librarians. Each conference has included a description of whether and/or how the management and access of national legal information resources incorporates First Nations resources.

Board members

The ALLA Board is an active, collegiate group of people, focussed on the aims of the Association.

I am grateful to the board for their accumulated industry knowledge acting as a source of advice and comments in consideration of the decisions made throughout the year, as well as strategic matters such as member attraction and retention, and the further development of educational programs and resources for the Association's members, and our relationship with suppliers in Australia's legal information industry.

Individually and collectively, the Board approaches matters creatively and responsibly, sometimes drawing on their vast experience, and sometimes through fresh perspectives. Board members are also great at getting things done, and being quick to volunteer to act. It is a warm, positive culture. I have been particularly blessed this year with the support that I have needed to call on during periods of planned and unplanned leave. Thank you to each of my fellow Board members: Phil, Amanda, Kate, Paula, Carole, Khym, Emma, Lisa and Amber – both from my perspective as President, but also on behalf of the Association's members, you do great work, and we appreciate you.

Laurie Atkinson

President Australian Law Librarians Association

17 July 2024