

ALHR PRESIDENT'S REPORT AGM 11 APRIL 2016

It is with mixed emotions that I provide my final President's report. I have been a member of ALHR for 5 years and for almost all of that time I have been a member of the National Committee. It will be a strange experience to no longer be involved in the day to day decision making of the organisation. I am, however, curious to know what it is like to be 'just' a member of ALHR. I look forward to seeing the organisation from that perspective.

Over the last two years as President I have been supported by a National Committee, the membership of which has remained mostly constant. It has been a Committee of extremely talented and dedicated individuals who have worked tirelessly to increase the profile of ALHR and the impact of our work. It is a great source of pride to see how ALHR is growing. It is a momentum that must continue and I am sure will continue under fresh leadership with new ideas.

As President I wanted to ensure that ALHR had processes and a structure to fully realise its potential. I thank the National Committee for contributing ideas and providing support and hard work to make this a reality. ALHR has a strong structural and financial basis to become the leading voice on human rights in Australia.

Subcommittees

A structure of subject specific subcommittees is now enshrined in our Rules. They have been nothing short of a great success. So much so that in addition to the subcommittees chaired by our six ordinary members we have also formed two further subcommittees for Business and Human Rights and LGBTI rights. A focus on specific human rights areas has engaged members allowing them to focus on specific human rights issues for which they feel passionate.

Over the past year the six ordinary member subcommittees were: Refugees, Human Rights Act, Freedoms, Disability Rights, Indigenous Rights and Fundraising.

Natalie Wade has been a phenomenal chair of the Disability Rights Subcommittee. Her subcommittee has gone above and beyond in the number of submissions and media releases it has produced. Natalie has published articles and been an invaluable member of the National Committee in terms of providing referrals and advice to members of the public who contact us directly for assistance. She is a tremendously hard worker and a great asset to ALHR. I am so pleased to see that she is renominating to chair the subcommittee again this year.

Dr Tamsin Clarke continues to produce amazing work as chair of the Freedoms subcommittee. This subcommittee was set up to engage with the Law Reform Commission's inquiry into laws that infringe traditional rights and freedoms but has become one dealing with any laws infringing civil and political rights. Tamsin has written the majority of all the submissions that have come within the purview of the subcommittee and she has also been a substantial contributor in relation to nearly every other submission produced by ALHR. Her knowledge of general governance issues has been of tremendous assistance in the general administration of the organisation. Tamsin has been a great support and invaluable member of the Committee. It is fantastic that she is renominating this year.

ALHR would not be where it is today without the tireless work of Kerry Weste. Officially the chair of the fundraising subcommittee, in reality she should be the volunteer of the year. She is always willing to lend a hand for anything. She has looked after paid membership, social media, events and much more. Thank you so very much Kerry. I am very pleased to see your nomination for Vice-president and so glad you will be remaining on the National Committee.

Benedict Coyne has put his tremendous energy and enthusiasm into pushing ahead with the campaign to have a Human Rights Act for Australia. The subcommittee has worked very hard to take the first step in ensuring that Queensland has a Human Rights Act. The Queensland Government will now hold a Parliamentary inquiry into a Human Rights Act for Queensland and ALHR will no doubt be a strong contributor to that. As the only western democracy without some form of a Bill of Rights or Human Rights Act it must be ALHR's focus to bring this issue into all human rights areas. Examples of how things would be better with such an Act must be illustrated on a constant basis in order to build up support. Benedict has nominated this year for President. His passion for human rights will serve

ALHR well as its leader. I thank him for all his work over the past year, including attending Australia's Universal Periodic Review in Geneva and providing a daily blog of events.

I thank Claire Hammerton who is standing down as Chair of the Refugee subcommittee. Claire's knowledge and experience has been invaluable in this extremely important human rights area. Under her leadership ALHR has produced extremely high quality submissions and undertaken well informed interactions with the media. Claire's passion and knowledge of human rights is an immense asset to ALHR and I do hope that she will continue on in another capacity. I also wish the Committee well in finding a strong replacement as Chair of the subcommittee. Australia's treatment of people seeking safety is a national disgrace and ALHR must be at the forefront of pushing for change.

Lastly I must mention Amy Sinclair and Rafael Szumer. They are the chairs of the Business and Human Rights and LGBTI subcommittees respectively. Both have been amazingly effective in a relatively short period of time. Lawyers weekly even reported that ALHR was responsible for the Government's commitment to a National Action Plan to implement the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. I thank them both for their hard work and I am very pleased that they are both continuing on in their roles this year to give ALHR a voice on these very important issues.

States

I would be remiss in not acknowledging the hard work of the state and territory convenors. These members of the national committee are able to interact with our membership on a face to face level that the National Committee cannot. Over the past year the states and territories have held successful events, made submissions on state-based issues and been there to encourage our membership. I thank all the convenors for their hard work and encourage you all to actively seek out the members in your state or territory, hold regular meetings and actively pursue the protection of human rights on a state and territory level.

Secretariat

On 17 July 2015 we launched our secretariat at La Trobe Law School. The secretariat has given us access to students to assist us with ongoing research and production of useful resources such as position papers and fact sheets. It has provided us with access to La Trobe in Melbourne which has been of great assistance in holding events in Melbourne. And it has given us Randa Rafiq who has been of tremendous assistance to us. Thank you so much Randa for your help even at times when you were not officially on the 'ALHR clock'. It has been of great assistance to have someone who can answer our phone, provide assistance for referrals, post on the website and social media, track submissions, send out media releases and organise our upcoming conference.

I especially want to acknowledge Randa's work on the conference which will take place in November 2016. This will be a fantastic opportunity to raise ALHR's profile and expand our network. It is a fantastic opportunity that our partnership with La Trobe has given us. I look forward to attending.

The future

This year sees a number of National Committee members stepping down.

I thank our Vice-president Roslyn Cook for her assistance over the past two years. She has been of great assistance filling in for me when I was unable to undertake duties, generally assisting all other members of the Committee with their work and helping out with banking emergencies! I wish her all the best in her future endeavours which I hope include being an active member of ALHR!

I also thank our tremendous treasurer, Jenny Leo. There has been immense change in the governance of this organisation over the past two years and this has very much included how we handle our money. I am extremely grateful that we had such a competent, independent person like Jenny who showed initiative and skill in handling the change. She will be sorely missed. I wish the Committee well in finding a replacement.

Thankfully Scott Calnan is remaining as Secretary. Scott first took on the role last year and has been of great assistance to me. Thank you Scott for your enthusiasm for the role, your willingness to assist

and all the hard work you have put into the role. An organisation needs a good secretary to keep us organised and running smoothly. We are lucky to have Scott in the role.

I believe that ALHR is an extremely important organisation for Australia. We are seen by many as the voice of Australian lawyers on human rights issues. I believe that is what we are but that voice needs to be stronger and it needs to be louder. We are all volunteers. It makes what we do more difficult but no less achievable. We now have more money. We now have an effective organisational structure. We now have the assistance of a large Australian University. And we have talented, committed people with whom I have been proud to have worked closely over the past two years as President. I wish the new Committee all the best for the year ahead. I know you will build on what we have achieved to ensure that human rights are promoted, respected and protected in Australia.

Nathan Kennedy
President
10 April 2016