



## President Report 2018/2019

### Executive Summary

I am very excited and honoured to present my first ALHR annual *President's Report*. During my first year in this role I have been very fortunate to be supported by a National Committee of extremely talented and dedicated individuals, all of whom volunteer their time on top of busy day-jobs and other life-responsibilities, and who have worked tirelessly to increase the profile of ALHR nationwide and the impact of our work both locally, nationally and internationally.

ALHR has had another extremely productive year with a significant amount of advocacy output as well as internal adjustments and governance enhancements. The Executive Management Committee (EMC), established by past president Benedict Coyne and myself during 2017 has continued to successfully streamline the large extracurricular workloads of all of our fabulous members of our ALHR National Committee, which keeps growing stronger with now 34 members from around the continent all will specific, important well defined roles.

### Executive

I would like to acknowledge the work of my colleagues on the ALHR Executive. As president it would be impossible to perform my role without the support of ALHR's vice-president, secretary and treasurer.

I would like to take this opportunity acknowledge Jarrah Ekstein our outgoing Vice President and very long serving member of the National Committee. Jarrah stepped away from the Vice Presidency in February in order to go on maternity leave. It has been an immense pleasure to work with Jarrah who has been consistently devoted and brilliant in her work on behalf of ALHR and I thank her so sincerely for her incredible contributions over the past six years.

Since February, I am very pleased and fortunate to have received the support of Natalie Wade as acting Vice President. I am beyond thrilled to receive Natalie's nomination for election to the role of ALHR Vice President tonight. Natalie has been a member of the National Committee for 5 years and is the founder and chair of our acclaimed Disability Rights Subcommittee. Nat has consistently been a driving force for ALHR's good governance and has displayed incredible passion toward the advancement of ALHR as the leading advocacy organisation for human rights in Australia. In addition to her significant contributions as Chair of the Disability Rights Subcommittee, Nat has been a most valued member of the EMC as an Ordinary Member for Governance. I cannot think of a better person to take up the role of Vice President. Nat and I are incredibly excited about

continuing to increase ALHR's presence as the leading association for human rights lawyers in Australia.

Thank you to our amazing Treasurer, Katherine Hinton who has continued to do a stellar job on the finances. There has been immense change in the governance of this organisation over the past few 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 Katherine who shows initiative. It has been an incredible asset to ALHR to have a Chartered Accountant with over 20 years Finance experience who also has a strong interest in human rights and social justice. We are very grateful to Katherine for the time she so generously gives ALHR and I am so pleased to receive her nomination for another year!

Nathan Kennedy our current Secretary will be stepping down tonight. Nathan's commitment to and belief in ALHR is unrivalled. He has been a member of the National Committee in a number of roles over many years, including as a past president. ALHR would not be where it is today without Nathan's very significant contributions. Most recently, Nathan has not only been an excellent secretary, his significant expertise in international human rights law has been a very highly valued resource for the National Committee. I extend most sincere thanks to Nathan for his willingness to assist and his many and varied contributions to ALHR's work. The position of secretary is a key role on the ALHR Executive. Our Secretary is not only essential to keeping the good ship ALHR organised and running smoothly but plays an important role in contributing to governance and ALHR's engagement with the media. I am absolutely thrilled and very grateful to have received former ACT and NSW Convenor Sangeeta Sharmin's nomination to replace Nathan as the ALHR Secretary at the 2019 AGM. I know Sangeeta is as passionate about nurturing ALHR as we are and we very much look forward to the year ahead with such stellar colleagues on the Executive team.

## **EMC**

The creation of the EMC to manage the day-to-day governance of ALHR has created efficiencies for the eminent Chairs of our specialist thematic subcommittees and State and Territory Convenors allowing them to very much focus on human rights advocacy overseen by the EMC. I extend sincere thanks to Nicholas Stewart, Khanh Hoang and Madeleine Bridgett for their work on the EMC.

## **Subcommittees**

Throughout the past twelve months ALHR's subcommittees have continued to grow and build on various campaigns with their respective subcommittee members. Over the past twelve months our eight thematic national subcommittees have grown to ten with the launch of our new Children's Rights Subcommittee and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights subcommittee.

This focus on thematic human rights areas serves to increase the impact of our strategic advocacy and enables ALHR to efficiently target areas of critical focus for Australian human rights practice. It also continues to be an incredibly successful means to engage our members allowing them to concentrate on particular human rights issues and enabling ALHR to deliver a key promise to our paid membership by offering them a voice on human rights and law reform in Australia.

In appointing leaders of these subcommittees, the ALHR EMC has continued to seek out eminent leaders in their fields. We are pursuing co-chair management structures within the

subcommittees as a means to improve the impact of our advocacy and deliver efficiency and accountability.

I would like to acknowledge and thank Dr Tamsin Clarke who has continued to produce amazing work as chair of the Freedoms subcommittee. This subcommittee was originally 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 many other submissions 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 to me as President and throughout my years in other roles on the National Committee. She has truly been an invaluable member of the Committee and although Tamsin will not be renominating for a leadership position on the National Committee this year, I know I speak for the entire Committee when I note how much we look forward to her continued engagement and wisdom as an active member and mentor.

I must also mention the significant contributions of Nicholas Stewart and Georgia Burke as co-chairs of our LGBTI Subcommittee, the wonderful work Dr Emma Phillips is doing as chair of our Human Rights Act Subcommittee, the work of Natalie Wade and Susan Peukert in co-chairing the Disability Rights Subcommittee. I acknowledge their tireless advocacy in support of a Royal Commission and the work they will do now that it has been established! Thanks also to Sonali Seneviratne and Jo Byrne who have been doing wonderful work as the co-chairs of our Indigenous Rights Subcommittee.

Jessica Bayley has had a fantastic start to her time as Chair of the Refugee Rights Subcommittee and I am thrilled to receive her nomination tonight for a governance role on the EMC and to know that she will be continuing to chair it. I also acknowledge the work of Scott Cosgriff who stepped down as chair of the Refugee Rights Subcommittee late last year. ALHR's Business and Human Rights Subcommittee had an incredibly productive year as we saw the passage of Australia's Modern Slavery Act. Thanks to the leadership of Madeleine Bridgett and Lauren Zanetti ALHR has been at the forefront of BHR advocacy in Australia over the past twelve months. Lauren has stepped down and we thank her for her significant contributions while looking forward to Madeleine's continued leadership in this space. As acting chair of our Women and Girls Rights Subcommittee, Kate Marchesi has undertaken important work in advocating for the decriminalisation of abortion and for equitable and affordable access to reproductive health services.

Thanks to former ACT Convenor and Chair of the new ESCR Subcommittee, Charlie Faulder who I know has fantastic plans for the coming year. Sincere thanks to Professor Rita Shackel for her contributions as Co-chair of the Women and Girls' Rights Subcommittee and now as the Co-chair of our new Children's Rights Subcommittee. I am very excited to co-chair and develop this important subcommittee with Rita.

## **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 other members of 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.

## **Media**

ALHR's media exposure has continued to ensure that ALHR's strategic human rights advocacy received the traction and attention it deserves. Through the expert hands of our superb professional media manager, Matt Mitchell the last year has seen ALHR interviewed, quoted and published in the media through Australia and overseas.

Our ability to engage a professional media manager, which we think is important to enhance and increase the impact of ALHR's advocacy for human rights protection, has only been possible due to the revenue raised via the introduction of paid membership. The decision to use some of our very limited resources in this manner has certainly proven well worth its weight in gold with ALHR's media presence significantly and consistently raised and diversified to include significant and targeted media reach including more prime time positions on radio and television and becoming a go-to source for journalists who want information on human rights issues.

2019 will see a continued focus on broadening the media reportage of ALHR to new media and non-traditional supporters, such as News Corporation mastheads, to ensure the reporting of human rights abuses and issues is carried outside of the traditional realm of the ABC and Fairfax. Long-standing supporters of ALHR, such as Lawyers Weekly, will continue to be a key ally and new avenues will be pursued for media appearances in television, radio and new media in particular.

## **Conclusion**

I look forward to following up this President's Report in the very near future with publication of ALHR's Annual Report which will offer a much more detailed insight into the specific work undertaken by our subcommittees and state and territory convenors.

We are very fortunate to have such a democratically robust, horizontal and largely consensus-based organisation where the ALHR National Committee and the EMC are both composed of a diverse array of erudite leaders in different fields who have provided an infinite wellspring of inspiration and education over the past year.

Of course, none of this would be possible without the commitment and engagement of our marvellous membership across Australia and around the globe. ALHR accepts no funding from governments or political organisations and our functionality relies entirely on the goodwill and energetic investment of all of us volunteers on the National Committee and of the goodwill contributions of ALHR members. So, on behalf of the Executive, please accept a HUGE thank you from us for being involved and take this as a warm invitation to become more involved and to invite your friends and colleagues to become involved as there is much important work to do at this remarkable time in history.

I consider myself very fortunate to have been involved with ALHR for the past six years, so it is a great source of pride to see how well ALHR is growing in its advocacy impact reach and professionalism. This is an endless source of inspiration and hope, particularly given the current unprecedented challenges to human rights, both locally and globally.

I am excited to nominate for a second year as ALHR President and to continue the fantastic momentum for advocacy and strong governance so well managed by past presidents. Our upward trajectory must continue for the betterment of our communities, our society and for all of our fellow Australians.

With heart and humanity,

Kerry Weste, President

29April 2019