



President Report 2020/2021

Executive Summary

I am very excited and honoured to present my ALHR President's Report for the combined 2020/2021 years. ALHR was not alone in facing significant challenges throughout 2020 posed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, not least of which was the impact of significant demands on the capacity of those who contribute to our wonderful, entirely voluntary organisation. As a result, we were granted permission by New South Wales Fair Trading to defer the 2020 AGM and combine it with the 2021 AGM.

During my second and into my now third year in this role I have been incredibly fortunate to be supported by a diverse National Committee of extremely talented and dedicated individuals. Each of them volunteer their time, on top of busy day-jobs and other life-responsibilities, and all have worked tirelessly, to the very best of their capacity, in order to increase the profile of ALHR nationwide and the impact of our work both locally, nationally and internationally.

The challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic for an organisation like ALHR were multi-fold:

- A reduction in voluntary resources as members managed the impact of the pandemic on their paid work and family lives;
- Decreased revenue due to the inability to hold events, a vital source of funds for ALHR;
- Decreased donations and paid membership revenue as the economic impact of the pandemic restricted the capacity of our membership to generously contribute financially to ALHR;
- Reduced focus on many and varied human rights issues within the political and media space as the challenge of managing a global pandemic naturally remained front and centre.

Despite these challenges, ALHR has been extremely productive over the 2020/2021 years to date, 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 the National Committee, which keeps growing stronger with now 32 members from around the continent all with 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 Natalie Wade our Vice President, Chair of the Disability Subcommittee and very long serving member of the National Committee. Natalie gives to ALHR because like me she is passionate about our potential to make a meaningful difference to the protection of human rights in Australia. Outside of her work for ALHR in the past year Natalie has launched Australia's first devoted Disability Rights Law Firm and served as a special advisor to the Disability Royal Commission. Natalie is a powerhouse.

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. As noted earlier we have also faced, and continue to face, reduced financial resources due to the COVID-19 pandemic and this makes Katherine's contributions all the more fundamentally important to ALHR. 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 incredibly pleased to receive her nomination for another year!

Sangeeta Sharmin our current Secretary will be stepping down during the coming year but has generously renominated to ensure ALHR's smooth sailing until such time as a suitable nomination is received. Sangeeta's commitment to and belief in ALHR is evidenced in her years as an ACT and NSW Convenor before stepping up to the Executive. I extend most sincere thanks to Sangeeta for her willingness to assist and her consistent engagement and reliability. The position of secretary is an absolutely 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.

Executive Management Committee

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. Membership of our EMC is comprised of the elected executive positions plus the 6 elected ordinary member positions under the ALHR rules. The Ordinary Member for Governance positions are extremely important to ALHR and without the contributions made by this team ALHR's capacity to engage in timely strategic human rights advocacy would be severely impeded.

I extend sincere thanks to Nicholas Stewart, Khanh Hoang and Madeleine Bridgett, Jess Bailey, Naomi Gould and Anthony Hallal for their work on the EMC. Khanh stepped down during the past year due to increasing pressures of travel with his day job, however, during the more than five years that Khanh sat on the ALHR EMC and also served as Co-Chair of our Refugee Rights Subcommittee, he made consistent and invaluable contributions to advocacy and governance reforms.

I am very pleased to welcome barrister Valerie Health to the EMC and look forward to what will we gain from her significant legal expertise and powerful advocacy.

Subcommittees

Throughout the past twelve months ALHR's subcommittees have continued to build on various campaigns with their respective subcommittee members during highly challenging circumstances. Our subcommittees have been particularly hard hit by the inability to hold face to face events during the pandemic as well as by the reduction in member's capacity to engage whilst they managed challenges such as working from home, employment instability or schooling children from home.

This subcommittee 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.

I would like to acknowledge and thank Dr Tamsin Clarke who has continued to produce amazing work for ALHR over the last two years despite formally stepping down as Chair of the Freedoms subcommittee. Tamsin has been a great support to me as President and throughout my years in other roles on the National Committee. I know I speak for the entire Committee when I note how much we appreciate 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, Joanna Abraham and Naomi Gould in chairing of our Human Rights Act Subcommittee. Emma stepped down during the year to take up a role as Deputy Chair of the Qld Law Society's new Human Rights and Public Law Committee. Jo will be stepping down from her role for the 2021 and I would like to thank and acknowledge her wonderful work for ALHR on the Human Rights for NSW Campaign, particularly as Chair of its Community Engagement Working Group. The Alliance consists of over 33 community and legal organisations all working together toward the long-term goal of a Human Rights Act for NSW and Jo's contributions to the Alliance are invaluable. I am very pleased that Naomi Gould will remain in the role, hopefully soon to be joined by a new co-chair with relevant thematic expertise.

Thanks also to Sonali Seneviratne Jo Byrne who have been doing wonderful work as the co-chairs of our Indigenous Rights Subcommittee and to Patrick Lurcanus who came on board as the Youth Co-Chair during this past year.

Jessica Bayley has continued to produce important advocacy in refugee rights as chair of that subcommittee and I am so pleased that will be with us again for the coming year. Jess was recently joined by Caitlin Caldwell as co-chair and they have already undertaken excellent works in the shameful space that is Australia's treatment of refugees and asylum seekers.

ALHR's Business and Human Rights Subcommittee had an incredibly productive year thanks to the leadership of Madeleine Bridgett and Dr Natalia Szablewska and Jessica Hatherall. Thanks to their work, ALHR has remained at the forefront of BHR advocacy in Australia over the past twelve months. Jess has stepped down and we thank her for her significant contributions to the role. We particularly acknowledge her "We'll Always have Paris" event that was one of ALHR's most well attended events during 2020, creating significant buzz. I look forward to Madeleine and Natalie'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. Kate stepped down during the 2021 year and on behalf of the National Committee I extend our sincere thanks for her significant advocacy, particularly in being a key advocate in the successful decriminalisation of abortion in Queensland.

I am very pleased indeed to announce the appointment of two new co-chairs of the Women and Girl's Rights Subcommittee for 2021, Leanne Smith and Cassi Bourke. They each come with very impressive human rights and policy credentials and we are really excited about what they will bring to ALHR members wishing to engage with this thematic area and to advocating for women and girls in Australia.

Thanks to former Chair of the ESCR Subcommittee, Charlie Faulder, and to Professor Rita Shackel for her contributions as Co-chair of the Children's Rights Subcommittee.

During 2020 ALHR began the foundational work to launch a Strategic Litigation Subcommittee under the guidance of our Strategic Litigation Chair Nicholas Stewart. This is a venture that will involve collaboration across the pro bono, private and community legal sectors as ALHR looks to identify and assist with submissions necessary to ensure that where matters before Australian courts raise international human rights law standards, relevant material is presented to the court.

I am thrilled to announce the impending launch of ALHR's new Environment and Human Rights Subcommittee. Human rights and the environment are intertwined; human rights cannot be enjoyed without a safe, clean and healthy environment; and sustainable environmental governance cannot exist without the establishment of and respect for human rights. The time is ripe to advocate for Australia to embrace a new approach to environmental decision-making, one, which ensures that proper consideration, is given to relevant human rights. ALHR's Environment and Human Rights Subcommittee will engage locally, nationally and internationally in order to:

1. Undertake advocacy to stand up for the right to a safe, clean and healthy environment; and sustainable environmental governance.
2. Highlight the need for decisions about the environment to be made from within a human rights framework
3. Promote awareness of the growing body of international discourse on human rights and the environment and adherence to the Framework Principles
4. Engage with a diverse range of stakeholders and organisations.
5. Specifically seek to engage with and offer a voice to children and young people, those most likely to suffer the future human rights impacts of climate change and environmental neglect.

State and Territory Convenors

I would be remiss not acknowledging the hard work of the state and territory convenors. These members of the national committee are, under normal circumstances, 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 been incredibly challenged by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic but they have continued to hold webinar-based events, made submissions on state-based issues and engaged with the media on many and varied human rights 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. I would like to express our utmost thanks to Matt for his flexibility as ALHR navigates the fiscal challenges posed by the past year, Matt always goes above and beyond for ALHR and he is an incredible asset to the organisation.

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 two years.

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 most heart-felt 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 eight years. It is a great source of pride to see how many Australian lawyers are willing to give their time standing up for human rights. This is an endless source of inspiration and hope.

I am excited to nominate for a third 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 22 February 2021