



## President Report 2020/2021

### Executive Summary

I am honoured to present the ALHR President's Report for the 2021/2022 year. ALHR has not been not alone in facing ongoing challenges whilst navigating the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic, not least of which has been the impact of significant and complex demands on the capacity of those who contribute to our wonderful, entirely voluntary organisation. I would like to extend utmost gratitude to each and every person who has made voluntary contributions to ALHR for helping our wonderful organisation to continue to stand up for human rights and the rule of law in Australia.

As in previous years, I have once again been incredibly fortunate to be supported by a diverse Executive Management Committee and 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.

### 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 to acknowledge Natalie Wade, our Vice President, Chair of the Disability Subcommittee and very long serving member of the Executive Management Committee. Natalie will be stepping away from the Vice Presidency after three years of absolutely incredible service in the role. Natalie is an amazing colleague and friend. She is not only one of Australia's leading disability rights advocates; Nat is passionately committed to everyone's human rights and determined that our communities become more inclusive for everyone at all levels. This is seen in the wide range of her significant contributions over so

many years across all of ALHR's thematic areas of focus and in terms of her contributions to ALHR's governance and strategic direction. Beyond her work as Vice President, Nat founded and continues to Chair our Disability Rights Subcommittee and I am very pleased she will continue to work with us in that capacity.

Outside of her work for ALHR Natalie is relentlessly committed to improving the world by championing human rights. So much so that it is not possible to list all of her prolific achievements here. To highlight just a few, she has been South Australian Young Lawyer of the Year (2016). Australian Young Lawyer of the Year (2016), launched Australia's first devoted Disability Rights Law Firm, changed the way people with complex communication disabilities give evidence in South Australian courts, jointly launched the Disabled Lawyers Association, served as a special advisor to the Disability Royal Commission, and published *Disability Rights in Real Life*, a law handbook for people with disabilities, their families and supporters. Natalie is a powerhouse and I am honoured to have partnered with her in leading ALHR and look forward to continuing to work with her in disability rights.

I am so very pleased to receive Nichols Stewart's nomination for Vice President. Nicholas has been a Co-Chair of ALHR's LGBTI Rights Subcommittee since 2016 and a member of the Executive Management Committee since it was established in 2017. Like Nat, Nicholas is dedicated to championing human rights in both his professional practise as a criminal lawyer, work on committees outside of ALHR and in his many significant contributions to the work and governance of ALHR for the past six years. Nicholas' contributions consistently go well beyond LGBTIQ via his work for the ALHR EMC. I feel very fortunate to receive a nomination for Vice President from a lawyer with such significant experience and immense professionalism.

Thank you to our amazing Treasurer, Katherine Hinton who has continued to do a stellar job on the finances for more than four years. 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 financial impacts 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 23 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 ALHR's current Secretary is stepping down after two years of amazing service in the role. Sangeeta has ensured ALHR's smooth sailing and will be greatly missed. Beyond her contributions as Secretary, Sangeeta's commitment to human rights 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.

I am very pleased to receive Anna Kennett's nomination for the role of ALHR Secretary. Anna is based in South Australia and has been a past ALHR convenor in that state. I am sure she will step smoothly into Sangeeta's big shoes!

I know I speak for all of the members of the Executive Management Committee and the National Committee in expressing our heartfelt gratitude to the members of the ALHR executive who are stepping away from their roles and in expressing what an absolute pleasure and honour it has been to work with you.

### **Executive Management Committee**

Membership of ALHR's Executive Management Committee (EMC) is comprised of the elected executive positions plus the six elected Ordinary Member for Governance 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 Jessica Bayley, Nicholas Stewart, Madeleine Bridgett, Naomi Gould, Valerie Heath and Anthony Hallal for their work on the EMC throughout the past year.

Jess stepped away during the year as she embarked on motherhood but has remained co-chair of our Refugee Rights Subcommittee. Madeleine, who made immense contributions to ALHR for many years, also stepped away from the EMC and her role as a Co-Chair of our Business and Human Rights Committee during the year. Madeleine is currently doing important work as Counsel Assisting the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide. I would like to take this opportunity to recognise Madeleine's significant contributions to ALHR's legal advocacy and internal governance. ALHR would not be the organisation it is today without the considerable time she so generously devoted to her ALHR roles. Sadly, Naomi, who also Chairs the ALHR Human Rights Act(s) Subcommittee, will be another much valued member of the team moving out of the EMC. Naomi's expert advice on a wide range of issues has been an incredible asset to both the Human Rights Committee, the EMC and our state-based Human Rights Acts campaigns. I feel very fortunate to have been able to work with Naomi. She has been an incredibly supportive member of the ALHR team offering mentorship across the organisation.

I thank everyone who has contributed to the important work of the EMC over the last year for their consistent and invaluable contributions to both human rights advocacy and to the governance that ensures ALHR remains a highly professional and collaborative organisation.

I am very pleased to welcome Dr Natalia Szabkewska to the EMC. Natalia has been a Co-Chair of ALHR's Business and Human Rights Committee for over two years. I am also very pleased

to receive Georgia Burke's nomination for the EMC. Georgia has been a Co-Chair of ALHR's LGBTI Rights Subcommittee alongside Nicholas since 2016. Finally, I also warmly welcome Andrea Rogers' nominated to join the EMC. Andrea has recently relocated from London to Sydney after working for Reprieve assisting victims of torture. The significant expertise that these new EMC members will bring to ALHR promises to stand the organisation in very good stead to continue guiding the work of ALHR into the coming year and beyond.

### **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 continued the process of adapting to holding fewer face to face events during the pandemic. Although events are now possible, ALHR has remained very mindful of ensuring that we continue to offer COVID-safe online events in the form of webinars so that important discourse remains accessible for members of the community who are vulnerable to serious COVID disease.

ALHR's 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 look forward to providing a detailed outline of the amazing work across all of our thematic areas in the forthcoming ALHR Annual Report

### **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 absolutely 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 nine 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 and the rule of law. This is an endless source of inspiration and hope.

I am excited to nominate for a fourth 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 25 June 2022