



## President Report 2024

### Executive Summary

I am honoured to present my fifth and last ALHR President's Report. I would like to begin this report by extending my utmost gratitude to each and every person who has made voluntary contributions to ALHR over the past twelve months; and indeed during the duration of my Presidency. Every moment so generously given enables 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 Nicholas Sewart, our Vice President, and Co-Chair of LGBTIQ+ rights, who has nominated to become our next President. Nicholas is a dedicated long serving member of the ALHR Executive Management Committee and a lawyer with significant human rights experience and immense professionalism. I have had the honour of working alongside Nicholas since 2016 and ALHR would not be what it is today without him. 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 eight years. I feel very fortunate to be handing over the reins to such a skilled and wonderful human rights champion and leader. I very much look forward to supporting Nicholas as President.

Our incredibly loyal and amazing Treasurer, Katherine Hinton will be stepping down after eight years guiding ALHR through immense change in governance, including how we handle our money. It has been an incredible asset to ALHR to have a Chartered Accountant with over

25 years Finance experience who also has a strong interest in human rights and social justice. Katherine not only volunteers her time and skills as a chartered accountant to ALHR but also to other organisations working at the coal face of human rights and this is a reflection of her admirable commitment to making the world a better place, as well as the genuine generosity of spirit that defines her as a person I know I speak for everyone who has worked with Katherine over the past eight years when I express our profound gratitude. Hers will indeed be very hard shoes to fill.

Our wonderful secretary of the past two years Anna Kennett has continued to do a stellar job bringing much needed energy, enthusiasm and initiative to the Executive Management Committee and National Committee. 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. Anna is based in South Australia and is also our SA Convenor. It is wonderful to receive Anna's nomination for another term as ALHR's secretary.

### **Executive Management Committee**

Membership of ALHR's Executive Management Committee (EMC) comprises 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 EMC members Georgia Burke, Dr Natalia Szablewska, Valerie Heath, Dr Tania Penovic and Stephanie Lee and Sophie Leaver for their work on the EMC throughout the past year. Their consistent and invaluable contributions to both human rights advocacy and to governance ensure ALHR remains a highly professional and collaborative organisation. I am thrilled to receive re-nominations for the coming year from Georgia Burke, Dr Natalia Szablewska, Dr Tania Penovic, Sophie Leaver and to receive new nominations from Madeleine Bridgett who has previously served on the EMC and as Co-Chair of our Business and Human Rights Committee, and Claudia Robinson, who we all very much look forward to welcoming to the EMC. We are very fortunate to receive nominations from academics, solicitors and barristers, all of whom have invaluable and diverse human rights expertise and will be an incredible asset in ensuring ALHR maintains the robust governance and strategic direction needed to advance the case for human rights in Australia.

Georgia Burke has been involved with ALHR as either a student or practitioner since 2013. In 2015/2016 she spent twelve months as a Tasmanian Co-Convenor, before moving on to the LGBTI Subcommittee, which she has proudly chaired with Co-Chair Nicholas Stewart since 2018. By day, Georgia is a family lawyer with Broun Abrahams Burreket in Sydney. Georgia was an Out for Australia 30 under 30 award recipient in 2019 in recognition of her contributions to the LGBTI community, and Lawyers Weekly 30 under 30 Finalist in 2020 in

the Family Law category. Georgia is also a member of the New South Wales Young Lawyers Family Law Committee.

Dr Tania Penovic is a current senior co-chair of our Women and Girls' Rights Committee, a member of the EMC since last year and a legal academic with significant expertise in access to justice, gender equality and the human rights of vulnerable groups. She is Associate Professor at Deakin Law School and a civil society member of Australia's Open Government Forum. Tania is an affiliated academic member of the Castan Centre for Human Rights Law at Monash University, having served as Deputy Director and research group leader in gender and sexuality. Tania's qualifications include a Masters in International Human Rights Law (with Distinction) from the University of Oxford and PhD from Monash University.

Dr Natalia Szablewska has Co-Chaired ALHR's Business and Human Rights Committee since 2019, and has been a Member of the EMC since 2022. Natalia has over 20 years of professional experience in the area of human rights in the academic context and in practice at the international level. She has taught in the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Cambodia, Canada, Germany, Slovenia and Indonesia and is currently a full Professor in Law and Society at The Open University (UK), and has further academic affiliate positions at universities in Australia, New Zealand and Cambodia. She is also a Business and Human Rights Committee Member of the International Law Association (ILA).

Sophie Leaver is one of ALHR's NSW Co-Convenors and is a Senior Lawyer at the Australian Human Rights Commission, where she conducts inquiries into human rights breaches in immigration detention. She previously worked as a solicitor at Redfern Legal Centre, in the police accountability and administrative law team.

Barrister Madeleine Bridgett has previously made very significant contributions to ALHR in leadership roles, having served on the EMC, National Committee and as Senior Chair of Business and Human Rights over a five year period. Madeleine took time away from these Committee positions whilst acting as Counsel Assisting the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide, and I am thrilled to receive her nomination to return to the EMC. Madeline is a human rights, public law and commercial law barrister at 6 St James Hall Chambers, With a special interest in international law, coronial inquests, inquiries, and complex commercial and criminal matters. She is a strong advocate for human rights, equality and justice, and undertakes regular work in public and private international law. She is the current Co-Vice-Chair, Women Barristers Forum, NSW Bar Association, sits on the Human Rights Committee, NSW Bar Association, the Management Committee, HIV/AIDS Legal Centre, HALC, and the Australian Committee, International Coalition to End Transplant Abuse in China, ETAC.

Claudia Robinson, a new nominee to the EMC, is a solicitor and human rights advocate dedicated to social justice and empowering marginalised communities. Claudia currently works at the Financial Rights Legal Centre providing free legal advice in the areas of credit and debt and insurance law. Claudia also volunteers with the Illawarra Legal Centre and is a member of the NSW Law Society's Human Rights and Ethics Committees. Claudia is currently

pursuing a Master of Laws (LLM) with a specialisation in Human Rights from the University of London.

Together with the members of the ALHR Executive these nominees for the EMC promise to stand ALHR in an extremely good stead, guiding our work into the coming year and beyond.

## **Committees**

Throughout the past twelve months ALHR's subcommittees have continued to build on various campaigns with their respective subcommittee members. 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 particularly recognise the significant contributions of:

- our Women and Girls' Rights Committee, with senior co-chairs Dr Tania Penovic and Dr Amira Atfab and deputy co-chairs Dr Jane Alver and Tracy Cole;
- our LGBTIQ+ Rights Committee, chaired by Nichoas Stewart and Georgia Burk;
- our Human Rights Act(s) Committee, chaired by Kate Gauld;
- our Business and Human Rights Committee, with senior co-chairs Dr Natalia Szablewska and Lara Douvartzidis and Deputy Chair Millie Jones
- our Disability Rights Committee, chaired by Natalie Wade and Harry Rutner;
- and our Environment and Human Rights Committee, chaired by Annika Reynolds and Melanie Montalban.
- our Human Rights Act(s) Subcommittee, chaired by Kate Gauld.

I thank them for consistently contributing throughout 2024 and thank the wonderful chairs for their leadership.

## **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. I would like to acknowledge and thank Ella Furlong, our long serving Queensland Convenor who has recently stepped away. Ella has been a fantastic and positive presence in Queensland and we look forward to receiving expressions of interest for new convenors who can continue to drive our important advocacy in Queensland. I also recognise and acknowledge the hard work throughout this year of our Western Australian Convenors, Zubayr Abrahams and Dr Jackie Mapulange who do such a stellar job on our Western Australia for a Human Rights Act Coalition. Similarly, our energised NSW Convenors, Stephanie Lee, Sophie Leaver, Andrew Bank and Grace Cameron-Lee.

## **Honouring the late Sophie Trevitt**

Finally, and with a very heavy heart, I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the late Sophie Trevitt who passed away on 27 July 2023, but leaves behind a truly remarkable legacy. Soph was our much loved ACT Convenor and led our work as the petitioner on our successful campaign to have the ACT Human Rights Act amended to create accessible remedies. Thanks to Soph, everyone in the ACT will be able to make a complaint to the ACT Human Rights Commission if they feel their rights under the Act have been breached. However, Children's rights in the youth justice system are what kept Soph up at night and what she dedicated so much of her incredible acumen toward, particularly ALHR's advocacy to raise the age of criminal responsibility, and to end the use of 'spit hoods'. In her day jobs Sophie worked at Canberra Community Law and was the Executive Officer at Change The Record, where she spearheaded the national campaign to raise the age of criminal responsibility. With unflinching determination, Sophie managed press releases and navigated submission, letters and meetings. She pressed on fighting for justice following her brain cancer diagnosis, and while battling the side effects of her disease. She was a true champion of human rights. Our thoughts and love remain with her family, her partner Tom Swann, her many friends, and her colleagues at Canberra Community Law and Change The Record.

## **Media**

ALHR's media exposure has continued to ensure that ALHR's strategic human rights advocacy received the traction and attention it deserves. We have been incredibly fortunate to receive pro bono media management support from John Connolly and Partners and we extend our sincere gratitude to John Conolly, Michael Salmon and Marsha Jacobs for their extremely generous support.

## **Conclusion**

ALHR is 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 decade. 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 thank everyone who has supported me as President. Much of the work that I have done would not have been possible without your commitment to ALHR. It is an absolute honour to work with people who share my relentless passion for human rights! I am excited to hand over the presidential reins to Nicholas, whom I know will continue our fantastic momentum for advocacy and strong governance. 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 28 August 2024