

## MEDIA RELEASE



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### **Elizabeth Heenan Awarded Inaugural Australian Women Lawyers Award Successful Fourth Australian Women Lawyers Conference Kate Ashmor Elected President of Australian Women Lawyers**

Australian Women Lawyers (AWL) is delighted to announce Elizabeth Heenan as the inaugural recipient of the Australian Women Lawyers Award. The Patron of AWL, Family Court of Australia Chief Justice The Hon Diana Bryant AO QC, presented Ms Heenan with the Award at a gala dinner held on Saturday 11 August 2012 at the National Gallery in Canberra. A former President of the WA Law Society, Ms Heenan has made an extraordinary contribution to the Australian legal community, including via the Law Council of Australia, Curtin University and law firms Minter Ellison and Marks & Sands – all while raising two children. Ms Heenan is an inspiring role model and mentor for the next generation of Australian women lawyers.

The presentation of the Award was a highlight of the Fourth AWL Conference held at the Australian National University in Canberra from 10-12 August 2012. Attorney-General The Hon Nicola Roxon MP and Chief Justice Bryant welcomed delegates at a reception on Friday evening. Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia, The Hon Robert French AC, delivered a keynote address on Saturday. He shared his personal experience with challenges faced by women lawyers via the career of his wife, Judge Valerie French, the first Western Australian woman barrister. High Court of Australia Justice The Hon Virginia Bell SC invited delegates to consider the attributes of an effective modern barrister and lamented unconscious bias as detrimental to women barristers. Penny Williams, Australia's Global Ambassador for Women and Girls, declared the legal profession has a particular capacity and responsibility to advance the interests of women and girls.

The Conference program featured discussion panels on digital intellectual property rights; the perils and opportunities social media presents for practitioners; construction law; and the challenges women lawyers face surviving and thriving in the profession. Other presentations explored research projects on female lawyers practising in regional and rural Queensland; bullying in Western Australian legal workplaces; and collecting oral histories of trailblazing women lawyers.

AWL's Annual General Meeting was held on Sunday, following the conclusion of the Conference. Kate Ashmor was elected AWL President for 2012-2013. An Arts/Law graduate of Monash University, Kate is a commercial lawyer at Public Transport Victoria. Kate is the Immediate Past Convenor of Victorian Women Lawyers (VWL) and has been a VWL board member for five years. Kate previously practised as an in-house corporate lawyer, in private practice and as a volunteer lawyer. She served as an elected Councillor for the City of Glen Eira from 2005-2008. Kate is currently on maternity leave following the birth of her first child in December 2011. Upon her election as AWL President Kate said: "It is a tremendous honour and privilege to serve as President of Australian Women Lawyers. I thank Rebecca Lee for her leadership over the last twelve months and I look forward to working hard to ensure that issues of importance to Australian women lawyers, such as high attrition rates, are effectively addressed." The incoming AWL Executive and other members of the AWL board are listed here: [tinyurl.com/8ofaz3r](http://tinyurl.com/8ofaz3r)

AWL will now undertake an analysis of the Canberra Conference and a strategic review of AWL's priorities and activities for the year ahead. The next biennial AWL Conference will be held in Adelaide in 2014.

KATE ASHMOR – PRESIDENT OF AWL

PHONE: 0403 334 245 EMAIL: [kate.ashmor@gmail.com](mailto:kate.ashmor@gmail.com) TWITTER: @KateAshmor

POSTAL ADDRESS: C/- PO Box 2602 Caulfield Junction VIC 3161

WEBSITE: [www.australianwomenlawyers.com.au](http://www.australianwomenlawyers.com.au)