

MEDIA RELEASE

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AUSTRALIAN
WOMEN
LAWYERS

Only 7.92% of Female Senior Counsel Practising at the Independent Bar Are Female, Fifty Years After Australia's First Female Silk Appointed.

Australian Women Lawyers (AWL) is delighted to mark the fiftieth anniversary of Dame Roma Mitchell's appointment as Australia's first female silk in 1962.

Since then, AWL understands at least 121 Australian women have been appointed silk (ACT: 1, Tas: 1, NT: 3, WA: 9, SA: 13, Qld: 14, Vic: 41, NSW: 39). Many have gone on to become magistrates and judges. For instance, in Western Australia, 7 of the 9 women ever appointed silk were subsequently appointed to the judiciary. In Queensland, 9 of the 14 appointees have since become judges.

AWL understands that the current number of practising female Senior Counsel in Australia, and the percentage vis-à-vis the total number of practising Senior Counsel, are as follows*:

State	Number of Practising Female Senior Counsel	% of all Practising Senior Counsel at the Independent Bar
NSW	22	6.53% (337 in total)
Vic	23	8.40% (238 in total)
Qld	5	3.97% (126 in total)
SA	7	20.59% (34 in total)
WA	2	6.90% (29 in total)
Tas	1	7.69% (13 in total)
NT	3	33.33% (9 in total)
ACT	1	4.54% (22 in total)
TOTAL	64	7.92% (808 in total)

*Note: a handful of silks are listed on multiple State and Territory bar directories.

In marking Dame Roma's milestone, AWL President Kate Ashmor said: "Fifty years on, female Senior Counsel only represent 7.92% of all silks practising at the independent bar in Australia. Despite women comprising the majority of law students for decades, it's clear that women have a long way to go before there will be equitable representation of Senior Counsel. In the words of Dame Roma, speaking in 1982: "...better opportunities for women do not mean they should relax. Results of past discrimination are going to take a long time to reverse."

Last Friday AWL launched its Find a Female Barrister webpage which includes directories of all female barristers practising at the independent bar in each State and Territory. The page can be accessed via the main menu on AWL's website.

The Law Council of Australia, with the support of AWL, revised its Equitable Briefing Policy in 2009. The Policy may be voluntarily adopted by briefing entities. It encourages active briefing of female counsel and regular reporting thereof. Also in 2009, the Law Council's Court Appearance Survey found that female barristers appear in statistically the same proportions as they exist at the Bar, but on average, all male barristers appear for significantly longer periods of time when compared to all female barristers (3.8 hours for males and 2.8 hours for females) and when compared to other entities such as government agencies, private law firms are far more likely to brief male barristers.