



Australian
Bar Association

The ABA acknowledges the relationship between the land on which it and its members work and the First Nations' peoples of Australia

The National Brief

19 November 2021

National Conference

In the last National Brief, I reported on the decision to postpone the National Conference.

We have now fixed the dates of 28-30 April 2022 for the Conference which will take place both physically in Melbourne and fully remotely. The details are here: <https://austbar.asn.au/events-calendar/details/re-emerge-2022>

The postponed Conference has received great, continuing support from its presenters and our sponsors.

It will be a wonderful opportunity for the National Bar to gather together again and I commend the program to you. Can I acknowledge, again, the enormous work done by Dr Matt Collins AM QC, the ABA's outgoing head of Strategy Implementation Dr Liz Gray, and the many members of the Victorian Bar who have all worked for both the initial planning and rescheduling of the Conference.

Podcasts: Sexual Harassment and the Bar

With the great benefit of Liz Gray's herding of cats, two further Podcasts have been recorded and released by the ABA on sexual harassment and the Bar.

Podcast #3 is entitled “Eliminating Sexual Harassment at the Bar: Building a Culture of Respect”; in which I was joined Dr Michael Flood of Queensland University of Technology.

In Podcast #4 Kate Eastman SC discusses “From #MeToo, through #UsToo and Respect@Work, to changes to the *Sex Discrimination Act*. Bringing the Bar to account.”

These have both now been distributed and placed on the website: [ABA | ABA Podcast #3 \(austbar.asn.au\)](#) and [ABA | ABA Podcast #4 \(austbar.asn.au\)](#)

The Bar and the pandemic

The ABA receives many requests from media outlets and others for comment on issues in the public domain. Usually by the Executive, but sometimes by the full Council, careful consideration is given to such requests with a view to the ABA only speaking when it feels it can make an appropriate contribution to the particular issue.

We were contacted in the last month by an international publication that specifically covers Bars and spirits: I suppose it had to happen at some point!

Amongst the questions which were posed to us were:

- what has the last year been like for the Australian Bar?
- what will be the biggest challenges facing the sector in 2022?

- was I optimistic for the future of the Bar (industry) next year?

All of these, are excellent questions for the Bar that we are actually at.

I can say that the Bar has responded magnificently to the challenges of the pandemic and has across the board sought to continue to represent our clients and to work co-operatively with the Courts to do so. I think the Bar can be justly proud of the work it has done, and continues to do.

Sign-off

On Tuesday, 23 November 2021, the Association will hold its AGM at which time a new Executive and President will be elected.

That will bring to an end the two years I have been President and the six years of being on the ABA Council.

It has been an incredible privilege to serve as President in, it almost goes without saying, what have been an incredibly challenging couple of years for the world, our society and the profession.

I would like to thank, especially, Greg Tolhurst who has been (and remains) an incredibly hardworking, thoughtful and insightful CEO. I would also like to thank the Executive over the last couple of years who have been always constructive, co-operative and industrious. It would, however, be remiss for me not to single out Dr Matt Collins AM QC, Vice-President for these last two years, for his hard work, energy and wise counsel.

I have every confidence that the incoming President and Executive will continue to serve the ABA's members most excellently.

Matthew Howard SC
President, Australian Bar Association