



# LIV

## WELCOMES 13-GROUP NETWORK

SPECIAL INTEREST LAW ASSOCIATIONS ARE COMING TOGETHER TO PROMOTE INCLUSION OF MEMBERS FROM DIFFERENT CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS AT ALL LEVELS OF THE PROFESSION. **BY CAROLYN FORD**

Amani Green, Keerthi Ravi and Oliver Cox (above) want everybody to know that they, too, are faces of the legal profession.

The three lawyers lead cultural law groups – African Australian Legal Network (AALN), Diverse Women in Law (DWL) and LIVOut for LGBTIQ+ members respectively – which are among 13 diverse law groups in the sector.

The LIV is backing special interest law groups to amplify diversity in law, says LIV president Sam Pandya, the first lawyer of Indian heritage to lead the LIV.

“I have set up an LIV Network of Cultural and Diverse Association Presidents which I see as the glue that binds these groups together. It will coordinate our efforts and create a strong voice to advocate for greater cultural diversity in the profession. Diversity contributes to the vitality of our community. We want the legal profession to reflect that. We want broad representation across the profession, from the bottom to the top.”

The LIV encourages support of the groups – profiled on following pages – to strengthen diversity at all levels but senior leadership in particular.

Twenty-eight per cent of the Australian population was born overseas and 32 per cent has a non-Anglo Celtic background, but this is not proportionately represented in leadership of organisations. A 2015 Asian Australian Lawyers Association (AALA) report found Asian Australian lawyers account for 3.1 per cent of partners in law firms, 1.6 per cent of barristers and 0.8 per cent of the judiciary.

“We continue to tackle the bamboo ceiling and sticky floor,” says AALA Victorian president Daniel D Nguyen.

Inclusivity is vital for the sustainability of the legal profession, says Mr Pandya, adding diversity in workplaces positively impacts performance, innovation, risk reduction and client satisfaction.

“The cultural law groups have an important role to play in the wider profession, and each representative body addresses concerns unique to its cohort. Each provides powerful networking, educational and mentoring opportunities, as well as support for individuals who, due to their cultural group’s under-representation in the profession, might feel alone and unsupported on their legal journey. The LIV is here to support them, hear them and spread their message.”

Quick uptake of membership of the AALN from its first event in 2018 demonstrated the need for such a group, says Australian-Tanzanian Mr Green. “It’s something people want to be a part of, and the profession has really supported us: firms, judges, the LIV, all putting their hands up to help. It’s important to feel connection and community. This group is a way of being at the table and improving cultural diversity.”

Barriers impact systemically and personally, says Mr Green, with Corrs until he became an associate at the Federal Court. “Being the only black person at law school or in a firm feels like a burden, it is difficult on a personal level. Systemically, it’s a problem within the profession. There are a lot more African-Australian students graduating from law schools than you would think if you look at graduates in firms. We as a profession are not doing as well as we should at hiring those people. It’s a profession that is very traditional and the systems perpetuate themselves. Our long term goal is to be able to support our members throughout the whole pipeline; from student to senior professional.”

DWL’s Keerthi Ravi, too, talks about the talent pipeline. The Indian-born Allens senior associate says the group’s focus is early lawyers and tackling the issue of women from diverse backgrounds not returning to the law after maternity leave and/or suffering burnout, combined with cultural challenges.

“The profession loses when good talent leaves. We want to empower women to stay. As a culturally diverse woman, I’m always the minority person in a meeting or a courtroom,” says Ms Ravi, adding that circumstances permitting, DWL, now Sydney based, will launch a Victorian chapter in 2021. “DWL hopes to enable positive and long-lasting change across the profession.”

LIVOut comes under the umbrella of the LIV’s Diversity Committee which has supported and implemented initiatives in the legal profession that promote diversity, equality and respect since 2013. Diversity refers to characteristics, both visible and invisible, that make individuals unique and include gender and sexual orientation.

LIVOut aims to provide opportunities for members of the profession to network and share their experiences, and to advocate on LGBTIQ+ issues within the LIV. An example of this is an event that LIVOut hosted last year: “LGBTIQ+ wellbeing, the lawyer and the law” at which Switchboard Victoria CEO Joe Ball and the Commissioner for Gender and Sexuality Ro Allen spoke.

“The legal profession has come a long way in a short space of time but there is still work to be done and LIVOut has a role to play in helping the profession become an even more inclusive and respectful place,” says LIVOut co-chair Oliver Cox.

According to the LIV, which is a signatory to the LCA’s Diversity Charter, diversity is a significant issue for firms and lawyers as a result of legislative changes in equal opportunity and discrimination law, and changes in social attitudes towards diversity.

“The new network is a practical way for the LIV to promote diversity and help shape a more inclusive profession for the future,” Mr Pandya says.

## African Australian Legal Network

The AALN is the network for African Australian legal professionals and law students. Established in 2018, it has more than 200 members. The AALN aims to form a community and create and promote professional opportunities for members. This involves driving the conversation about diversity and inclusion within the law, programs and pathways into the profession, and always trying to create spaces in which our members feel they can be their whole selves.

President Amani Green says: “The AALN is necessary in the Australian legal profession because there is an increasing number of talented African Australian lawyers and law students, but that is not reflected in the makeup of the legal profession and legal institutions. It is our mission to ensure the ranks of the profession more accurately reflect the diversity of its talent.”

**Contact** amani.green@aaln.org.au.



The AALA with Chief Justice Susan Kiefel at the William Ah Ket Scholarship Awards

## Asian Australian Lawyers Association

AALA is a national organisation of more than 1100 members which seeks to promote greater cultural diversity in the legal profession. With the support of leading firms, it provides members with mentoring, advocacy and networking through a mentoring program, panels, workshops, cultural celebrations and the William Ah Ket scholarship. The scholarship, which celebrates the first Asian Australian barrister, is awarded to the winning paper on cultural diversity and equality in the law. Membership of AALA is open to all who support its objective, from students to the judiciary.

“In a just and fair society, the legal profession and judiciary should be reflective of the community they serve. Significant advances have been made in recent times but we should not be complacent as there is always room for improvement,” says Victorian president Daniel D Nguyen.

**Information** www.aala.org.au, **contact** vic@aala.org.au.

## Australian Italian Lawyers Association

AILA was established 25 years ago. The Hon Tony Pagone QC is patron and Albert Monichino QC is president. It has about 50 members, who are lawyers of Italian descent, lawyers with Italian connections or Italophiles. New members are welcome. The AILA hosts several CPD events each year and speakers at past events have included chief justices of the Supreme Court and other judicial officers, attorneys-general and shadow attorneys-general. It also sponsors an annual essay writing competition and various prizes for law students. **Contact** secretary Joseph Carbone, [australianitalianlawyers@gmail.com](mailto:australianitalianlawyers@gmail.com).



Members of Diverse Women in Law

## Diverse Women in Law

DWL was founded in 2019 to empower and support diverse women lawyers and law students. The Sydney-based group, which has 800-plus supporters, plans to launch a Victorian chapter in 2021.

DWL seeks to empower diverse women by providing mentoring, networking, and awareness-raising initiatives, early career development and professional growth programs that enlist industry stakeholders. Initiatives include a moot and witness examination competition, campus presentations, research and since COVID-19, online events on wellbeing, how to lead, clerkships and careers in government.

Diverse women are identified as female-identifying individuals from underrepresented backgrounds including culturally and linguistically diverse, migrant, Indigenous and refugee backgrounds, LGBTQI+, with caring responsibilities, from regional, rural and remote areas, living with a disability or experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage. **Information** [www.diversewomeninlaw.com.au](http://www.diversewomeninlaw.com.au), **contact** founder and vice-chair Keerthi Ravi at [diversewomenlawyers@gmail.com](mailto:diversewomenlawyers@gmail.com).

## French Australian Lawyers Society

Established in 2013, FALS is a national not-for-profit organisation with an old heritage. It promotes the networking of French speaking lawyers who are interested in the Australian and French legal systems. It aims to empower through knowledge-sharing by promoting and fostering personal and professional relationships between members of the legal profession in both countries. It provides resources to its members including support for law students travelling to Australia/France for work experience or study. FALS organises regular networking functions including seminars for legal professionals and the French business community. **Information** [www.french-australian-lawyers.com](http://www.french-australian-lawyers.com), **contact** president Pierre Jean Michel Baume [pbaume@vicbar.com.au](mailto:pbaume@vicbar.com.au).

## Hellenic Australian Lawyers

HAL's membership is Australian lawyers, judicial officers, law students and others with a Hellenic background or Philhellenes, those with an interest in Greece and Greek culture. The national association, which has separate state and territory chapters, provides opportunities for members to engage in professional activities in an environment that celebrates Hellenic ideals and promotes cultural harmony and diversity.

HAL was launched in 2014 in the Supreme Court of Victoria library by national patron of HAL, SA Chief Justice Christopher Kourakis. Then Victorian Chief Justice Marilyn Warren and other jurists and Philhellenes attended.

Membership continues to grow strongly nationally with many lawyer Philhellenes joining. HAL offers mentoring, social and high-level educational opportunities for members. In July 2018 HAL hosted an international legal conference in Rhodes, Greece, opened by the president of the Hellenic Republic. High Court of Australia Chief Justice Susan Kiefel was keynote speaker, joining other distinguished jurists and scholars speaking on contemporary legal issues and the influence of Hellenism.

**Information** <https://hal.asn.au>, **contact** Victorian chapter chair Andrew K Panna QC [akpanna@vicbar.com.au](mailto:akpanna@vicbar.com.au).

## Jewish Australian Lawyers' Association

JALA will launch late 2020. "There have been Jewish lawyers since before Federation," says founding co-ordinator Joel Silver. "There are a lot of Jewish lawyers practising today, but we don't really come together much." The group will celebrate Jewish contributions to the law and aims to run networking and CPD events and a mentoring program.

**Contact** Joel Silver [jsilver@vicbar.com.au](mailto:jsilver@vicbar.com.au).

## LIVOut

LIVOut is the LIV's LGBTIQ+ working group established in 2013 by the LIV's Diversity Committee. The group includes a diverse group of lawyers and law students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex or queer.

The LIV started the group after a cover story in the April 2013 edition of the *LJ*, aimed at providing a voice for the LGBTIQ+ community within the LIV membership. LIVOut has two purposes: to provide an opportunity for LGBTIQ+ lawyers to network and to inform the LIV's policy submissions. For example, it contributed to advocacy on the recent amendment to birth certificates, as well as religious freedoms and banning conversion practices.

**Contact** LIV Administrative Law and Human Rights Section [alhr@liv.asn.au](mailto:alhr@liv.asn.au).

## Melbourne Catholic Lawyers' Association

MCLA was founded in 2001 and is part of a long tradition of having faith-based groups or guilds for particular professions. Its purpose is to provide a forum for lawyers to discuss legal, ethical and work related issues, create a network of Catholic professionals in the law and strengthen and develop the faith of all involved.

MCLA has more than 400 subscribers and typically holds two breakfasts and a dinner each year with guest speakers discussing issues of interest. Anybody with an interest in the topic is welcome. The association also hosts the Red Mass at St Patrick's Cathedral to mark the start of the legal year, and monthly gatherings after 7.30am Mass in the CBD. MCLA's chaplain Father Cameron Forbes, who is a former lawyer, can be contacted for confidential ethical or personal support. **Information** [www.catholiclawyers.com.au](http://www.catholiclawyers.com.au), **contact** president Christina Warren [info@catholiclawyers.com.au](mailto:info@catholiclawyers.com.au).

## Muslim Legal Network

MLN is a professional association of Australian Muslim legal practitioners and law students. It was founded in 2008 by a group of passionate lawyers and students to support each other and improve access to justice for the Australian Muslim community.

Its vision is for a society in which there is equal access to mentors and opportunities needed to reach full potential – a

society in which everyone has equal access to justice.

"We empower a network of Muslim legal professionals and law students to reach their potential, connect marginalised communities to appropriate legal services and education and engage with the profession and the community to advance diversity and human rights," says president Jazeer Nijamudeen.

MLN offers networking opportunities, mentoring, community legal education workshops, legal referral services and volunteering opportunities. **Contact** co-founder and president Jazeer Nijamudeen [jniyamudeen@muslimlegalnetwork.com](mailto:jnijamudeen@muslimlegalnetwork.com).

## North American Australia Lawyers Alliance

NAALA is dedicated to advancing cross-border opportunities and collaboration between lawyers, policymakers and institutions in Australia and North America. At a time when technology, people, capital and ideas move rapidly around the world, NAALA fosters connections across continents and diversity in the legal profession.

Founded in 2019, NAALA is a membership organisation, and with its sponsors, patrons and members, NAALA looks forward to honouring national and cultural traditions while developing new traditions. To future members, NAALA encourages them to be active through ongoing engagement via committees, initiatives, and events. **Information** [www.naala.com.au](http://www.naala.com.au), **contact** president Paul Cenoz [president@naala.org.au](mailto:president@naala.org.au).

## Victorian Christian Legal Society

VCLS was formed by a fellowship of committed Christians in the 1980s. Tim and Peter Costello were early distinguished members. The society has about 400 members and is multi-denominational and inter generational. Members come from a wide range of practice areas, and include judges, barristers, solicitors, in-house counsel, legal recruiters, students and politicians. Past president Derrick Toh says: "Our aims are to connect, equip and encourage Christian legal practitioners to understand that there is a difference in redeeming the practice of law for the glory of God. VCLS also strongly believes that advocacy is required where necessary, especially around the oppression of religious freedom and the lack of real diversity, including within our legal profession." **Information** [www.clsvictoria.org](http://www.clsvictoria.org), **contact** secretary [clssecretary@clsvictoria.org](mailto:clssecretary@clsvictoria.org).

## Victorian Women Lawyers

Founded in 1996, VWL is the peak representative body for women lawyers and law students in Victoria. It aims to remove existing barriers and increase opportunities for participation by, and advancement of, women in the legal profession. VWL provides a network for information exchange, social interaction and career development through panel discussions, networking events, mentoring programs and the Warren Moot. Its mission is to advance women's legal and human rights and achieve justice and equality for all women. VWL contributes to the legal and justice sectors through its advocacy including submissions to government, donation drives, journal articles and its annual publication *Portia*. **Contact** president Deborah Kliger [deborah.kliger@gmail.com](mailto:deborah.kliger@gmail.com), [vwl@vwl.asn.au](mailto:vwl@vwl.asn.au).