



,10 September 2008

## **\$48.5m pro bono by top 25 Australian law firms**

About \$48.5 million of work<sup>1</sup> was undertaken on a pro bono basis by 25 of Australia's largest law firms in the past year. These firms delivered a total of about 194,500 hours of pro bono legal work or an average of 3,740 hours a week. However, contributions varied greatly between firms when expressed as a percentage of total practice income or as average pro bono hours per lawyer.

“This is an impressive result. By comparison the total amount paid to community legal centres in Australia in the last year by both State and Federal governments was just over \$50m” said the National Pro Bono Resource Centre's Director, John Corker.

The range of pro bono contributions varied between 0.5% and over 3% of total practice income with the median being 1.1% - 1.5%. Whilst law firm offices averaged between less than five hours per lawyer per year, to more than 90 hours, the median was approximately 21 hours per lawyer per year.

Firms that were signatories to the National Pro Bono Aspirational Target<sup>2</sup> generally had higher participation rates (74%) and average pro bono hours per lawyer (39.4 hours) although there were a couple of non-signatory firms that performed well. All firms who reported a pro bono contribution of greater than 2.6% of total practice income were Target signatories.

The findings come from a national survey launched today conducted by the National Pro Bono Resource Centre and the results of the first performance report on the National Pro Bono Aspirational Target.

The five largest law firm signatories between them provided a total of 111,747 hours of pro bono legal work in the past year which is more than half of the total contributions by the 25 firms.

Mr Corker said, “These firms are making a significant contribution to improving access to justice for many who are unable to obtain legal assistance elsewhere, but the contributions of large and mid tier firms are far from equal. This is the first time there has been a national picture of the pro bono contributions of large and mid-tier law firms. We hope that firms will use this information to benchmark their contribution against their peers and review their pro bono programs”.

---

<sup>1</sup> Based on 194,500 hours of pro bono work charged out at an average rate of \$250 per hour

<sup>2</sup> In April 2007 the National Pro Bono Resource Centre launched the National Pro Bono Aspirational Target which established an aspirational target figure of at least 35 hours per year per lawyer for pro bono work. Nearly 3000 lawyers are now covered by this target.

Other key findings were:

- 68% (17 firms) recognise pro bono work in salary reviews and give full billable credits (uncapped) for pro bono work
- Twenty-one firms (84%) paid membership fees to a Public Interest Law Clearing House
- Firms with established pro bono programs offered a wide variety and a considerable amount of non-legal assistance to complement their legal pro bono assistance
- The mean and median Participation Rate nationally was 21-40%

The sample data includes all but two of the 25 largest Australian firms<sup>3</sup> and was collected in May this year. The 25 firms in the report had a total of 83 offices across Australia in all States and Territories except Tasmania. Between them they employ approximately 11,000 lawyers, or 22% of all lawyers in Australia.

For further information please contact: John Corker 0402 474 628 or 02 9385 7381

---

<sup>3</sup> Based on the listing of the 25 top firms by fee earner numbers published in *the AFR* on 1 July 2008.

**The Law Building, University of New South Wales, Sydney, NSW, 2052**

**p 9385 7381 f 9385 7375 e info@nationalprobono.org.au**

**www.nationalprobono.org.au ACN 102 444 557**