

PRO BONO LEGAL SERVICES AND SUSTAINABILITY REPORTING

The Australian Legal Sector Alliance (AusLSA) and the National Pro Bono Resource Centre (NPBRC) are pleased to announce that they are working together to support their shared objectives, to share expertise and to minimise the reporting burdens for law firms.

AusLSA is a membership association that promotes sustainability across the legal sector and has been facilitating reporting on environmental sustainability for law firms since 2010. The NPBRC, established in 2002, is an independent centre of expertise that aims to grow the capacity of the Australian legal profession to provide pro bono legal services.

In the last year, AusLSA commenced a strategy to expand the scope of reporting to include social sustainability issues that consider people and the community. Given that law firms have a long and proud history of engaging with the community and 'giving back' through their pro bono programs, the inclusion of pro bono in AusLSA's broader reporting is a natural extension of its community engagement strategy and sustainability programs reporting.

The NPBRC holds a wealth of information about the pro bono contributions of law firms. In 2007 the NPBRC established the National Pro Bono Aspirational Target (Target). The Target sets a benchmark of at least 35 hours of pro bono legal work per lawyer per year. The NPBRC's annual reporting on the performance of Target signatories against the Target currently captures the pro bono hours of over 11,000 lawyers, a number which continues to grow.

AusLSA recognises the achievements and expertise of the NPBRC in the field of pro bono legal services and will incorporate the advice of the NPBRC in developing the AusLSA sustainability reporting framework, while ensuring that no confidential information held by either organisation is shared.

AusLSA is planning to include pro bono reporting in their sustainability reporting framework with the support of the NPBRC in the following way:

- *Stage 1:* Each law firm's sustainability profile will indicate whether the firm is a signatory to the NPBRC's Target for pro bono legal services.
- *Stage 2:* Each law firm's sustainability profile will indicate whether the firm is a signatory to the NPBRC's Target **and** whether the firm has met the Target for that financial year.

General Members of AusLSA will be invited to report on their pro bono programs with AusLSA as described in Stage 1 from FY2016 and, in Stage 2, from FY2017.

Businesses are subject to increasing expectations to provide information on how they address their material issues and risks. This is typically provided in a Sustainability Report. The increased scope of AusLSA's reporting provides an opportunity for law firms to acknowledge the community contributions of their pro bono programs within their broader sustainability context while providing a well-respected, powerful reporting tool that draws together both environmental and social data.

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