

# Better together

Diversity & Inclusion year in review

## A message from the Co-Chairs of our Diversity & Inclusion Committee

After saying goodbye to an extraordinary 2020, we have been able to reflect and consider the many challenges we have faced as individuals, communities and as a firm. The impacts have made their way into our homes and in the workplace, changing the way we connect and interact.

Australia saw gender disparity highlighted across industries, an increase in caring responsibilities for many parents, significant disruption across the workforce and a spotlight on working from home and flexible working.

With so much happening, we thought we would take a look at some of the issues that were in focus at Hall & Wilcox.

As Co-Chairs of the Diversity & Inclusion Committee and as Partners at Hall & Wilcox, we have challenged our own thinking about what makes an inclusive workplace. Our commitment to creating an inclusive workplace culture extends beyond office locations. It's about who we are as a firm and how we have prided ourselves on maintaining connection to our clients and our community.

Thinking differently and continually evolving in how we deliver services to our clients is more important now than ever before. We also continue to reflect on what considerations are needed to drive progress within the legal profession. We have a role to play and look forward to what we can achieve in 2021!



[Rachael Arnold](#) and [James Morvell](#)

## Mental health and wellbeing

Focusing on the personal wellbeing of our people has always been a priority for the firm, and this was more vital than ever during the pandemic.

**Hugh van Cuylenburg**

Source: [theresilienceproject.com.au](https://theresilienceproject.com.au)



Feelings of anxiousness, helplessness and loneliness may have been amplified due to lockdowns during the COVID-19 crisis. We wanted to ensure we were providing a holistic approach to wellbeing with a range of initiatives – so we launched the Hall & Wilcox **'Be Well Program'** for 2020 with a focus on resilience and mental health.

The program also covers women's and men's health, drug and alcohol awareness and many other aspects of health – psychological, physical and psychosocial. We wanted to encourage people to feel comfortable to talk about any of these issues. Having these on the agenda is part of our role in helping our people start and continue important conversations with one another to stay connected and supported.

The Resilience Project was one of the key events in our Be Well Program. This included a session on Discovering Resilience with Hugh van Cuylenburg.

This was followed by a **'Digital wellbeing series'** of short videos to keep providing ongoing support. In addition, we launched **'Stay well | work well'**, a collection of resources (updated weekly), including webinars, videos, online training, articles and other resources to support health and wellbeing and to help people to work productively from home and other work locations.

We continue to recognise the importance of mental health and promote awareness and support of mental health issues throughout the year. For example, we supported

**'Mindfulness in May'**, recognised October as **Mental Health Month**, and continued to foster conversations to help eliminate the stigma associated with talking about mental health.



We supported **R U OK? Day** on 10 September. Partner Kathryn Howard is a long-standing director of R U OK? and is passionate about creating a community in which everyone has someone to support them. In an [article](#) published that day, Kathryn reminded us to: 'Reach out to each other for genuine conversation, wherever we may be located, and really listen to and support each other through this upheaval. We are human beings who need each other, now more than ever.'

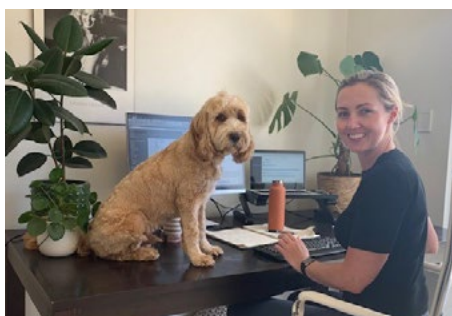
We recognised that it was incredibly important for our people to take a break during the second half of 2020 to recharge and refresh. In May 2020, we launched our **COVID annual leave policy**. Anyone taking two weeks' annual leave between May and 31 December could claim reimbursement of up to \$300 spent in rural and regional areas (particularly bushfire and drought-impacted areas). With people being unable (particularly in Victoria) to travel to rural and regional areas, we updated this to supporting Australian small businesses.

## Flexibility

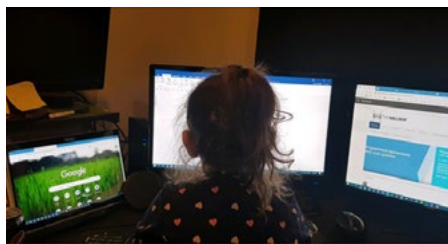
When the COVID lockdowns began in mid-March 2020, we were well-placed to transition to full remote working within 24 hours. The firm already had the technology, training and flexible work culture to 'go remote' seamlessly.

**As our Managing Partner Tony Macvean told The Australian Financial Review: 'We already had a flexible working culture, with many of our people working flexibly, including part-time or full-time working remotely/from home. Our physical office will continue to be important for learning, collaboration, connection and socialising, and essential in some roles. We think that, in the future, people will be even more empowered to decide where they work, based on what will be most effective.'**

We also celebrated **Flexible Working Day** on 10 June and took part in a virtual summit 'Reframing Flexibility'. Partner Fay Calderone is a Flexible Work Ambassador and participated in a panel discussion at the summit on 'The Gender Flex Gap' — the difference in the number of men and women who are able to, and choose to, work flexibly — and what we can do to address this in our community, workplace and home.



**P&C Manager Sam Hooper and her WFH buddy Gus**



We are planning how we will work in the future and setting up our firm to accommodate this. Our **HW Evolve** project will consider how we can combine the best of flexible working with the benefits of collaborating in the office. We are engaging all of our people in helping us to shape the future of work at Hall & Wilcox.

Maintaining a healthy blend between work and personal life during COVID has been a significant challenge. The most significant factors identified in our mid-year survey (June 2020) were home schooling, separating work and personal life and being unable to switch off.

Through open communication, we have gained a better understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on the wellbeing of our people, and we continue to provide as much support as possible. We are working with consultants to support our people to develop the skills they need to maintain a healthy balance to work and life, particularly when physical boundaries of home/office are blurred.

## First Nations: towards Reconciliation and truth telling

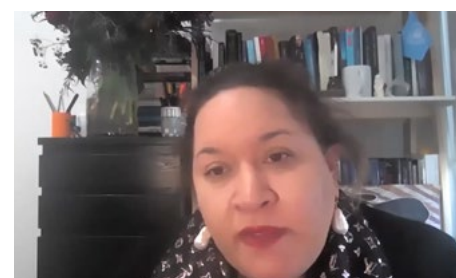
We launched our Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) in March 2020. Our RAP provides us with many opportunities to continue to support our relationships with First Nations people, which includes providing workplace experience, through pro bono community and engagement relationships and also in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses through our supply chain.



We were again proud to support **CareerTrackers**, an organisation established with the goal of creating pathways and support systems for Indigenous young adults to attend and graduate from university, with industry experience and professional futures. We hosted our second intern in our Newcastle office. The success of the program has been recognised by employers, governments and, most importantly, Indigenous communities throughout Australia.

**Reconciliation Australia marked 20 years** of a movement for Reconciliation, including greater acknowledgement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights to land and sea; understanding of the impact of government policies and frontier conflicts; and an embracing of stories of Indigenous success and contribution.

We hosted a webinar with **Professor Megan Davis**, Pro Vice-Chancellor Indigenous UNSW and a Professor of Law, UNSW Law. Professor Davis currently serves as a United Nations expert with the UN Human Rights Council's Expert Mechanism on the rights of Indigenous peoples. **Nathan Kennedy** hosted the webinar, and asked Professor Davis to share her views on important issues of Reconciliation, storytelling and truth, the Uluru Statement from the Heart and the law.



**Professor Megan Davis**

We maintain that we are all In This Together; every one of us has a role to play when it comes to Reconciliation, and in playing our part we collectively build relationships and communities that value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, histories and cultures.

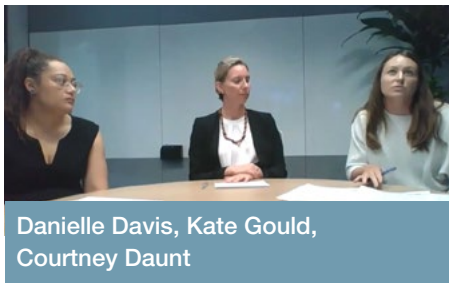
We hosted a webinar recognising NAIDOC week — held in November due to COVID (usually held in July) — where our guests, Robyn Ayers, CEO Arts Law, and Emilia Galatis, Australian Art Projects, shared the



Emilia Galatis



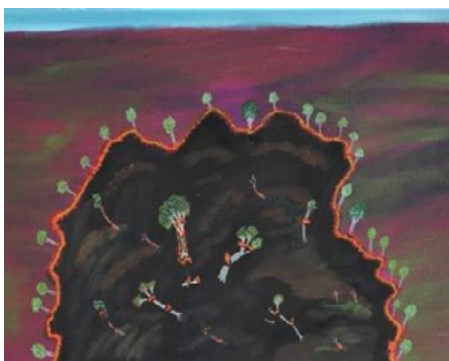
Robyn Ayers



Danielle Davis, Kate Gould,  
Courtney Daunt

importance of supporting the legal rights of Indigenous artists. We also learnt more about how we are supporting Indigenous communities with pro bono work in wills clinics.

Also in 2020, we were delighted to begin our pro bono relationship with the Wik and Kugu Aurukun Art Centre in far north Queensland under the 'Adopt a Lawyer' program with Arts Law, Australia's independent national community legal centre for the arts. Under the agreement, we have committed to provide pro bono legal services to the Art Centre, particularly in employment, corporate governance, intellectual property, contracts and debt recovery.



Titled: *Bushfire*  
Artist: Judy Pamtoonda

## Gender equality

Our focus on gender diversity is about empowering all of our people by actively addressing barriers to gender equality to create an inclusive culture for all genders.

We are recognised as an Employer of Choice for Gender Equality by the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA). We challenge the status quo when it comes to gender equality.

We continued our support for the Diversity Council Australia, and were delighted to carry on our close relationship with DCA during its 10-year anniversary in 2020.

We ran, co-presented and sponsored a number of events through 2020 to facilitate discussion on these issues and to create a focused conversation in areas where gender inequities are experienced. Here is a snapshot of some of these events.

### Supporting women and children escaping family violence

Together with our client Parramatta Mission, we held a virtual panel event to raise vital funds for Thelma Brown Cottage, an accommodation program for women and their children escaping domestic and family violence. The panel included Georgie Dent – journalist, editor, author and executive director of The ParentHood, a not-for-profit parent advocacy group; and Lisa Annese, CEO of the Diversity Council Australia and regular media contributor, including to the ABC's *The Drum*.

Georgie and Lisa discussed what we all can do to move towards eradicating violence against women and children. Partner Fay Calderone hosted the event and wrote an illuminating [article](#) about why now is the time to help.

### Celebrating International Women's Day

To celebrate International Women's Day (IWD), we [published](#) seven stories from seven of the firm's amazing women: Natalie Bannister, Stephanie Driscoll, Jacqui Barrett, Kelli Stallard, Ahranee Vijayaseelan, Katrina Reye and Liz Meyer.

The theme of IWD2020 (8 March) was 'Each for equal: an equal world is an enabled world', and we focused our celebrations on the achievements of women in startups. In Melbourne, just before the first COVID lockdown, we heard from guest speakers Tessa Court (IntelligenceBank), Kate Johansson (KOJA Health), Sallie Jones (Gippsland Jersey) and Natasha Mandie (corporate advisor and investor). In Sydney, our planned IWD event just two days later could not go ahead due to the escalating pandemic.

### Promoting gender equitable briefing

We continue to endorse the Law Council of Australia's Gender Equitable Briefing policy, and to advocate for gender equality within the legal profession. The policy provides a straight forward way in which to consciously consider briefing or selecting women barristers.

We hosted a panel discussion in February 2020, 'Gender Equitable Briefing: in conversation with representatives of the legal profession'. This drew on perspectives from the Bar and the Bench, as well as from clients and private practice. Partner Anastasia Coutsouvelis facilitated the discussion with Michelle Britbart QC, barrister; The Honourable President Justice Chris Maxwell AC, Victorian Court of Appeal; and Maria Palamara, Senior Legal Counsel of WorkSafe Victoria.

## Support for parents and carers

We provide different options to support families, for example taking personal (carers') leave, using annual leave, working flexible hours or reducing workload during COVID to support parents with home-schooling. We also provide **Eldercare** and **Childcare** kits with useful resources.



Photos of Briele Heath's daughters – Ceci (top) and Anja (bottom) enjoying a virtual art and home economics class

2020 was the year we introduced the **Hall & Wilcox Virtual School Holiday Program** to support parents/carers. We worked with an external provider, Kids Unlimited, to deliver the program.

With the closure of childcare centres in Victoria for six weeks, we were quick to realise that our people with young children may have been struggling to juggle work and family during this time. To provide support, we communicated several options, including taking personal (carers') leave if available, using annual leave, working flexible hours or reducing their workload during this period.

To help families stay active during lockdown, we ran **Family Fitness** virtual classes, in partnership with PR Performance.

## LGBTIQ+ inclusion

We participate in the LGBTIQ+ Professional Services Interfirm Networking cohort. We continue to be the pro bono legal provider to the Victorian Pride Centre, allowing us to share our legal expertise and demonstrate our commitment to celebrating and protecting equality. The Centre seeks to become and create the largest LGBTIQ+ community hub in the southern hemisphere.

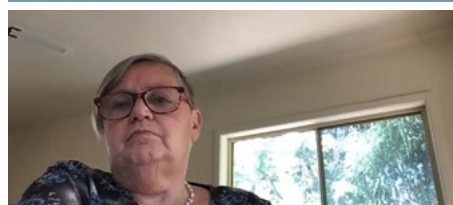
## Providing accessibility

During the COVID-19 pandemic, isolation and diminished services have greatly impacted the lives and wellbeing of people with disabilities within Australia and across the world. It is more important than ever for us to raise awareness about the rights of people with disability.

One of our events in 2020 was a panel discussion for International Day of People with Disability. Our guests included **Kirsten Deane**, **Dr Dinesh Palipana** and **Tricia Malowney OAM**. The panellists shared their own stories, as well as discussing how they think COVID-19 has affected people with disability.



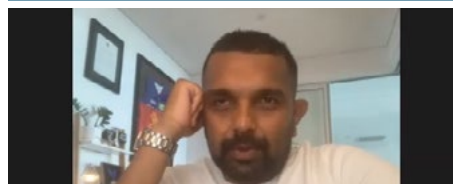
Nathan Kennedy



Tricia Malowney OAM



Kirsten Deane



Dr Dinesh Palipana

## Recognition for Diversity & Inclusion initiatives

We were honoured to win the 'Excellence in Workplace Culture, Diversity & Inclusion' category at the Hunter Business Awards. It was great to be recognised for our workplace culture throughout the legal industry and in this case within Newcastle, where one of our seven offices around Australia is located. The award celebrates a business in the Newcastle-Hunter region that has implemented strategies and initiatives to create a stimulating and supportive workplace environment that has a positive impact on its people and the organisation as a whole.

We were also selected, nationally, as an Employer of Choice by Australasian Lawyer. Among the criteria for this award was demonstrating a genuine commitment to creating and maintaining a diverse and inclusive workplace.



Albert Ponte, Anna Bailey, Bronwyn Scott and Clare Campbell



Bronwyn Scott accepting the award

# Community



1. **Left to right:** As part of our contribution to bushfire relief work across Australia, we worked pro bono with Magda Szubanski and Will Connolly on a Go Fund Me page, which raised more than \$150,000 to assist with ongoing mental health support for bushfire victims and their families.
2. We were delighted to be involved in the Mothers' Day Classic, Sleep at the G and a number of other charitable events to support health and community wellbeing.
3. We learned how to improve our mental wellbeing through a 'Your Mindset' webinar with Chelsea Pottenger, Director at EQ Consulting Co.
4. Leanne Greville and her son Alex participating in the Mothers' Day Classic together.
5. We supported the Women's T20 World Cup by hosting an event to promote and purchasing 130 tickets for our people, friends and family.
5. To give back to our communities, we sourced [client gifts from businesses impacted by the 2020 bushfires](#).



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