

Media Release



16 October 2014

Brian Walters QC awarded Victorian Bar Pro Bono Trophy

Victorian Bar Pro Bono Award recipients announced for 2014

Brian Walters QC has been awarded the Victorian Bar Pro Bono Trophy for his consistent pro bono commitment over more than 30 years to environmental law and human rights, at the annual Victorian Bar Pro Bono Awards announced this evening (16 October).

Previous recipients of the Trophy have included Julian Burnside AO QC (2010), Debbie Mortimer SC (2011) and Victorian Bar Chairman Will Alstergren QC in 2012.

Mr Walters has worked for long periods pro bono over the course of his career, on matters ranging from police misconduct at a protest in 2010 at the Beverley Uranium Mine in South Australia, human rights principles relating to the Tyler Cassidy Coronial Inquest, leading the team fighting the department of Stefan Nystrom who had lived in Australia since he was 25 days old, defending environmental and peace protestors (including former leader of the Greens Bob Brown, and Neil Smith aka 'Hector the Protector'). He has led cases challenging issues ranging from legislation excluding the public from forests, subpoenas to psychologists and counsellors to disclose information in sexual assault cases, and freedom of information.

“Mr Walters is an exemplar of the culture and tradition of pro bono at our Bar,” said Mr Alstergren. “While each Award only has one winner, all nominees are representative of a thriving culture of pro bono among barristers. Without our Bar doing our part, access to justice for those who could not otherwise obtain legal help would be denied.”

Each of the Award categories recognise the commitment to pro bono at varying levels of seniority and time at the Bar. Award recipients for 2014 were:

- Victorian Bar Pro Bono Trophy: **Brian Walters QC** for his outstanding pro bono contribution to environmental law and human rights.
- Daniel Pollack Readers Award: **Joel Silver** for Pro Bono assistance to consumers in Banking Law and in volunteer work
- Ron Castan AM QC Award : **David Yarrow** for Pro Bono assistance in the Muckaty Station litigation in the Northern Territory
- Susan Crennan AC QC Award : **Kristen Walker** for Pro Bono assistance in refugee, transgender and environmental issues
- Ron Merkel QC Award: **Daniel Aghion** for Pro Bono advice and advocacy for homeless people
- Public Interest/Justice Innovation Award Public Interest/Justice Innovation Award: **Jason Pizer QC, Emrys Nekvapil and Fiona Spencer** for their work in *Bare v Small*, assisting an African youth who was the subject of police misconduct.

“More than 1000 barristers in Victoria signed up formally to the Bar’s Pro Bono scheme – over half of our Bar. Many work pro bono unnoticed from their chambers, forgoing income to assist community organisations and causes they care about, or helping people they find on the steps of the courts without legal representation. They are driven by the desire to see justice served, by a sense of fairness and the knowledge that they can and should assist,” Mr Alstergren said.

Individual barristers were nominated by their peers at the Victorian Bar, who have noticed them working for free on cases ranging from taking on big banking and mining interests, to marriage equality, the protection of Indigenous burial grounds, and the rights of asylum seekers, people with disabilities, those experiencing homelessness or trying to access public housing, and people in the transgender and intersex community.

The Awards announcement tonight included special guest speaker Ron Merkel QC, well known for his commitment to pro bono and a namesake for one of the Awards. His long established commitment to social justice and human rights has included significant involvement in Indigenous rights, civil liberties and asylum seekers.

“Tonight we honour the entire commitment of our Bar to pro bono service. Award recipients are indeed representative of the depth of commitment to access to justice in our State by Victoria’s barristers,” Mr Alstergren concluded.

Media inquiries, including further details of the work leading to the nominations and interviews with Award recipients: Alicia Patterson 0403 172 024 or by [email](#).