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MEDIA RELEASE

Australian Lawyers Celebrate National Pro Bono Day

Today was Australia's second annual National Pro Bono Day, marking the beginning of National Law Week.

National Pro Bono Day got off to a good start with the third annual Walk for Justice, occurring simultaneously in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Adelaide at 7am. The walk is a fundraising activity for the pro bono clearing houses in each State, and it was attended by approximately 300 walkers in Sydney, 200 in Melbourne, 600 in Brisbane and 300 in Adelaide. Walkers around the country included Attorney-Generals, Judges, Magistrates, lawyers from private firms, legal aid, pro bono clearing houses and community legal centres, law students, and many others.

National Pro Bono Day was first initiated by the National Pro Bono Resource Centre (the Centre) in 2009 and aims to celebrate the outstanding pro bono commitment of the legal profession in ensuring access to justice for marginalised and disadvantaged Australians.

Director of the Centre, John Corker said, "National Pro Bono Day provides an opportunity to say a heartfelt thank you to the profession. It was developed as part of National Law Week to highlight one of the key activities we as lawyers have to celebrate – our unselfish giving back to the communities in which we exist." It's a day when the legal profession should feel proud of their significant pro bono contribution."

According to the latest survey of the legal profession done by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Australian lawyers did over 950,000 hours of pro bono work in the 2007-2008 financial year. A survey conducted by the Centre on the pro bono work of 25 large Australian firms in the same time period showed that these large firms had contributed over 194,000 hours of pro bono work that year, i.e over 3,700 hours per week.

"Australian lawyers have shown an increasing commitment to providing access to justice for disadvantaged and marginalised people. During the Global Financial Crisis the pro bono practices of the large Australian law firm's commitment to pro bono remained strong and that is a tribute to them and their commitment to this important professional ethical value.

"But it's not only lawyers who have a strong pro bono ethos – there's a real commitment among law students as well. I congratulate the Australian Law Students Association on their media release today that reminds us that 'entering into a profession with a good reputation and strong ethical focus is an important consideration for students looking to practice law'. It's fantastic to see the pro bono ethos grow in our future lawyers."

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