



MEDIA RELEASE
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NATIONAL PRO BONO TARGET REMAINS AT 35 HOURS PER LAWYER PER ANNUM BUT NOW INCLUDES WORK FOR SOCIAL ENTERPRISES

CHANGES TO APPLY FROM 1 JULY 2018

The final report of the tenth anniversary review of the **National Pro Bono Target** (as it will now be called) was released today concluding a year-long consultation process with members of the Target signatory community.

“The word ‘aspirational’ has been dropped from the Target’s title, but by its very nature the Target remains aspirational,” said John Corker, CEO of the Australian Pro Bono Centre, the independent organisation that manages the Target.

“The review has allowed the Target to be updated to reflect contemporary pro bono legal practice and maintain its place as an industry standard and beacon for pro bono legal practice in Australia,” he said.

The key outcomes of the Review are that from 1 July 2018:

1. The target will remain at 35 hours of pro bono legal work per lawyer per annum.
2. The Target’s definition of ‘pro bono legal services’ will now allow work undertaken for social enterprises to count towards total target hours, reflecting growth in this area of pro bono legal practice.
3. The Centre will issue new guidance notes to help firms assess whether legal work for a charity, other not-for-profit organisation or social enterprise should be undertaken on a pro bono basis.
4. The meaning of legal work undertaken for a ‘substantially reduced fee’ will also be clarified through guidance notes, with firms that undertake this ‘low bono’ work being required to report it separately from work undertaken for no fee.
5. The metric for measuring pro bono legal work for the purposes of the Target will remain as hours per lawyer per annum, with the Centre undertaking further work about how best to evaluate and communicate the impact of this work.
6. The Centre will adopt administrative changes in the way it works with some signatories on a case-by-case basis to provide more active support to signatories that are not reaching the target and to help them build a framework for reaching the target within a set timeframe.
7. The Centre will continue to advocate and work with governments to assist them to integrate the Target into their legal services tender arrangements and therefore encourage further pro bono growth.

“The review has been extremely worthwhile. It has facilitated a fruitful discussion within the signatory community about key definitional issues and facilitated the Centre to revisit the strengths and limitations of the Target scheme,” said John Corker.

The changes and new guidance notes will make the Target more fit for purpose to support pro bono growth in the future.

“Despite a number of firms now having internal targets of 50 hours per lawyer per annum, the target of 35 hours remains a realistic benchmark, with around half of Target signatories reporting more, and half fewer, than the 35-hour standard,” Corker said.

The *National Pro Bono Target: Final Report* (June 2018) and *Summary of Changes* are available on the Centre’s website.

BACKGROUND

The Australian Pro Bono Centre is an independent centre of expertise that aims to grow the capacity of the Australian legal profession to provide pro bono legal services that are focused on increasing access to justice for socially disadvantaged and/or marginalised persons and furthering the public interest.

The National Pro Bono Target is a voluntary target that Australian law firms, incorporated legal practices, individual solicitors (including in-house corporate and government lawyers) and barristers are encouraged to adopt by becoming signatories and by signing a Statement of Principles.

Signatories to the Target agree to use their best efforts to provide at least 35 hours of pro bono legal services per lawyer per year, adhere to the Statement of Principles and report annually to the Centre on whether they have met the target in the previous year.

The National Pro Bono Target was established in 2007. With four new law firms signing up in 2018 (at the time of distributing this release), the Target now covers over 12,000 full-time equivalent lawyers. Since its establishment, 2.86 million hours of pro bono work by Australian lawyers has been reported against the Target.

Target signatories are involved in a range of focus areas, including: helping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; people suffering homelessness; severe poverty; those affected by a cognitive impairment, mental illness or other disability; those affected by family violence or elder abuse; those lacking access to education; those in regional, rural and remote communities; and asylum seekers and refugees. Others prioritise women, youth or charities in their pro bono programs.

Reporting by firms for the 2017/2018 year is due in July 2018.

*****ENDS*****

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