



**AUSTRALIAN  
PRO BONO CENTRE**

**MEDIA RELEASE**  
**Tuesday 20 August 2019**

**COMMONWEALTH CONTINUES TO ENCOURAGE FIRMS TO UNDERTAKE PRO  
BONO LEGAL WORK THROUGH NEW WHOLE-OF-GOVERNMENT LEGAL  
SERVICES PANEL**

The Australian Pro Bono Centre welcomes the inclusion of a pro bono requirement in the new Commonwealth Whole-of-Government Legal Services Panel arrangements which commenced on Friday 16<sup>th</sup> August 2019.

The Centre particularly welcomes the following provisions in the Panel Head Agreement:

- Legal Service Providers must: (1) sign up to the National Pro Bono Target\*; (2) use their best endeavours to meet or exceed the National Pro Bono Target; and (3) maintain records and report on Pro Bono Work at the end of each financial year;
- Pro Bono Work is defined consistently with the Australian Pro Bono Centre's definition of pro bono legal services; and
- the Attorney-General's Department agrees that Legal Service Providers may act against the Commonwealth in Pro Bono Work where there is no conflict of interest.

“We are pleased to see that the new Panel Head Agreement provisions still encourage panel law firms to continue their pro bono commitment, including reporting annually on their pro bono performance against the National Pro Bono Target,” said Gabriela Christian-Hare, CEO of the Australian Pro Bono Centre.

The Centre's Chair, Phillip Cornwell, also welcomed the new pro bono conditions: “Pro bono legal services play an important role in improving access to justice for the disadvantaged, and in promoting human rights causes. So this is a really positive development, particularly the introduction of a 'best endeavours' obligation, which may help reduce the marked discrepancy of effort among National Pro Bono Target signatories. We are continuing to encourage other big users of legal services, such as State Governments and major corporations, to adopt similar pro bono conditions in their legal panel terms where they have not already done so.”

The Centre has been integral to ensuring that the new Commonwealth Whole-of-Government Panel arrangements continue to encourage panel law firms to undertake pro bono legal service as supported by the National Pro Bono Target. The Centre, along with key stakeholders in the pro bono community, strongly advocated for a continuation and strengthening of pro bono conditions in the new arrangements.

“We are pleased that the Centre, the pro bono community and the Commonwealth government were able to work together to maintain law firm commitment to pro bono under the new Whole-of-Government Panel arrangements. The Centre will endeavour to work with firms who are no longer

legal service providers under the new arrangements to ensure their continued commitment to pro bono through the National Pro Bono Target,” said Gabriela Christian-Hare.

*\* The Centre administers the National Pro Bono Target under which signatories aim to have their lawyers average at least 35 hours of pro bono legal services per year.*

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