Pro Bono for the Climate:
Showcasing PILnet and the Australian Pro Bono Centre's Global Pro Bono Climate Action Portal

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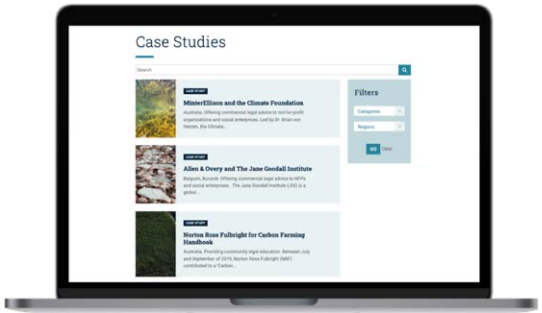
"For the first time, the UN body found that climate inaction had violated human rights, declaring that by failing to act on climate change, the Australian government had breached the rights to life with dignity, family, home, and culture of communities in the Torres Strait."

Sophie Marjanac, ClientEarth

It is easy to fall into the dark hole of news about the climate crisis. Each week, headlines, evacuation orders and weather bureaus remind us of the state of the world.

But it's not all bad news. While these challenges are no longer 'unprecedented', they do require unprecedented solutions—global collaborations for global impact. PILnet and the Australian Pro Bono Centre partnered to do just that—highlighting how lawyers can use their time and skills to provide pro bono assistance to address the climate crisis through the Global Pro Bono Climate Action Portal ('the Portal'). The Portal showcases case studies from around the globe demonstrating how lawyers are using their pro bono experience and expertise to address the climate crisis.



Case studies can be viewed on the Portal.

With already over 5,300 views from across the globe, and featuring 49 case studies from across 15 jurisdictions, including Australia, the UK, India, Yemen, Brazil and Uzbekistan, the Portal highlights how lawyers can respond to the climate emergency through activities such as:

- Commercial legal advice
- International climate negotiations
- Law reform
- Supporting climate activists
- Strategic litigation
- Pro bono impact on commercial work
- Community legal education
- Supporting natural disaster victims
- Community legal assistance
- Community lawyers' training
- Human rights research
- University climate clinics
- Secondments
- Assisting Indigenous peoples
- Immigration law advice

To highlight examples of this inspiring work, PILnet and the Australian Pro Bono Centre hosted the Climate Action Portal Forum ('the Forum') on Thursday, 13 October 2022. Special Rapporteur to the United Nations on Human Rights and the Environment, Dr. David Boyd opened the Forum declaring:

Speakers at the PILnet and Australian Pro Bono Centre Climate Action Portal Forum.
L-R (clockwise from top): Takanobu Morita, Sue Mahony (Moderator), Sophie Marjanac and Alison Ryan.

The Forum was introduced by Andrej Nosko, Interim Co-Executive Director of PILnet, expertly moderated by Sue Mahony, Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department Secondee to the Australian Pro Bono Centre, and featured the following three panelists, who brought to life the case studies featured on the Portal:

***Sophie Marjanac**, from ClientEarth in the UK, spoke about its recent ground-breaking win in the United Nations Human Rights Committee. For the first time, the UN body found that climate inaction had violated human rights, declaring that by failing to act on climate change, the Australian government had breached the rights to life with dignity, family, home, and culture of communities in the Torres Strait. Four years in the making, ClientEarth worked closely with communities in the Torres Strait to develop a legal strategy, supported by pro bono solicitors and barristers from the UK, Australia, and Peru. You can read about ClientEarth's work on the Portal.*

***Takanobu Morita**, Associate at DLA Piper based in Tokyo, spoke about the extensive legal and commercial research undertaken pro bono by his team to support a feasibility study for a cross-border renewable energy project known as the Asia Super Grid. The Asia Super Grid is an ambitious proposal to transmit renewable energy from Mongolia and other remote regions across national boundaries to China, Korea, and Japan. You can read about DLA Piper's work on the Asia Super Grid on the Portal.*

***Alison Ryan**, the Supervising Senior Solicitor from Sydney-based Refugee Advice and Casework Service (RACS), discussed the challenges RACS faces because the impacts of climate change are not recognised categories of harm under the Refugee Convention. Nonetheless, RACS provides expert immigration advice to vulnerable displaced persons with the help of its extensive pro bono network. You can read about RACS' work with those affected by displacement related to climate change on the Portal.*

The Global Pro Bono Climate Action Portal is a terrific source of information and inspiration outlining the many different types of legal services that are needed, from working on law reform to public interest litigation, legal education, and assistance for people who are really at the front lines of the climate crisis. It is incumbent upon members of the legal profession to contribute. As lawyers, we often focus on the law and sometimes lose sight of the end goal, which is justice. And in this case, climate justice. The impact of the climate crisis is really having a disproportionate impact on people who are already in situations of vulnerability and marginalisation. And the crisis is being caused in large part by the actions of wealthy people and wealthy nations.

— Dr. David Boyd, Special Rapporteur to the United Nations on Human Rights and the Environment

The Portal is actively seeking additional climate-related case studies. You can submit a case study here. In Dr. Boyd's words:

"I hope you'll join me in doing everything we can, putting all hands on deck to address the global climate crisis and to fulfill everyone's right to live in a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment." ■

A recording of the Climate Action Portal Forum is now available here on the Portal.

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