

Positive Energy: Origin's In-House Legal Pro Bono Program

*By Karen Hauff, Julia Macdonald,
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Origin Energy Foundation volunteer at SolarBuddy event.



The Origin Energy Foundation is a philanthropic organisation formed by Origin, Australia's largest energy company, with millions of customers and operations in communities across the country.

The Origin Energy Foundation believes in the power of education to help create better lives for young Australians by providing grants to Australian not-for-profit organisations who are working to break the cycle of disadvantage through education.

Through the Origin Energy Foundation, Origin employees have access to unlimited volunteer leave to participate in volunteering with the Foundation's not-for-profit partners, supporting employees to give their time and skills.

Origin's in-house legal team, who have always been passionate participants in this volunteering program,

wanted to explore how they could apply their professional expertise to provide greater value to the Origin Energy Foundation's not-for-profit partners.

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Establishing an In-House Legal Pro Bono Program

In late 2020, we began investigating how our in-house legal team could provide legal pro bono services to our not-for-profit partners, and set up a Pro Bono Committee to oversee the process.

The Pro Bono Committee developed a framework and governance structure, with guidance and support provided by the Australian Pro Bono Centre. We also sought to rely on the National Pro Bono Professional Indemnity Insurance Scheme (PII Scheme). This important scheme provides free professional indemnity insurance to lawyers and paralegals working on pro bono projects approved by the Centre as meeting the PII Scheme's guidelines.



Origin Legal volunteer, Josephine MacMillan, at SolarBuddy school event with STEM students.

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The Origin Legal Pro Bono Program launched in April 2021 with an available pool of over 30 lawyers across New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria and South Australia. The expertise of the Origin Legal pro bono volunteers ranges from commercial contracting to specialist intellectual property and employment advice. These skills can help meet partners’ critical legal needs in a cost-effective way.

The Origin Legal Pro Bono Program today

To date, the Origin Legal Pro Bono Program has partnered with SolarBuddy, the Raise Foundation, Autism Queensland and the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal (FRRR). Each of these partnerships is underpinned by the Centre’s PII Scheme.

The Pro Bono Committee’s objective is to understand the culture and strategy of each of its partners and work



with them to determine the areas where we can support with pro bono legal services. With increasing work requests from our partners and with additional potential partners on the horizon, the Pro Bono Committee continues to review, refresh and evolve our governance and systems to meet partner needs.

Partner Project Profile

Origin’s pro bono partners have a diverse range of legal needs that require Origin Legal team members to apply their specialist skills in unique and interesting contexts.

As an example of this, we support long-term Origin Energy Foundation partner, SolarBuddy, an Australian not-for-profit organisation working to address energy poverty globally. Together with the Origin Energy Foundation and other partners, SolarBuddy provides STEM programs in Australian schools to inspire and empower school students to become global citizens.

The SolarBuddy program involves students learning about renewable energy, energy poverty and assembling solar powered lights. These lights are distributed to children living in energy poverty, to help them study when the sun goes down.

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Impact of the Origin Legal Pro Bono Program

Feedback from partners of Origin Legal's Pro Bono Program illustrates the positive impact that the program is having. Sarah Matthee, General Manager of Partnerships & Services for FRRR, a national foundation focused on the long-term vitality of rural and remote Australia, has said:

“The services Origin is able to provide means FRRR now has access to resources for important matters that otherwise we would not have. Their assistance with day-to-day governance and operational matters will help ensure FRRR is better able to support the needs and aspirations of remote, rural and regional communities of Australia.”

The benefits of this skilled volunteering are not only felt by the not-for-profit organisations that we are working with, but also by the Origin lawyers who participate.

Kate Jordan, General Counsel & Executive General Manager Company Secretariat, Risk and Governance of Origin shared the following insights:

“Working with our pro-bono clients is hugely rewarding for our people. By applying their professional skills outside of their daily role, they are providing real value to these organisations and are getting to make a meaningful impact. Our pro-bono clients benefit, the community benefits and our people feel good and are even more engaged in their work with Origin as a result.”

Across Origin Legal, we're enthusiastic about continuing to support our current partners through the Pro Bono Program, exploring new opportunities to deliver on their strategic objectives, as well as the potential to grow the program in the future. ■



Karen Hauff is a commercial lawyer and Chartered Secretary with more than 20 years of experience, gained in private practice at a global law firm and in-house, with a focus on energy, resources, projects and litigation. Karen has held appointments as General Counsel and Company Secretary of corporations both publicly listed and privately owned and served as a Non-Executive Director at various not-for-profit organisations. In her current role as a Senior Corporate Lawyer at Origin Energy, she provides commercial legal advice to Origin's Integrated Gas and Generation businesses, including with respect to the Australia Pacific LNG Project and Origin's renewables projects. Karen is a founding member of Origin Legal's Pro Bono Committee.

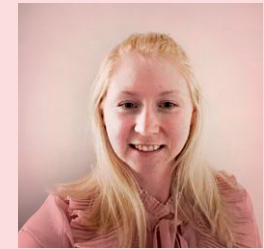


Julia Macdonald is a Senior Corporate Lawyer and Deputy Company Secretary at Origin. She advises on corporate governance, project development, M&A, and joint ventures primarily in the energy and resources sector. Julia is passionate about supporting the not-for-profit sector with pro bono advice, and provides governance support to the Origin Energy Foundation.

Prior to Origin, Julia had experience with an ASX-listed energy company and major international law firms. Julia holds a Bachelor of Laws (First Class Honours), Bachelor of Arts, Graduate Diploma in Legal Practice and Graduate Diploma in Management and is admitted to legal practice in Queensland, England and Wales.



Josephine MacMillan Prior to her in-house role with Origin Energy, Josephine gained experience in private practice at global law firms focusing on infrastructure projects and corporate energy transactions. Josephine currently advises on matters related to renewable energy, innovative energy technology solutions and partnerships, supporting Origin's ambition to lead the energy transition. Josephine is also passionate about contributing to the non-for-profit sector by volunteering with the Origin Foundation and as a member of Origin Legal's Pro Bono Committee. Josephine has a Bachelor of Laws (Hons), Bachelor of Arts and is currently completing an MBA (Executive) through the Australian Graduate School of Management at UNSW.



Kristina Matthey is a Personal Assistant in the Upstream & Development team and is also the Pro Bono Coordinator. Kristina has provided administrative support the team for 9 years and has coordinated the Pro Bono Program for 2 years.

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