Board Member Spotlight: **Susie Moir**

Interview by Angus Chung

Susie Moir, Director of Advocacy and Professional Development at the Law Society of Western Australia, sat down with us to reflect on her career in law and policy, shares what she enjoys most about being a board member, and offers her advice for students and early career lawyers who are interested in pursuing a career in pro bono.

Q: Could you provide us with a brief overview of your career?

I did a combined arts and law degree at the University of Western Australia (UWA), graduating in 1997. After graduation I worked for a few years at a large, independent West Australian firm, Jackson McDonald. I then moved over to Blake Dawson Waldron, which is now Ashurst. My main area of practice was in native title litigation. In 2003, I moved to London for a few years and, when I returned, I worked for a year at a small boutique firm before taking on my first policy role at the Law Society of Western Australia for two years.

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I then took a break from the law and moved into the policy space, which involved some further study. I completed a Masters of Urban and Regional Planning at UWA and then worked for five years at the West Australian Local Government Association, in social policy and emergency management. Two years ago I returned to the Law Society in the Director role.

Q: You have a very interesting combination of qualifications – a Bachelor of Laws, a Bachelor of Arts, and a Master of Urban and Regional Planning. How have these studies shaped your career?

Having studied law, I took the traditional path of moving into legal practice, but I always felt like it wasn't really where I wanted to be. I was much more interested in people and policy, so I decided to go back and do my Master's. One of the

things I really liked about returning to study was the opportunity to refresh my skills and the focus on interdisciplinary work. I selected several units that were open to planning, engineering, environmental management and law students. We often did courses with people studying other degrees. This provided an opportunity to approach things from different perspectives and work with people from different backgrounds. It helped me leverage my legal background to move into more policy-focused areas.

Q: Could you tell us something about your current role at the Law Society of Western Australia?

I am the Director of Advocacy and Professional Development at the Law Society. On the advocacy front, I look after our advocacy campaigns and the advocacy that we do around legislative and policy reform, developing submissions and campaigns. I also look after our continuing professional development program and our education programs. We run a CPD program, mentoring programs, accreditation for legal specialists, and we support over 30 committees which focus on different areas of practice and cohorts of the profession. It's busy, and it's varied, which I really like.

What made you decide to transition from private practice to policy work?

When I first became a lawyer, I hadn't given much thought to what kind of career I wanted. As I was practising, I found myself drawn to native title work. What I liked about it was that it was really about people, history, culture, and society. I enjoyed that part of it much more than the technical legal aspects, and that made me realise that doing work that had a component of social policy to it interested me.

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Susie and Law Society colleagues in WA's Parliament House, following a CPD session on the rule of law.

Susie and colleagues from the WA Local Government Association at an event hosted for Local Governments on reducing bushfire risk in natural areas.

Q: What have been some of the most memorable projects/cases you have worked on in your career?

I think the real highlight was the native title cases that I worked on. It was a fantastic experience getting to travel around Western Australia, see the beautiful country, and hear stories from Aboriginal people about their connection to those places. I also had the opportunity to work with fantastic lawyers and to see the court system adapt its processes to work with Aboriginal people whose customary laws, traditions, and cultural needs are really different.

Q: What do you like most about being a board member for the Australian Pro Bono Centre?

It enables me to think more deeply about pro bono practice in Australia as a whole. I also enjoy hearing the thoughts of other board members and working with the staff at the board meetings to support them in fostering the strategic direction of the Centre.

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Q: In your view, what should be key priorities for the pro bono sector in the coming years?

I think we should look at how to leverage pro bono support from organisations and how to manage the shortages of lawyers practising in some of the key areas for pro bono, such as criminal and family law.

Q: What advice would you give to law students or early-career lawyers who are interested in pursuing a career in pro bono work/social justice?

Remember that a career path doesn't always have to be linear. Be open to following the signposts and where they take you. Most people have a few different careers, and that's something to be embraced. Whenever a door closes, another door opens. In my own experience, sometimes things haven't gone the way I thought, but it actually turned out that was for the best because another opportunity came along, which was actually something that was better. Try things out and keep your chin up!

Q: What are some of your interests outside of work, and what do you love most about WA?

I love reading, I like to go walking, and I like to watch TV. I find that allowing myself to do nothing sometimes is really important for me. I really try and prioritise resting times. 'Human being' instead of 'human doing' is the way I think about that. What I love most about Western Australia is that it is just a really beautiful place. You can drive 2 or 3 hours from Perth, and you can be in beautiful forests, or you can be up in our hills, or you can be on the coast. I think our natural spaces are fantastic, and we are very lucky with that. ■

Angus Chung is an intern at the Australia Pro Bono Centre and is currently in the final year of his Juris Doctor at UNSW. Outside of his studies, he enjoys volunteering with not-for-profit organisations and exploring Sydney's coastal walks.

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