

Monday, 22 June 2020

Law Council President, Pauline Wright, statement regarding Hon Dyson Heydon, AC, QC

All comments are to be attributed to Law Council President, Pauline Wright.

The Law Council believe that all employers have a duty to eliminate sex discrimination, sexual harassment and victimisation

We are pleased that the High Court dealt with the allegations of sexual harassment in a timely and appropriate manner – by commissioning an independent inquiry.

There is no excuse for the behaviour exhibited by the Hon Dyson Heydon, AC, QC against the six complainants.

We welcome the commitment of the High Court to enact upon the recommendations made by the independent inquiry.

It would not have been easy for these women to step forward, and we respect and call for others to respect the privacy of the complainants.

The Law Council believes that every person who works in the legal profession is entitled to feel safe and to be treated with fairness, dignity and respect. Sexual harassment is both unlawful and entirely unacceptable.

All available statistics, as well as anecdotal evidence, suggest that sexual harassment within the Australian legal profession is a prevalent and persistent problem.

In 2013, the Law Council conducted the National Attrition and Reengagement Study (the NARS) to investigate the progression, attrition, and reengagement rates of male and female lawyers, obtain qualitative and quantitative data, and identify gendered trends within the profession.

The NARS remains one of the most comprehensive studies of the Australian legal profession. It is often cited in discussions relating to discrimination, bullying and harassment. The NARS found that approximately one in four women experienced sexual harassment in their legal workplace. More recent studies suggest that these rates may be even higher

The Law Council is committed to ensuring a diverse and inclusive profession which facilitates a positive experience for all members and which thereby delivers quality services and justice. The Law Council considers diversity as crucial to the sustainability of the profession as a whole.

The attrition rate of women lawyers is high, and experiences of sexual harassment are a key reason why women leave the law. This is damaging and costly – for individuals, for firms, and for the current and future standing of the legal profession.

ENDS

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The Law Council of Australia is the national voice of the legal profession, promoting justice and the rule of law.