

MEDIA RELEASE

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Call For Lawyers To Improve Sustainability And Gender Balance

The National Environmental Law Association has called on the top 100 Australian law firms to be leaders instead of laggards in the international trend to do integrated sustainability reporting.

NELA President Amanda Cornwall told the Sustainable Business conference in Melbourne last week that the legal sector is well behind other sectors in sustainability reporting. Only 6 law firms are doing full sustainability reporting covering environmental, social and economic aspects of the business, and 20 per cent of the legal sector is doing environmental reporting.

‘The legal profession needs to improve their environmental performance and opportunities for women,’ she said.

‘Reporting is crucial because it makes firms accountable and changes their behaviour,’ Ms Cornwall said.

‘Australian law firms that are doing sustainability reporting have significantly reduced their energy consumption and paper consumption, so it means they’re saving money.’

‘Law firms who have programs to provide equity for women have looked at the cost of losing female lawyers after investing in recruitment and training,’ she said. ‘It’s made them much more willing to accommodate a lawyer’s request to work flexible hours or part time.’

‘International research shows that companies with women at the top perform much better financially, and they’re more sustainable too. They’re more likely to adopt energy efficiency measures, reduce their environmental impacts, and take a longer term view which means they look after their staff, and protect their social ‘licence to operate,’ she said

Yet in the legal profession, where women make up nearly half the practising solicitors, women are only 20 per cent of partners in law firms and 20 per cent of barristers.

In August the Australian Stock Exchange released draft Corporate Governance Principles which recommend that publicly listed entities disclose to investors whether, and how, they’ve had regard to economic, environmental and social sustainability risks. The guideline falls short of recommending integrated sustainability reporting because the ASX says the international framework for reporting needs to be much better developed.

NELA is the leading environmental law organisation in Australia

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