

Double the commitment to pro bono, public interest law

Highlights

An analysis of Arnold Bloch Leibler's 2008/09 contribution to pro bono work reveals:

- averaged across the firm, fee earners carried out over 70 hours of public interest law work—twice the voluntary target of the National Pro Bono Resource Centre;
- 6,945 hours were spent on public interest law work;
- the firm undertook the financial equivalent of \$2.5 million of public interest work;
- pro bono advice was provided to over 150 Indigenous, Jewish, environmental and general not-for-profit causes and organisations; and
- many of our clients require long-term commitment to achieve outcomes.

Giving back to the community and a strong commitment to pro bono work has always been at the core of Arnold Bloch Leibler's culture and identity.

An analysis of the firm's pro bono public interest law commitment for 2008/09 revealed that, averaged across the firm, each of Arnold Bloch Leibler's fee earners carried out over 70 hours of public interest law pro-bono work.

In 2007, the National Pro Bono Resource Centre introduced a voluntary minimum pro bono target for each Australian law firm to commit on average 35 hours per lawyer per year. As one of the founding signatories to the voluntary target, Arnold Bloch Leibler is proud to achieve double this aspirational target.

Other results from the 2008/09 analysis include the following:

- 6,945 hours were spent on public interest law work by Arnold Bloch Leibler's lawyers.
- The firm undertook the financial equivalent of \$2.5 million of public interest work.
- Arnold Bloch Leibler provided a very broad range of legal services to its public interest law clients in such areas as general commercial law, administrative/refugee law, native title, racial discrimination and human rights complaints, property and taxation law.

As an illustration of Arnold Bloch Leibler's public interest law work in 2008/09, the firm provided pro bono services in the following long-running matters:

- In 2006, Arnold Bloch Leibler lodged a landmark complaint with the Australian Human Rights Commission on behalf of the Indigenous people of Wadeye in the Northern Territory, seeking an official apology and remedial funding for the prolonged under-resourcing of their education. It is alleged that Governments have discriminated against the people of Wadeye for 30 years by grossly underfunding their education. Conciliation of the complaint continues.
- Arnold Bloch Leibler has been acting for some years now for the estate of Rolah McCabe in proceedings brought by British American Tobacco seeking to stop the Estate from using alleged confidential documents to apply to reinstate a judgement for damages given in favour of Mrs McCabe in 2002. In the landmark case, a Victorian Supreme Court judge found BAT had deliberately destroyed thousands of internal documents and its defence of that proceeding was struck out. With Arnold Bloch Leibler's support, the estate's indefatigable efforts to achieve justice continue.

Peter Seidel—partner and head of Arnold Bloch Leibler’s public interest practice, and Adjunct Professor of Law La Trobe University—said this of the importance of committing to public interest law causes for the long haul:

“At Arnold Bloch Leibler, we understand that public interest law success, whether through the courts, negotiated agreements or just plain hard yards, takes time and requires just as much long-term commitment from the firm as it does from the client. We appreciate that success only ever comes in this difficult and complex area of the law from a lawyer/client relationship built on a foundation of mutual respect, solidarity and equality.”

In 2008/09, Arnold Bloch Leibler provided continuing pro bono legal advice to a vast range of important Indigenous, cultural, religious, environmental and general not-for-profit organisations, including:

- First Nations Foundation: which aims to enable Indigenous people to make confident and informed decisions about their financial wellbeing—through support to the ‘My Moola’ programme and drafting key agreements with banks and credit unions.
- Wantok Musik Foundation: through the creation of recording contracts for Wantok artists and expos for the promotion of Indigenous Australian and Melanesian musical talent to the world.
- Jewish Care (Vic) Inc: through the establishment of the financing structure for Jewish Care’s site for aged care accommodation.
- Australian Conservation Foundation: by assisting it with the rollout of its Northern Australian Programme and the development of the exciting EcoTrust concept in Northern Australia.
- The Burnet Institute: which aims to reduce the impact of serious infectious diseases—in relation to all legal aspects of its Romp events and profile raising initiatives in Melbourne and Brisbane.
- Jewish Aid Australia: which acts as a connection point for all Australian Jews who are passionate about participating and assisting in humanitarian projects locally and abroad—generally and in its successful efforts to get deductible tax status.

Arnold Bloch Leibler has also helped other clients secure important tax concessions, including PBS 106.7FM, Habitat Restoration Fund and the Australian Book Review.

In 2008/09 over 150 Indigenous, Jewish, environmental and general not-for-profit causes and organisations were represented by Arnold Bloch Leibler’s public interest law practice, including Reconciliation Australia, Jewish Museum of Australia, Jewish Holocaust Centre, Yachad Accelerated Education & Work Readiness Project, Children’s Cancer Institute, Australian Environmental Grantmakers Network, Greening Australia, The Climate Institute, Voiceless, Caulfield Hebrew Congregation, Fifteen Foundation, Make-A-Wish, Blake Napier Limited, Mizrachi, Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden, Insight Education Centre for the Blind, Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations, Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation and Elwood Talmud Torah Congregation.



Of the 2008/09 results Peter Seidel said:

“In the 2008/09 financial year, as in all years, we did our very best to honour our relationships with our public interest law clients and to continue to go shoulder-to-shoulder with them when it mattered most. In many cases, the public interest law work we carried out in 2008/09 for a number of clients often shared a common feature—success for their cause or one step closer to it after years of struggle to achieve it. Being part of a movement working towards systemic change for the better is one of the unique rewards for us as lawyers in a firm deeply committed to our clients’ causes.”

For more information, or to arrange an interview, contact **Katie Elston**, Marketing Communications Co-ordinator, (03) 9229 9715.

About Arnold Bloch Leibler

Arnold Bloch Leibler is a leading commercial law firm with offices in Melbourne and Sydney. The firm represents a wide range of individuals and corporate clients, including high-net-worth individuals and entrepreneurs, large family businesses and blue-chip corporations. Arnold Bloch Leibler also has a dedicated pro bono practice providing advice on social, environmental and cultural issues to more than 100 charitable and not-for-profit organisations.

Arnold Bloch Leibler is particularly known for its expertise in commercial law, litigation and dispute resolution, taxation and property. The firm also has an expanding presence in trade practices law. In these areas, the firm has been involved in many landmark matters and transactions.