

Three boosts for 'national' legal profession

Australian Financial Review <https://www.afr.com/companies/professional-services/three-boosts-for-national-legal-profession-20200318-p54bi7> [accessed 20 March 2020]

Published 20 March 2020

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There is good news on three fronts for the national profession project.

At times, it has seemed like a quixotic quest to have all the states and territories on the same page when it comes to how the legal profession is regulated.

It has been talked about since the early '90s and has been strongly supported ever since by the national law firms that have clients and offices in multiple jurisdictions.



Going national: WA Attorney-General John Quigley. **Philip Gostelow**

It was looking good for a while when Labor was in office, but when none of the smaller states wanted to play ball – fearing they would lose autonomy – NSW and Victoria decided to go it alone in 2015. Some "national" profession (even if they covered about 70 per cent of Australia lawyers).

[There was a breakthrough when Western Australia voted in a Labor government in 2017](#) and John Quigley became Attorney-General. He almost walked away from the tie-up when it looked like WA wasn't going to have equal voting rights, but NSW and Victoria came to their senses. They were calling it a right of veto; Quigley rightly pointed out that equal voting rights meant an equal partnership.

Quigley this week introduced the legislation that will allow WA to join the national profession project from January 1, 2021. He told state Parliament it would allow WA lawyers "to practise seamlessly across jurisdictions under uniform legislation and regulatory standards rather than disparate legislation".

"This in itself will reduce compliance costs for firms operating across participating jurisdictions."



In talks: South Australian A-G Vickie Chapman. **AAP**

Quigley says he will be sending copies of the intergovernmental agreement, second reading speech and WA's bill to South Australian Attorney-General Vickie Chapman.

Like Hearsay, he has been told that Chapman has been chatting to the Legal Services Council about joining and that the profession in that state is no longer vehemently opposed.

If SA does make the leap, [that would leave the Queenslanders as the last real hold-out.](#)

Which brings us to the third bit of good news: the appointment of Michael Tidball as CEO of the profession's peak body, the Law Council of Australia. He starts on July 1.

The long-time CEO of the NSW Law Society has been a champion of the national profession project. Still, Hearsay wondered why he would give up his currently comfortable existence to herd all the cats – every state and territory legal association – that make up the Law Council.

"I want to see this through," says Tidball. "I've been always been an ardent believer in the the benefits of a united national profession.

"The LCA role is the pinnacle place to complete this project."