



Australian Government



**Australian Government
Legal Service**

The professional network for Australian Government lawyers

Australian Government Legal Service Board 2021 Annual Report to the Secretary of the Attorney-General's Department

Table of Contents

- Introduction..... 3
- Work of the AGLS Board..... 4
 - Overview of the AGLS Board’s work in 2021..... 4
 - AGLS initiatives led by the AGLS Board 4
 - AGLS governance frameworks..... 8
 - 2021 AGLS Board meetings 9
 - AGLS Board’s purpose, objectives and responsibilities..... 9
 - Board members..... 10
 - Reflections from the AGLS Board 11
 - Key achievements and successes for the Board in 2021..... 11
 - Key challenges and learnings for the Board in 2021 12
 - Overview of the AGLS Board’s work in the year ahead..... 12
- Work of the AGLS committees 13
 - Professional Development Committee 13
 - Overview from the committee’s AGLS Board sponsors (Meredith Leigh and Kathryn Haigh)..... 13
 - Purpose of the committee and overview of committee members..... 14
 - Overview of the committee’s work this year 15
 - Overview of the committee’s work in the year ahead..... 15
 - Acknowledgement from the Professional Development Committee Chair (Andrew Paloni)..... 16
 - Conference Committee 16
 - Overview from the committee’s AGLS Board sponsors (Louise Rafferty, Samantha Nichol and Andrew Ford) .16
 - Purpose of committee and overview of committee members 16
 - Overview of the committee’s work this year 17
 - Overview of the committee’s work in the year ahead..... 17
 - Acknowledgement from the Conference Committee Chair (Caroline Rice) 18
 - Engagement and Communication Committee 18
 - Overview from the committee’s AGLS Board sponsors (Matthew Swainson and Emily Sehu) 18
 - Purpose of committee and overview of committee members 18
 - Overview of committee’s work this year..... 19
 - Overview of the committee’s work in the year ahead..... 20
 - Acknowledgement from the Engagement and Communication Committee Co-Chairs (Jesse Cowie and Alexander Tu)..... 21
 - Legal Practice Managers’ Forum 21
 - Legal Risk Committee 22

Purpose of committee22

Overview of committee members.....23

Interaction with Significant Legal Issues Committee (SLIC).....23

Overview of the two committee meetings this year.....24

Overview of the committee’s work in the year ahead.....24

Other AGLS initiatives.....24

 Australian Government Legal Advice Database24

 AGLS website and government lawyer contact list24

Acknowledgements24

Conclusion25

Introduction

This is the Australian Government Legal Service (AGLS) Board 2021 Annual Report to the Secretary of the Attorney-General's Department (AGD), Katherine Jones PSM.

The AGLS is the new formal professional network for government lawyers. The AGLS aims to support government lawyers in the delivery of consistent, coherent and effective legal services through a range of initiatives focused on information sharing, collaboration, guidance, professional standards and training. It is intended to emphasise the whole-of-government nature of managing legal risk, and to provide support to agencies and government lawyers to collaborate across government.

The AGLS replaces the Australian Government Legal Network (AGLN) and will build on its work, sharpening the focus of Commonwealth legal services.

The establishment of the AGLS was one of 10 recommendations from the [2016 Secretary's Review of Commonwealth Legal Services](#).

Membership of the AGLS is automatic for government lawyers. The network connects more than 2,000 Commonwealth government lawyers working in over 90 entities across Australia. AGLS members remain employees of their entity, but their AGLS membership is a core part of their professional identity.

The AGLS Board is composed of 10 senior lawyers from across the Commonwealth, plus a standing member from AGD. The Secretary of AGD is the head of the AGLS, and responsible for appointing members of the Board. With the exception of AGD, membership is limited to one member per Commonwealth agency, unless the Secretary of AGD otherwise agrees.

The inaugural AGLS Board was appointed by the then Secretary of AGD, Chris Moraitis PSM, in November 2020. The official launch of the AGLS took place virtually in April 2021, due to the need to be COVID safe. The launch comprised the upload of speeches from Iain Anderson, then Acting Secretary of AGD, and Sarah Godden, AGLS Board Chair, and other updates to the [AGLS website](#).

The [AGLS Board Terms of Reference](#) provide the Board's responsibilities include reporting annually to the Secretary of AGD on the work of the AGLS Board and its committees, and the activities of the AGLS.

The Terms of Reference establish the following AGLS committees:

- Conference Committee
- Engagement and Communication Committee
- Professional Development Committee
- Legal Risk Committee.

Nominated Board sponsors work closely with the chairs of each committee, and the Legal Practice Managers' Forum. The forum was formerly an AGLN committee, as was the Government Lawyer Training Working Group. Both are continuing as informal AGLS working groups.

The AGLS team in AGD's Office of Legal Services Coordination (OLSC) provides administrative support for the AGLS, including secretariat support for the AGLS Board.

Work of the AGLS Board

Overview of the AGLS Board's work in 2021

Since its appointment in November 2020, the inaugural AGLS Board has focussed on establishing key governance frameworks that will support the aims of the AGLS for years to come. This has included developing the AGLS Strategic Plan, AGLS Stakeholder Engagement Plan and AGLS Communications Strategy, and facilitating the AGLS committees developing charters and work plans.

Key initiatives led by the Board include development of the General Counsel Charter and a 'Statement of expectations of Australian Government lawyers', establishing a working group to develop a heads of legal induction package and strategy, and facilitating the delivery of the very popular Foundational Government Lawyer Training program.

The Board has also supported or facilitated initiatives led by the AGLS committees or the AGLS team in OLSC, including the very successful AGLS Conference on 14 October 2021, the Mentoring Circles program, a panel discussion with three senior lawyers working in law enforcement and national security, the inaugural AGLS newsletter and initial development of the key medium-term initiative of the Australian Government Legal Advice Database.

Key initiatives led by the Board are outlined below, followed by governance frameworks established by the Board ([commencing on page 8](#)). Initiatives led by the AGLS committees or the AGLS team in OLSC and supported or facilitated by the Board, are outlined in the 'Work of the AGLS committees' section ([commencing on page 13](#)) and 'Other AGLS initiatives' section ([commencing on page 24](#)).

AGLS initiatives led by the AGLS Board

In its inaugural year, the Board has focussed on exploring ways to engage with General Counsel and heads of legal of different agencies and entities across the Commonwealth, given their critical leadership role in Commonwealth legal services. This focus complements existing initiatives which are targeted at junior or mid-level lawyers, such as the Mentoring Circles Program and Foundational Government Lawyer Program.

This section outlines the following initiatives led by the AGLS Board in 2021: General Counsel Charter, Statement of expectations of Australian Government lawyers, a heads of legal induction package/strategy and the Foundational Government Lawyer Training program.

General Counsel Charter

The General Counsel Charter is a key pillar of the AGLS, emphasising the vital role General Counsel play as senior lawyers and practice leaders in the Australian Government. The Board has worked with the Secretary of AGD to finalise the Charter (**Attachment A**).

[General Counsel Charter overview](#)

The Charter applies to the head of the legal practice of each Commonwealth agency, irrespective of the particular job title attaching to that position. It identifies obligations of General Counsel as a broader leadership cohort within the AGLS and sets out how General Counsel will lead and promote their entity's engagement in the AGLS. This includes supporting their staff to take part in training, development and secondment opportunities.

The Charter creates a relationship between the Secretary of AGD, as head of the AGLS, and each General Counsel. It is intended to complement, not override, existing arrangements between General Counsel and their Accountable Authority, in the same way that the AGLS is intended to complement the role of government lawyers within their agency.

Secretaries and Accountable Authorities have an important role to play in supporting participation in the AGLS by their General Counsel and government lawyers, including by encouraging their General Counsel to embrace the Charter and its core expectations in their day-to-day work.

The Charter is not legally binding, and there are no sanctions for non-compliance. Rather, it elaborates the Secretary of AGD's expectations, as head of the AGLS, for the role General Counsel should play to help promote the purpose of the AGLS, ultimately with a view to the coordinated and effective management of legal risk across government.

General Counsel Charter background

A key recommendation of the [2016 Secretary's Review of Commonwealth Legal Services](#) was to clarify the role of General Counsel in a General Counsel Charter:

Recommendation 2

Role of General Counsel

a) That the role of General Counsel should include:

- responsibility for identifying and contributing to the coordinated management of whole-of-government issues*
- a leadership role in coordination of legal issues and services in the portfolio, and*
- responsibility for sharing information across the Commonwealth, including on informed purchasing and good in-house practice.*

The expanded role would be supported through a charter for General Counsel to be sponsored by the Secretary of AGD.

b) That all General Counsel across the Commonwealth would have responsibility for leading their entity's engagement in the AGLS, supporting their entity head to ensure their entity's compliance with the Directions and managing non-compliance.

The Charter was approved by the then Secretary of AGD and the AGLS Board in December 2020. The General Counsel Working Group (a previous representative forum of some General Counsel across government) was consulted on the Charter during its development. In October 2021, the Secretary of AGD requested that the Charter be amended to include driving innovation in the delivery of legal services. The AGLS Board subsequently approved the revised Charter including this change, and a new section called 'Compatibility with other obligations' added to ensure consistency between the Charter and the 'Statement of expectations of Australian Government lawyers' (described below). The Secretary of AGD subsequently approved the revised Charter, as endorsed by the Board. OLSC is in the process of conveying it on behalf of the Secretary of AGD to all Departments of State and Commonwealth entities, together with the Statement of expectations of Australian Government lawyers.

Statement of expectations of Australian Government lawyers

The 'Statement of expectations of Australian Government lawyers' (**Attachment B**) is informed by the [2016 Secretary's Review of Commonwealth Legal Services](#), which recommended 'A clear statement of expectations, ongoing tailored training in core skills and mobility opportunities for government lawyers'

(Recommendation 8), as well as direction from the AGLS Transition Steering Committee, which preceded the AGLS Board. It has been prepared by the Board in consultation with government lawyers. The purpose of the Statement is to acknowledge the unique demands placed on government lawyers and reinforce the importance of complementing technical legal proficiency with a broad understanding of the context in which they operate. The Statement will raise awareness of the core expectations of government lawyers and provide guidance on how government lawyers should approach their duties with a whole-of-government focus. The Statement is intended to guide and support government lawyers as they perform their roles, and to complement the Charter.

Key changes made to the Statement following consultation included:

- clarifying who is the client – the final document states ‘generally our client is the Commonwealth’
- adding references to ‘discharging our role in a manner consistent with the law’, ‘to provide high quality work’ and ‘continuous learning and professional development’ (emphasis added).

The AGLS Board endorsed the final Statement on 25 November 2021, which was subsequently approved by the Secretary of AGD. OLSC is in the process of conveying it on behalf of the Secretary of AGD to all Departments of State and Commonwealth entities, together with the General Counsel Charter.

General Counsel/heads of legal induction package and strategy

At its meeting on 9 September 2021, the AGLS Board discussed its engagement with General Counsel and heads of legal, agreeing that developing a heads of legal induction package and strategy should be prioritised, and that General Counsel and heads of legal be consulted on the content.

The AGLS Board Chair wrote to heads of legal on 23 September 2021, seeking ideas about what the package should include and volunteers to help develop it, together with the Board and the Professional Development Committee. Eleven people responded, of whom the following eight volunteered to assist:

Name	Position and agency
Andrew Garland	Executive Director Strategic Legal Operations – Department of Defence
Nicole Ingram	General Counsel, Chief Audit Executive – Department of Veterans’ Affairs
Angus Tye	General Counsel – Australian Fisheries Management Authority
Francesca Rush	Chief Counsel, A/g First Assistant Secretary Commercial – Department of Defence
Miriam Moore	General Counsel, Corporate – Department of Health
Geoff Purvis-Smith	General Counsel, Legal Services and Governance – Clean Energy Regulator
Garrick Larkin	Director, Legal Services, Governance/Corporate Division – Geoscience Australia
Alison Macdonald	A/g Chief Counsel – Australian Federal Police

At its meeting on 4 November 2021, the Board endorsed forming a working group to progress a heads of legal induction package and strategy. The group will comprise the volunteers listed above, and the following Board sponsors: Meredith Leigh, Tim Ffrench and Charmaine Sims. A sub-group of the Professional Development

Committee will provide secretariat support for the working group, with assistance from the AGLS team in OLSC.

Foundational Australian Government Lawyer Training Program

The Foundational Government Lawyer Training Program delivers cost-effective training on foundational competencies for junior lawyers or lawyers new to government, and is developed and delivered by senior lawyers from within government. The program is led by a working group supported by the AGLS team in OLSC and the AGLS Board. The working group comprises the following members:

Name	Position and agency
Alicia Wright	Deputy General Counsel - Department of Home Affairs
Alison MacDonald	A/g Chief Counsel – Australian Federal Police
Elizabeth Risteski	Senior Lawyer – Australian Taxation Office
Joe Rule	Branch Manager, Legal, International and Regulatory Affairs – Civil Aviation Safety Authority
Esmira Kliko	Acting Director, External Legal Services – Department of Defence
Alice Burgess	Senior Legal Counsel – Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources
Member	Commonwealth entity
Janet Courtis	Deputy General Counsel – Services Australia
Margaret Leach	Principal Lawyer – Department of Health
Matthew Swainson	General Manager, Legal Group – Comcare
Sarah Godden	Assistant Secretary/Senior Executive Lawyer, Bargaining and Coverage Branch, Industrial Relations Legal Division – AGD
Satomi Sword	Senior Lawyer – Australian Taxation Office
Charine Bennett	Senior Lawyer – Australian Government Solicitor
Zahra Tariq	Senior government lawyer – Australian Public Service Commission
Shani Kercher	National Practice Manager – Department of Defence
Jenn Waters	Legal Counsel, Legal and Policy – Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission
Samantha Smith	Senior Legal Practice Manager – Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

The program was delivered from 5 to 7 May 2021 to 62 lawyers from 21 Commonwealth agencies (see program at **Attachment C**). The program was scheduled to be delivered in November 2021 but has been

postponed to April 2022 due to the pandemic. The April 2022 program will be the fourth delivery of the program, and is planned to be delivered to 120 lawyers to address significant demand. The previous three courses sold out in a matter of days, with participants providing overwhelmingly positive feedback, demonstrating the success of this high quality, low cost program for in-house government lawyers.

AGLS governance frameworks

This section outlines the key governance frameworks established by the Board in 2021, being the AGLS Strategic Plan, the AGLS Stakeholder Engagement Plan and the AGLS Communications Strategy. The Board has also facilitated the AGLS committees developing charters and work plans. These are outlined in the ‘Work of the AGLS committees’ section ([commencing on page 13](#)).

AGLS Strategic Plan

The [AGLS Strategic Plan](#) is structured around three themes of governance, engagement and professional development, and identifies key AGLS activities. These streams of work are overseen by the Board with key contributions and support from the AGLS committees. Nominated Board sponsors work closely with the chairs of each committee. The Board sponsors are:

Committee	AGLS Board sponsor/s
Conference Committee	Louise Rafferty, Samantha Nichol and Andrew Ford
Engagement and Communication Committee	Matthew Swainson and Emily Sehu
Professional Development Committee	Meredith Leigh and Kathryn Haigh
Legal Practice Managers’ Forum	Tim Ffrench

Developing the Strategic Plan was an early priority for the Board. The Board met on 19 February 2021 for a strategic planning workshop facilitated by an external provider. The Strategic Plan is the product of that workshop. There are two versions of the Strategic Plan – a public-facing version available on the AGLS website, and a version for internal use by the Board and its committees (**Attachment D**). The internal version contains additional detail about planned activities under the three streams of work – governance, engagement and professional development. The Board plans to review the activities in the internal version annually. The planned governance cycle with a strategic review at the beginning of each year will enable each Board to set its priorities and focus its activities having regard to the overall priorities of the AGLS.

AGLS Stakeholder Engagement Plan and AGLS Communications Strategy

The Board surveyed government lawyers in July 2021 to ascertain their level of awareness of the AGLS and its initiatives, and their satisfaction with the initiatives they may have participated in. 344 government lawyers completed the survey (note 2015 data referenced in the [2016 Secretary’s Review of Commonwealth Legal Services](#), at page 83, suggested there were over 2,000 government lawyers at that time). Over 80% of survey respondents were aware of the AGLS. As can be expected given the AGLS only launched in April 2021, respondents indicated low levels of awareness of specific AGLS initiatives (between 40% and 55% were aware of various initiatives) and a low rate of participation to date. Encouragingly, respondents expressed high levels of interest in participating in AGLS initiatives moving forward. Of the 317 government lawyers who provided an overall satisfaction rating for the AGLS, 32% responded that they were somewhat satisfied or very satisfied with the AGLS, with 5% being somewhat or very dissatisfied, 48% were neutral and 15%

responded that it is too early to tell. These results provide a useful baseline for future annual surveys, and are being used to inform future AGLS initiatives.

Developing the AGLS Stakeholder Engagement Plan (**Attachment E**) and AGLS Communications Strategy (**Attachment F**) was a Board priority this year, given the national spread of AGLS members and the low awareness of AGLS activities driving a need to engage with government lawyers to drive the success of the AGLS and delivery of its objectives.

The AGLS team in OLSC engaged an external provider to develop the plan, which was developed in close collaboration with the Engagement and Communication Committee and its Board sponsors, and subsequently endorsed by the Board.

The plan identifies the following groups of AGLS stakeholders, and propose objectives and communications activities for engaging with each group (pages 3-5 of the plan):

- New government lawyers
- Junior lawyers
- Senior/long-term government lawyers
- Commonwealth General Counsel/heads of legal
- Private practice law firms
- Universities/law students
- AGD including AGS
- Commonwealth entity heads
- AGLS Board.

The plan also includes communications guidelines (page 6).

To complement the plan, a range of AGLS communications assets have also been developed. These include templates for social media posts, an AGLS newsletter, AGLS correspondence and other documents. These assets are intended to facilitate AGLS communications, including by making them engaging to read.

Further information about AGLS engagement and communications activities is provided in the overview of the work of the Engagement and Communication Committee ([from page 18](#)).

2021 AGLS Board meetings

The Board met 12 times in 2021, on the following dates: 11 March, 22 April, 20 May, 17 June, 25 June, 15 July, 5 August, 19 August, 2 September, 9 September, 4 November and 25 November. Three meetings were held out-of-session (17 June, 5 August and 2 September), primarily for the Board to make decisions for the 2021 AGLS Conference. Meeting attendance statistics are provided at **Attachment G**. As required by the Terms of Reference, the AGLS team in OLSC provided secretariat support for each meeting, including preparing agendas, meeting papers and minutes. [Communiqués](#) for each meeting are published on the AGLS website, to provide visibility of the Board's activities.

AGLS Board's purpose, objectives and responsibilities

The [AGLS Board Terms of Reference](#) outline the Board's purpose, objectives and responsibilities.

The Board's primary purpose is to support a whole-of-government, high quality, consistent and coordinated approach to the delivery of legal services and the management of legal risk across the Commonwealth.

The Board’s objectives are to:

- Facilitate engagement between senior lawyers on whole-of-government legal issues and build a community of leaders of the government lawyer profession.
- Promote awareness of whole-of-government legal issues or initiatives.
- Drive cultural change towards coordinated delivery of legal services and the consistent management of legal risk.
- Establish a professional model for government lawyers, including professional standards, government legal practices and training modules.
- Connect and share information with government lawyers working across Australia in corporate and non-corporate government entities.
- Promote broad participation and involvement in the AGLS.

The Board’s responsibilities are to deliver its objectives. This includes through action to:

- Determine the priorities and strategic direction of the AGLS, including developing a Strategic Plan.
- Oversee and support the initiatives of the AGLS such as the Government Lawyer Training Program.
- Task and manage non-Board members, working groups and committees to deliver the AGLS Board’s objectives.
- Report annually to the Secretary of AGD on the work of the AGLS Board and its committees, and the activities of the AGLS.

Following the first full year of operation of the Terms of Reference, the Board proposes to review the Terms of Reference in the new year. The Board will report the outcome of that review and any recommendations to the Secretary of AGD.

Board members

The AGLS Board members are listed below – all were appointed in November 2020 unless otherwise indicated:

Name	Position and agency	Term expires
Sarah Godden (Board Chair)	Assistant Secretary/Senior Executive Lawyer, Bargaining and Coverage Branch, Industrial Relations Legal Division, AGD (previously General Counsel – Communications & Arts, Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications to 24 September 2021)	March 2022
Tim Ffrench	General Counsel, Department of Education, Skills and Employment	March 2022
Samantha Nichol	Chief of Staff/Chief Counsel, Australia Federal Police	March 2022
Emily Sehu	Deputy General Counsel, Australian Institute of Marine Science	March 2022
Charmaine Sims (from 11 August 2021)	General Counsel, Legal Services, Australian Public Service Commission	March 2022

Sayuri Grady (to 11 August 2021)	(formerly) General Counsel, Legal Services, Australian Public Service Commission	N/A
Andrew Ford	Deputy Chief Counsel, National Disability Insurance Agency	November 2022
Kathryn Haigh	Chief Counsel, Services Australia	November 2022
Meredith Leigh	First Parliamentary Counsel, Office of Parliamentary Counsel	November 2022
Louise Rafferty	Senior Executive Lawyer, Australian Government Solicitor (seconded to the Department of Defence)	November 2022
Matthew Swainson	General Manager, Legal Group, Comcare	November 2022
Toni Pirani (from September 2021)	First Assistant Secretary, Legal Services Policy Division Attorney-General's Department	Standing member
Tamsyn Harvey (November 2020 to September 2021)	First Assistant Secretary, Legal Services Policy Division Attorney-General's Department	N/A

The Terms of Reference provide that the maximum number of AGLS Board members is 11 including 10 appointed members and one standing member (the First Assistant Secretary of the Legal Services Policy Division in AGD). They also provide inaugural Board membership will be for a term of 12 months for five members and a term of 24 months for the other five members. This staggered re-appointment process provides continuity in membership and retention of corporate knowledge. It also provides regular opportunities for new members and perspectives. Board members cannot serve for more than two consecutive terms unless invited by the Secretary of AGD to do so.

Sarah Godden, Tim Ffrench, Sayuri Grady (replaced by Charmaine Sims), Emily Sehu and Samantha Nichol were appointed for a term of 12 months. In November 2021, the Secretary of AGD approved extending the terms of appointment for these five members until the appointment process for new members is completed in March 2022. An expression of interest process for new members closes on 24 December 2021.

The remaining Board members (Andrew Ford, Kathryn Haigh, Meredith Leigh, Louise Rafferty and Matthew Swainson), excluding the AGD standing member, were appointed for 24 months and will continue serving until their term of appointment expires or in case of resignation.

Reflections from the AGLS Board

Key achievements and successes for the Board in 2021

The Board has driven a significant uptake in member engagement with the AGLS. Member participation in AGLS activities skyrocketed; with the 2021 AGLS Conference leading engagement, together with the Mentoring Circles program, the Foundational Government Lawyer Training program and the first Professional

Development Committee seminar held in late November 2021. These activities are outlined in the 'Work of the AGLS committees' section ([commencing on page 13](#)).

Establishing foundational governance and strategy frameworks to drive future AGLS activities and provide a framework for prioritising AGLS activities has been a key achievement for the Board.

The Board has also reinvigorated many of the working groups and committees that preceded the AGLS, and is promoting a coordinated approach to the work of these groups and committees to support the broader aims of the AGLS. Establishing the Legal Risk Committee ([see overview from page 22](#)) including endorsing its Terms of Reference and supporting its first two meetings, is also a key success.

Reflecting on the diversity of government legal practice across the Commonwealth, it has been beneficial to bring senior lawyers and heads of legal from different parts of that broad practice together to work as productively and collegiately as we have as the inaugural AGLS Board. One Board member reflected that Board membership has allowed him to form closer connections to Board members and OLSC than he would otherwise have. This Board member also reflected that diversity of background, which has played out in different perspectives, has helped the Board in the initiatives that we have advanced.

A number of Board members reflected that Sarah Godden has been marvellous as the Board's inaugural Chair.

Key challenges and learnings for the Board in 2021

The COVID-19 pandemic and the need to focus on virtual engagement is an ongoing challenge, particularly for the Board when driving national engagement. It was difficult for the Board to pivot at the last minute to make decisions to deliver the 2021 AGLS Conference entirely virtually (rather than through the planned mix of in-person and virtual attendance) and to postpone the November 2021 offering of the Foundational Government Lawyer Training program.

The ongoing success of the AGLS relies primarily on volunteer effort, and the workload can be significant particularly for key initiatives such as the AGLS Conference and the Foundational Government Lawyer Training program. This can make it difficult to run popular events more frequently and requires significant buy in from senior leaders across the APS.

Effective engagement with corporate Commonwealth entities is a challenge and area of ongoing focus for the Board.

Good progress has been made increasing the profile of the AGLS on social media, but there is scope for further progress to be made. A key challenge with social media has been keeping momentum going with regular posts when there is a lull in AGLS announcements, events and training. Since the AGLS Engagement and Communications Committee started managing the AGLS LinkedIn, followers have increased to 522 (105% increase at 3 December 2021). The committee has published 43 posts on LinkedIn, a majority of which relate to the AGLS Conference and sharing APS job opportunities. Engagement on the AGLS Twitter is low, with 18 new followers since July 2021.

Overview of the AGLS Board's work in the year ahead

The AGLS Board has planned an annual governance cycle to ensure its activities and priorities are aligned with the objectives of the AGLS.

The Board proposes holding a planning session in early 2022 to review and update its Strategic Plan, including the activities/initiatives to prioritise in 2022.

The Board has asked the committee chairs to share their forward work plans before the end of 2021, and meet in early 2022 for a half-day workshop to align their work plans and share them with the Board to inform the planning session.

Continuing to explore ways to engage with heads of legal will be a Board priority next year. Developing the heads of legal induction and package is a key component of this work.

The Board plans to review its Terms of Reference, and will report the outcome of the review and any recommendations to the Secretary of AGD next year.

Having set up governance structures and functioning committees, the key challenge for the Board is to start delivering more for the AGLS members.

In a competitive market, there may be work the Board can do to raise the profile of being a government lawyer as an attractive career choice. Key initiatives such as the Foundational Government Lawyer Training program and annual conference will help the Board to continue to raise the AGLS profile. The Board may need to take further steps to address the demand for places for the Foundational Government Lawyer Training program.

Work of the AGLS committees

Professional Development Committee

Overview from the committee's AGLS Board sponsors (Meredith Leigh and Kathryn Haigh)

With a strong focus of the AGLS being to develop government lawyers, the Professional Development Committee (PDC) plays a central role in delivering on this. In 2021, the PDC has hit the ground running, building on the strengths and the work of the previous PDC under the Australian Government Legal Network.

While some of the focus in 2021 was on establishing a strong governance framework, the committee was still able to provide opportunities for professional development to government lawyers. The AGLS Mentoring Circles Program increased the already popular AGLN Mentoring Circles Program, connecting 95 lawyers from across the Commonwealth. After the success of the first AGLS conference, the PDC also used the increased visibility of the AGLS to launch the first in a series of webinars.

The Board would like to thank all members of the committee for their hard work, their enthusiasm, their time and their ideas. We are so proud, and they should be proud too, of their achievements in 2021.

The Board would also like to recognise the outstanding vision, energy and leadership of Andrew Paloni, the Chair of the Professional Development Committee. Andrew's hard work, drive and collaborative style over a number of years has built the strong base from which the committee was able to launch itself in 2021. The Board sponsors, Kathryn Haigh and Meredith Leigh, have greatly enjoyed working with Andrew and the enthusiasm and professionalism he brings.

The Board looks forward to continuing to work with Andrew and the other members of the committee in 2022, to provide more opportunities for success in bringing professional development to government lawyers.

Purpose of the committee and overview of committee members

The purpose of the PDC is to facilitate professional development programs and opportunities for all Australian Government lawyers, in support of the vision and strategic priorities of the AGLS Board. The PDC aims to facilitate the delivery of a suite of joined-up professional development programs for Australian Government lawyers and to support the AGLS Board in establishing a professional model for Australian Government lawyers, including professional standards, government legal practices and training modules.

In 2021, the PDC has comprised a group of around 15 active members, from a range of departments and agencies, and a range of roles and levels, as follows:

Name	Agency
Andrew Paloni (Chair)	Australian Institute of Marine Science
Donna Webster	Department of Defence
Jacqueline Swinton	Department of Defence
Milli Wong	Department of Education, Skills and Employment
Bianca Paridaen	Australian Federal Police
Mathew Short	Australian Federal Police
Jenn Waters	Legal Counsel Legal and Policy Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission
Tamara Cherny	Attorney-General's Department
Thuy Vi La	Department of Education, Skills and Employment
Melanie McIntyre	Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment
Meg Wootten	Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources
Anthony Todd	Professional Services Review
Jon Papalia	Australian Government Solicitor
Kate Tonkin	Australian Securities and Investment Commission
Bianca Bautista	Department of Social Services

Overview of the committee's work this year

The inaugural PDC has had a productive year in 2021. We began the year with a focus on establishing the governance and structures for the committee for the future, with our attention increasingly turning to delivery of programs and other work as the year progressed.

Governance

The PDC worked closely with the Conference Committee and Engagement and Communication Committee to develop a committee charter that is consistent with the other charters adopted across the AGLS. The PDC's Charter was endorsed by the AGLS Board on 19 August 2021 (**Attachment H**).

The PDC also worked iteratively with the AGLS Board to develop a Work Plan for 2021/22 that addresses each of the AGLS Board's strategic priorities in the professional development space. The PDC's 2021/22 Work Plan was endorsed by the AGLS Board on 4 November 2021 (**Attachment I**).

Activities/initiatives

In 2021, the PDC facilitated the inaugural intake of the AGLS Mentoring Circles Program, continuing a program that ran successfully under the Australian Government Legal Network. The program proved popular with the AGLS membership, kicking off in mid-2021 with 18 mentors and 77 mentees. Just over 50% of participants in the program were based outside the ACT, highlighting the ability of the AGLS to offer professional development opportunities to Australian Government lawyers across Australia.

On 25 November 2021, the PDC also delivered the first in our AGLS Webinar Series for 2021/22. The first webinar was a panel discussion with three senior lawyers working in law enforcement and national security (Steve Webber (Home Affairs), Catherine Fitch (Office of the Special Investigator) and Stefan Jerga (Australian Federal Police)), facilitated by the PDC Chair.

Reflections from the Professional Development Committee

A key achievement for the PDC was establishing the foundational governance documents and structures for the committee.

A key lesson was that, for the AGLS to achieve its great potential, there needs to be significant collaboration and communication between all parts of the AGLS, but especially between the AGLS committees.

Meetings

The full PDC met 10 times in 2021, with sub-groups of the PDC focussed on delivering particular initiatives also meeting ad-hoc as required.

Overview of the committee's work in the year ahead

In 2022, the PDC will be focussed on delivering on the remainder of our 2021/22 Work Plan. That work will include:

- delivering the 2022 AGLS Webinar Series
- developing a professional development framework for Australian Government lawyers
- welcoming a new intake for the AGLS Mentoring Circles Program
- developing a secondment program
- continuing to support the Foundational Australian Government Lawyer Training Program, and
- supporting the development of a heads of legal induction package and strategy.

Acknowledgement from the Professional Development Committee Chair (Andrew Paloni)

The PDC Chair would like to acknowledge all the members of the PDC who contributed to our activities in 2021.

The PDC Chair particularly acknowledges the contributions of:

- Donna Webster, Bianca Paridaen and Tamara Cherney for their huge efforts in coordinating the AGLS Mentoring Circles Program
- Jon Papalia and Mathew Short, for their stints in the role of PDC Secretary
- Kathryn Haigh and Meredith Leigh, our AGLS Board Sponsors, for championing the PDC and being so generous with their guidance, encouragement and support
- the AGLS team within OLSC for their ongoing support
- Youn Joo, for her commitment to ensuring a smooth transition for the committee from the AGLN to the AGLS.

Conference Committee

Overview from the committee's AGLS Board sponsors (Louise Rafferty, Samantha Nichol and Andrew Ford)

The 2021 AGLS Conference held on 14 October 2021 was an outstanding success, with 920 registered government lawyer attendees representing over 50 Commonwealth agencies. All involved demonstrated outstanding effort in developing, coordinating and delivering the event. As well as successfully navigating the challenges involved in delivering the first AGLS conference, those involved contended with the additional challenges involved with the AGLS Board's decision to pivot to a full virtual offering of the planned in-person event. The Conference Committee and AGLS team in AGD displayed perseverance to deliver an excellent program, which provided a professional development and networking opportunity to government lawyer colleagues working in legal practices across Australia, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Purpose of committee and overview of committee members

The purpose of the Conference Committee is to develop and deliver the annual professional development conference for the AGLS.

In 2021, the Conference Committee has comprised a group of around nine active members, from a range of departments and agencies, and a range of roles and levels, as follows:

Name	Agency
Caroline Rice	Department of Defence
Thomas Creedon	Australian Government Solicitor
Pip Fairbairn	Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources
Genevieve Ilic	Department of Education, Skills and Employment

Grace Burgess-Limerick	Department of Veterans' Affairs
Kate Crompton	Department of Education, Skills and Employment
Tanya Sims	Department of Education, Skills and Employment
Melusha Robson	Department of Education, Skills and Employment
Thuy Vi La	Department of Education, Skills and Employment

Overview of the committee's work this year

The 2021 AGLS Conference held on 14 October 2021 provided a valuable learning and professional opportunity for government lawyers at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns significantly limited such opportunities. Attendance was outstanding, given that when the AGLS Board surveyed Commonwealth lawyers in May 2021, only around 20 per cent of the approximately 300 respondents were aware of the existence of the AGLS and 2015 data, and 2015 data referenced in the [2016 Secretary's Review of Commonwealth Legal Services](#) (at page 83) suggests there were over 2,000 government lawyers at that time.

The Conference Committee, with input from the AGLS team in AGD, took the lead on developing all aspects of the conference, including key theme and topics, agenda, speakers, MC, venue/platform, costs, marketing, implementation and delivery. The theme, 'DNA of a government lawyer', was selected to reflect the mix of technical legal skills and people skills required in modern government legal practice. The program (**Attachment J**) of speakers and topics was diverse, engaging, of high calibre and appropriately reflected the theme.

Following the AGLS Board's decision to deliver an entirely virtual event due to the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Conference Committee and AGLS team in OLSC, together with the conference event manager, acted quickly to ensure all necessary steps were undertaken to deliver the event. These included working closely with the event manager to develop the online conference portal, and advertising the event to government lawyers, with assistance from the AGLS Engagement and Communication Committee.

Governance

The Conference Committee worked closely with the Professional Development Committee and the Engagement and Communication Committee to develop a committee charter that is consistent with the other charters adopted across the AGLS. The Conference Committee's Charter was endorsed out-of-session by the AGLS Board on 21 December 2021 (**Attachment K**).

Meetings

The Conference Committee met 12 times throughout 2021, between February and November. Meetings have a circulated agenda and minutes are taken.

Overview of the committee's work in the year ahead

The Conference Committee is focused on planning for the 2022 AGLS Conference and will use the extensive feedback provided by 2021 AGLS Conference attendees to design the program and deliver the event. The committee is also developing a standard operating procedure to inform future delivery of this event.

Acknowledgement from the Conference Committee Chair (Caroline Rice)

The Conference Committee Chair would like to acknowledge all the members of the committee who contributed to our activities in 2021.

The Conference Committee Chair particularly acknowledges the contributions of:

- The Secretary of the Attorney-General's Department, Katherine Jones PSM, for her participation in the panel session, 'Providing legal advice in a complex and dynamic environment', and for bringing a unique perspective to the task. We acknowledge her generosity in sharing her extensive experience of working with legal areas and applying a whole-of-government focus to what we do.
- The committee's AGLS Board sponsors (Louise Rafferty, Samantha Nichol and Andrew Ford) for their encouragement, input, advice and unwavering support in delivering the event.
- The AGLS Board for their support in delivering the event and for encouraging participation and attendance amongst their respective agencies and departments.

Engagement and Communication Committee

Overview from the committee's AGLS Board sponsors (Matthew Swainson and Emily Sehu)

With a mandate to support the AGLS vision through engagement and communication with government lawyers across Australia, in 2021 the Engagement and Communication Committee (ECC) prioritised the development of a roadmap in the AGLS Stakeholder Engagement Plan and AGLS Communications Strategy to ensure a systematic, effective, and professional approach in its activities going forward.

In line with AGLS Board priorities the ECC also focused on subcommittee structures and communication protocols. These were developed to ensure continuity and smooth transitions of the ECC activities, as committee volunteers move on.

One of the highlights was the great enthusiasm and proactiveness of ECC members in forging ahead with engagement activities on social media to increase visibility of the AGLS and the first AGLS newsletter. The ECC, in collaboration with the other committees, acted as the conduit of communication for AGLS activities and events, for example the 2021 AGLS Conference and the PDC Webinar Series, and therefore shares in the success of those activities and AGLS as a whole in 2021.

The Board looks forward to the implementation of the AGLS Stakeholder Engagement Plan and AGLS Communications Strategy and the ECC building on and strengthening all its initiatives and efforts in 2022.

Purpose of committee and overview of committee members

The purpose of the ECC is to connect government lawyers and to increase collaboration amongst the Australian Government legal community. The committee is also responsible for internal and external AGLS communication through social media and a quarterly newsletter.

In 2021, the ECC comprised a group of 12 active members. Those members are from a range of different roles and levels, and are from agencies whose employees comprise 31% of APS employees, representing large and small operational, specialist and policy agencies, as follows:

Name	Agency
Alexander Tu	Department of Social Services
Jesse Cowie	Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment
Amelia Keath	Comcare
Chris Gounder	Australian Public Service Commission
Courtney Lor	Department of Education, Skills and Employment
Dannielle Creighton	Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment
Erin Dalton	Department of Education, Skills and Employment
Kelvin Kwan	Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment
Nicholas Wilson	Australian Government Solicitor
Nicola Viero	Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority
Sophie Momber	Comcare
Sharon Chiu	Department of Education, Skills and Employment

Overview of committee's work this year

The inaugural ECC has had a productive year in 2021. We began the year with a focus on establishing the governance and structures for the committee for the future, with our attention increasingly turning to growing/building awareness of the AGLS and other work as the year progressed.

Governance

The ECC worked closely with the Conference Committee and Professional Development Committee to develop a committee charter that is consistent with other charters adopted across the AGLS. The ECC's Charter was endorsed by the AGLS Board on 19 August 2021 (**Attachment L**).

The committee created the *AGLS Engagement and Communications Committee – Communications Policy* which was endorsed by the AGLS Board on 9 September 2021 (**Attachment M**). The policy outlines protocols for the ECC's use of external communications to undertake official AGLS business and is designed to provide structure and guidance to the ECC members on the processes, standards and approach for the AGLS's external communications, including the AGLS newsletter and the appropriate use of social media.

The committee also worked closely with the AGLS Board, Board sponsors, AGLS team in OLSC and a supplier in developing the AGLS Stakeholder Engagement Plan and AGLS Communications Strategy.

Activities/initiatives

The ECC has compiled a stakeholder list, containing university law societies, state/territory law societies, and private sector law firms. The ECC has sent initial invitations to meet to state/territory law societies so far, to see if there are any areas of mutual interest on which we can collaborate and share communications.

Social media channels

The AGLS official social media accounts are used to connect government lawyers, increase collaboration and promote sharing of information and resources, and recruit new members.

The ECC posts regular updates on AGLS social media accounts in accordance with the *AGLS Engagement and Communications Committee – Communications Policy*.

Social media activities and initiatives include:

- Publishing posts in relation to AGLS events and sharing APS job opportunities on LinkedIn and Twitter.

- Liaising with other AGLS committees to obtain content.
- Liaising with members of the AGLS team at Attorney-General's Department to obtain content.

Social media key achievements for 2021:

- Creation of the ECC Social Media Sub-Committee chaired by Amelia Keath and Sophie Momber.
- Creation of an authorisation protocol for posts on AGLS social media accounts found at Annexure A of the *AGLS Engagement and Communications Committee – Communications Policy*.
- Since the ECC started managing the AGLS LinkedIn, followers have increased to 522 (105% increase at 3 December 2021).
- Published 43 posts on LinkedIn, a majority of which relate to the AGLS Conference and sharing APS job opportunities.

The committee's key social media challenges/learnings are:

- Engagement on the AGLS Twitter is low, with 18 new followers since July 2021.
- A key challenge with social media has been keeping momentum going with regular posts when there is a lull in AGLS announcements, events and training.

The committee's key social media priorities next year are to:

- Increase followers and engagement on LinkedIn and Twitter.
- Establish a steady stream of content specifically for LinkedIn that attracts high engagement.
- Implement a social media forward planning content calendar.

Newsletter

The AGLS newsletter is a quarterly publication created by government lawyers, for government lawyers. They are an important part of connecting more than 2,000 government lawyers who comprise the AGLS.

The newsletter will update members on the work of the AGLS, share stories of government lawyers and legal practices across the Commonwealth and discuss issues of interest to members.

This year the ECC has made significant progress on establishing processes for the publication of the newsletter. This includes the development of a master content plan, processes for sourcing content and allocation of work, and a publishing strategy.

This important establishment work will ensure that newsletter publication is embedded into the ECC's ongoing work plans and its content continues to be fit-for-purpose and aligns with AGLS's broader strategic priorities.

The first issue of the AGLS newsletter, which includes an inaugural letter from the AGLS Board Chair summing up the year that was and the AGLS's priorities for 2022, was published in December 2021.

Meetings

The ECC meets monthly on the second Friday of every month. Meetings have a circulated agenda and minutes are taken. The full ECC met five times throughout 2021, from July to November, with sub-groups of the ECC focused on delivering particular initiatives also meeting ad-hoc as required.

Overview of the committee's work in the year ahead

- One of our key priorities is to continue working with the AGLS Board, Board sponsors and committees to implement the AGLS Stakeholder Engagement and Communications Plan, and to begin incorporating more broadly the use of the AGLS communications assets developed for social media posts and all other AGLS correspondence.

- We will continue to develop relationships with other AGLS committees.
- We will consistently deliver on four quarterly newsletters that are engaging and of high quality. We intend to theme newsletters to provide a spotlight on areas of the Commonwealth. Planned themes include how lawyers work within a regulator, a corporate Commonwealth entity, a legislation practice, and how a lawyer works with new technology. We intend that newsletters will share common features, such as 5 minutes with a senior lawyer and a feature article, and will curate content accordingly (e.g. for a quarterly issue regarding regulators, we would aim to have 5 minutes with a chief counsel at a regulatory entity and source a feature article on a legal issue that affects regulators).
- We hope to grow our social media base on LinkedIn and Twitter through a steadier stream of content. This will be achieved through better collaboration and communication with other committees as we promote their initiatives.
- Ultimately, we envision success to look like more targeted engagement with specific cohorts of the Australian Commonwealth legal community such as corporate Commonwealth entities, regulators and even broader proactive engagement with the Australian non-Commonwealth legal community such as state and university law societies.

Acknowledgement from the Engagement and Communication Committee Co-Chairs (Jesse Cowie and Alexander Tu)

The ECC Co-Chairs would like to acknowledge all the members of the committee who contributed to our activities in 2021.

The ECC Co-Chairs particularly acknowledges the contributions of:

- The entire committee for attending monthly meetings and brainstorming sessions regularly and participating actively in meetings, including sharing in taking minutes.
- Sophie Momber and Amelia Keath for proactively managing the social media channels - sourcing content from job postings, liaising with other committees in promoting professional development and conference activities.
- Nick Wilson and Courtney Lor for developing a content plan for our inaugural newsletter which can be reused as a work plan for all future issues, and acted as editors for the first issue.
- The entire committee for contributing to sourcing content for the first quarterly issue of the newsletter.
- Matthew Swainson and Emily Sehu for being responsive and supportive as ECC AGLS Board sponsors - in providing feedback to documents we have produced, and allowing us to set the direction and activities of the inaugural ECC.

Legal Practice Managers' Forum

The Legal Practice Managers Forum (LPMF) is an informal working group and discussion forum that predates the establishment of the AGLS. The LPMF does not have a formal chair as participants take turns hosting meetings. The LPMF provides a discussion forum that facilitates the resolution and identification of issues that are faced by Australian Government legal practices. All persons working in legal practice management in Australian Government legal practices are welcome to participate in the LPMF, whether legally qualified or not.

Whilst not a formal AGLS committee the forum has an AGLS Board sponsor. The Board sponsor acts as a conduit between the LPMF and the AGLS Board. The sponsor passes information to the LPMF from the Board and wider AGLS. The LPMF is also expected to provide useful information, feedback and support for AGLS

initiatives. The present Board sponsor is Tim Ffrench and a role statement for the Board sponsor has been settled by the LPMF.

The LPMF is expected to focus on the identification and dissemination back to the Board and wider AGLS of better ways of managing Australian Government legal practices. This includes, but is not limited to, identifying best practice in:

- Matter management systems.
- Knowledge management systems.
- Administration of the Whole of Australian Government Legal Services Panel, including driving best value for money from Panel providers.
- Administration of the payment of legal invoices.
- Best practice in managing legal budgets.
- Training and CPD programs.
- Graduate/cadetship programs.
- The structure of legal practices.

There have been three LPMF meetings in 2021 with the Department of Education Skills and Employment, the Department of Health, and the Department of Home Affairs each hosting an event. There has been very helpful discussion and sharing of information at the LPMF in 2021 in relation to the management of the Australian Government Legal Services Panel, graduate programs and matter management systems among many other things.

The LPMF expects to build on the experience of working under the umbrella of the AGLS in 2022 and drive further identification of industry best practice in Australian government legal practice management.

Legal Risk Committee

Purpose of committee

The AGLS Board endorsed [Terms of Reference](#) for the Legal Risk Committee in April 2021.

Performing a different function to the other AGLS committees, the Legal Risk Committee is the new primary consultative forum for heads of legal from a range of Commonwealth agencies. It allows agencies to share a range of experiences from their legal teams, such as substantive legal issues and training and development of staff. It embodies the AGLS goal of further collaboration between agencies, and will assist agencies in managing Commonwealth legal risk in a coordinated manner. The committee is intended to be a consultative and information sharing body, rather than a decision-making body.

In pursuing this purpose, the committee will be used to:

- facilitate its members identifying sources of legal risk in their agencies, including identifying systemic or thematic risks arising across multiple agencies
- consult and seek agencies' views and input on key issues of legal risk
- promote the proactive management of legal risk, including through the identification of best practice and capacity building
- disseminate information and guidance from government on matters of legal risk (including the Attorney-General, Solicitor General, the Significant Legal Issues Committee or OLSC), and
- promote consultation, information sharing and sharing of experiences among agencies.

Overview of committee members

The committee's current members are listed in **Attachment N**.

In line with the committee's purpose, its members are a representative group of senior government lawyers including:

- The head of legal (or other senior government lawyer) from:
 - each Department of State
 - each of a selection of agencies invited by the AGLS Board (currently Services Australia, the National Disability Insurance Agency, Comcover, Comcare and the Australian Federal Police)
 - two representatives of the financial regulatory agencies (currently the Australian Taxation Office and the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission)
 - one representative of the intelligence agencies (currently Office of National Intelligence)
 - one representative from the corporate Commonwealth entities (currently National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority)
 - the Australian Government Solicitor
 - Office of Parliamentary Counsel
 - Office of Constitutional Law (AGD), and
 - Office of International Law (AGD).

- The following standing members:
 - First Assistant Secretary, Legal Services Policy Division (AGD)
 - Assistant Secretary, OLSC (AGD), and
 - an SES representative from the Government Division of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

- The Chair of the AGLS Board will *ex officio* be a member of the LRC.

Interaction with Significant Legal Issues Committee (SLIC)

SLIC is responsible for considering a small number of specified legal matters or issues, as brought to SLIC's attention by OLSC or raised by SLIC's members. In contrast, the Legal Risk Committee's role is to discuss and communicate legal risk broadly, which may cover among other things specific legal matters and issues, approaches to identifying and managing legal risk within agencies' areas of responsibility, and the capability of government lawyers and legal practices to manage legal risk. This may extend to proposing initiatives for the broader AGLS to be implemented by other AGLS committees.

The committee will complement SLIC, and will form part of the broader legal risk ecosystem (which also encompasses the role of agencies, OLSC and ministers, the operation of the Legal Services Directions, the ongoing collaboration and consultation among government lawyers, and other education, training, information sharing and networking initiatives of the AGLS). What this means in practice will depend on the context of particular issues. As and when appropriate, the committee may identify issues worthy of SLIC's attention, or review or triage issues before they go to SLIC.

The committee will also be a forum to implement or disseminate outcomes from SLIC if requested by them, or to discuss matters which are not included on SLIC's agenda.

Overview of the two committee meetings this year

The committee met twice in 2021, on 28 July and 24 November. The first meeting was introductory, and focussed on the committee's purpose and agency updates. The substantive matters discussed at the second meeting were:

- Workplace vaccinations
- Cultural loss – an emerging issue in the context of compensation
- Implications for the Commonwealth following the *Voller* High Court judgment – in relation to social media and defamation.

Overview of the committee's work in the year ahead

The Terms of Reference provide that the committee will meet at least four times each year.

Other AGLS initiatives

Australian Government Legal Advice Database

A key medium-term initiative for the AGLS is the development of the Australian Government Legal Advice Database, which will be a central repository of key legal advices for government lawyers, encouraging consistency in legal interpretation and supporting a whole of government approach to common legal issues. The database will be developed iteratively, building on feedback provided by government lawyers. A functional beta version of the database, incorporating its most essential functions, was completed by 30 June 2021. This beta version will provide the foundation to develop and test information security protocols and seek usability feedback from government lawyers.

With the support of the Board, the AGLS team in OLSC is leading the database project which is overseen by an AGD Steering Committee. The database arises from the [2016 Secretary's Review of Commonwealth Legal Services](#) which outlined the need to share knowledge through 'An electronic solution to better share critical legal advice and other information held by Commonwealth entities to improve consistency and reduce duplication of effort' (Recommendation 5).

AGLS website and government lawyer contact list

The AGLS team in OLSC manages the [AGLS website](#), which provides key information about the AGLS to government lawyers and promotes AGLS initiatives. The website includes an option for government lawyers to subscribe to a government lawyer contact list, used to communicate government lawyers about AGLS activities. As at 20 December 2021, there were 1,072 people on this list. The team maintains a separate distribution list for people who might not be government lawyers but are interested in AGLS updates. As at 20 December 2021, there were 2,174 people on this list.

Acknowledgements

The AGLS is a platform to assist government lawyers across the APS to support their colleagues and work together to effectively and efficiently provide consistent, high quality legal services across the Commonwealth. In this foundational year of the AGLS, the Board was engaged and highly active in determining our strategic priorities from the many activities that the AGLS could engage in to ensure that we

deliver on these objectives now and into the future as an organisation. Collectively, we look forward to future Boards growing the existing priority activities and adding additional priorities to build the AGLS up to its true potential.

Reaching this goal requires sustained commitment, collaboration and determination – as well as the support of senior leaders across the Commonwealth. The Board acknowledges the supportive and positive way each member approached agreeing and articulating our vision for the AGLS. The Chair thanks the Board for their shared commitment to achieving the aims of the AGLS and working with the many members of the AGLS committees to bring these initiatives to life. Without the participation of its members and the activity of so many volunteers across the committees, we would not have the achievements outlined in this document. This uptake in engagement with the AGLS is vital to the long-term success of the AGLS and achieving the aims laid down for us in the Secretary’s Review of Commonwealth Legal Services and articulated in the AGLS Strategic Plan.

Of course, it is not just volunteers who run the AGLS. Without the dedication and commitment of the AGLS team within AGD, so many of these initiatives would not have been possible. Their work enables so many of the initiatives of the AGLS and allows the volunteers to focus their time and commitment. They also work alongside the Board sponsors to facilitate communication between the various committees, assist the Board in maintaining a strategic overview of its initiatives and other AGLS activities and to discharge our reporting and record keeping obligations.

Finally, the Board would like to acknowledge the support and the generosity shown by the Secretary of AGD, Katherine Jones PSM, to her government lawyer colleagues in participating in the AGLS Conference. The Secretary’s participation enabled nearly one in two government lawyers across the Commonwealth to benefit from her experience, share in her vision and – importantly – hear from the Secretary of AGD directly as the head of the AGLS.

Conclusion

The AGLS represents an unparalleled opportunity for all government lawyers to strengthen the vital role of government lawyers, now and into the future. Our success will be measured in many ways but a key early indicator is participation. Participation in the AGLS and its initiatives enables us to support each other and build on the legacy of our predecessors.

We seek to make it easier for lawyers to discharge our professional responsibilities, build our capability – and that of our colleagues – while delivering legal services to, and identifying and managing legal risk for, the Commonwealth of Australia. The huge uptake in participation in AGLS initiatives and increasing engagement across all the AGLS’s activities is a testament to the commitment of government lawyers to delivering on these objectives. We thank each and every government lawyer who has engaged with the AGLS over the past year, as you have contributed to a solid foundation for our successors to build upon as they strengthen the AGLS next year and every year into the future.