

15 May 2024

## Consumer Rights Award winners making Australia a more just society

Catherine Eagle and Christian Mikula were recognised last night at the Law Council of Australia's Consumer Rights Forum in Perth for their dedication to protecting the community and the promotion of an equitable and just society.

"Catherine and Christian embody some of the most important values of our profession and are highly deserving recipients of the 2024 Consumer Rights Award," Law Council of Australia President, Mr Greg McIntyre SC said.

"One of the key roles of the legal profession highlighted in our Lawyer Project report is to facilitate access to justice for all members of the Australian community, particularly those facing economic or social disadvantage.

"This Award is conferred annually upon members of our profession who champion the rights of consumers.

"With consumers seemingly more vulnerable than ever to those who would seek to take advantage of them and often facing great disparity in power and resources when fighting against injustice, it is lawyers like Catherine and Christian who work to protect them.

"For over 30 years, Christian has championed the rights of consumers, from his early career in community law and legal aid, through to reforming lending laws while working at Treasury, to his nearly two decades at ASIC.

"While at ASIC, Christian has been instrumental in ensuring insurers actively address the risk of under-insurance; he has helped protect First Nations Australians from poor bank lending practices and he secured over \$100 million in remediation for Australians harmed by systemic practices, such as selling add on products with expensive loans. For many years Christian's achievements have protected vulnerable consumers from unfair lending practices.

"Irresponsible lending inflated by add on junk insurance only to be followed by interest rate shocks caused many consumers great suffering. Many of these unfair lending practices have been addressed by Christian.

"Catherine has also served our community for more than 30 years. Catherine has been employed at Welfare Rights & Advocacy Service (WRAS) for nearly 20 years and is currently Principal Solicitor.

"In her role, Catherine assists clients with their Centrelink and tenancy issues on a daily basis. The clients she assists suffer severe financial hardship, ill-health and vulnerability.

"During the 'Robodebt' scheme, Catherine worked tirelessly to assist clients to appeal their debts, and to draw attention to the problems with the automated debt system, appearing regularly before various Senate Inquiries between 2017 and 2021.

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

# Media Release



“In collaboration with Economic Justice Australia, Catherine was invited to appear before the Royal Commission into Robodebt. The Royal Commission produced a report making numerous recommendations intended to improve the processes of Services Australia, reinforce the capability of oversight agencies, and to hold those responsible for Robodebt accountable. To operationalise one of the Robodebt Royal Commission’s recommendations, she has worked closely with Services Australia to establish a Pilot Advocate’s Channel to assist with communication between lawyers/advocates in welfare rights centres and Services Australia to resolve customer issues.

“Catherine’s commitment to consumers extends far beyond her work with clients. She has been a generous and valued mentor and educator who provides regular legal outreach to regional and remote areas of WA, including in Fitzroy Crossing to those impacted by the Kimberley floods. Catherine works with government agencies to improve legislative, administrative, service delivery and policy outcomes.

“Catherine has also made an invaluable contribution to the community legal sector in WA and Australia. Catherine is the Convenor of the WA Community Legal Centre’s Legal Practice and PII Committee and Chair and Convenor of the Community Legal Centres Australia Professional Indemnity Insurance (LP&PII) Network. She has undertaken these roles in a voluntary capacity for seventeen years and provides support to CLC solicitors and the sector across the country.”

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