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Statement on the outcomes of a national Roundtable into sexual harassment in the legal profession from Law Council President, Pauline Wright

All comments to be attributed to Law Council President, Pauline Wright.

Following recent media reports into sexual harassment, the Law Council of Australia held a national roundtable that brought together experts across the country to address the issue of sexual harassment in the profession.

The aim of the roundtable was to provide a conducive forum for those with relevant expertise to refine policy positions for specific legislative reforms and to further develop approaches that can be adopted within the legal profession to address sexual harassment. Attendees included inclusion and diversity representatives from legal professional associations, regulators, women lawyers' associations, law student representatives and the Sex Discrimination Commissioner.

Across the roundtable there was broad consensus and agreement that the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* (Cth) requires urgent amendment to extend the prohibition of sexual harassment to all areas of life, and not just in respect of certain relationships and situations. This reform is entirely appropriate, necessary, and overdue.

Participants at the roundtable also agreed that the legal profession should act upon key recommendations contained in the Australian Human Rights Commission's [Respect@Work Report](#).

Other areas identified as requiring as law reform included defamation, conduct rules, occupational health and safety laws, and time limits to make complaints.

The roundtable acknowledged that law reform must be accompanied by cultural change in the legal profession, which could be achieved through measures including: a national model sexual harassment policy and guidelines; a centralised source of information and suite of educational tools; the facilitation of consistent complaints processes across Australia; and the development of appropriate training.

There was also consensus that the establishment of a Federal Judicial Commission – long called for by the Law Council – has merit.

There remains much work to be undertaken by the Law Council and all stakeholders to refine and implement the proposals for reform and actions agreed at the roundtable. The Law Council will work with its constituent member associations to develop these measures into a blueprint for action to address sexual harassment in the legal profession.

The legal profession must come together in times like this to reflect on what we can better and work together to improve the experiences of all legal professionals.

ENDS

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