



Chair's Report 2023-2024

The Landscape

The focus continues to be on uncertainty in the construction landscape in Australia, with construction being the economy's weakest sector, coupled with static economic growth and an inflation rate that continues to rise.

Existing issues, such as increased labour costs, skills shortage and the rising cost of materials, are some of the biggest issues facing the building and construction industry.

As reported last year, there still remains significant risks in the market for all participants in delivering projects successfully, as evidenced by a continuing rise in insolvent construction companies.

On a more positive note, while construction sector activity has slowed, there are opportunities ahead by diversifying into other project sectors. Significant investment by the Federal Government has been noted in areas such as transportation, renewable energy activity and social infrastructure. Also, the construction industry is increasingly adopting technology to improve efficiency and productivity, which will drive growth.

SoCLA Strategy

SoCLA continues to deliver on its strategic objectives to:

- *promote the education, study and research in the field of construction law and related subjects in Australia and overseas; and*
- *provide a forum for industry participants and thought leaders to connect and together initiate positive change in the construction industry for the benefit of the construction industry and public as a whole by influencing changes to legislation, policy and practice.*

As part of delivering on the Strategy, I note as follows:

An Executive General Manager

SoCLA is pleased to announce the recent appointment of Joy Meilak, as our Executive General Manager. Joy comes to the role with a wealth of knowledge of membership associations, against the backdrop of law, professional services and the construction landscape.

Video showcasing SoCLA and members

We now have an engaging and compelling story to tell about SoCLA and its members we will start to share in a number of marketing campaigns. The video forms part of the plan to build out SoCLA's brand and reputation. You can watch the video [here](#).

A Successful inaugural Stynes Address

SoCLA is grateful for the contribution of Justice Katie Stynes who presented the inaugural Stynes Address. Named in her honour, the Address focused on the practice of law and the construction industry.

The Stynes Address, which aims to provide thought provoking insights and challenge industry views and norms, is now an annual fixture in the SoCLA calendar, with the next likely to be held in Sydney in November 2024. Preparations are well underway, with thanks to Kiri Parr for driving this thought leadership and educational initiative.

The Annual Conference and Events

This year's National Conference in Melbourne exceeded all expectations. Across several days delegates enjoyed events held in some of Melbourne's most iconic venues, with conference highlights as follows:

- Attendance records were broken with 288 conference registrations.
- 300 attendees at the Gala Dinner witnessed the Comedy Debate.
- Eminent multi-discipline experts were in attendance.
- There were 38 speakers and 27 presentations.
- Overseas guests attended, including a number from our fellow SCLs in the UK, HK, NZ, Vietnam and Singapore.
- The conference showcased a jam-packed social calendar including the popular, sold out YCC networking event.
- The hotly contested Charrett Moot.

The Conference Committee, led by Emma Lampard, did an extraordinary job; it was a credit to the entire Conference Committee. In particular, David Ulbrick is to be congratulated for curating a program, with a multi-disciplinary approach.

We hope that many more delegates will join us at the conference in Brisbane on 22 May 2025.

Events

Our 24 educational and networking events across Australia, held free to attend for our members, were received with much enthusiasm. Many more members' events are planned across Australia to close out the second half of the year; keep a watch in your email inbox for details as they are finalised.

Brooking Prize

Named after the Hon Robert Brooking AO KC in recognition of his Honour's pioneering contribution to the study and practice of construction law in Australia, SoCLA continues to offer the Brooking Prize annually, for the best essay submitted in the field of construction law.

The winners of the Brooking Prize, Jeremy Coggins and Dr Jessica Viven-Wilksch presented their paper at the SoCLA National Conference.

SoCLA thanks the entire judging team, led by Dr Matthew Bell as Chair of the Brooking Prize Judging Panel. Matthew has been a great supporter of SoCLA. He will be stepping down as Chair and will be replaced by Dr Jeremy Coggins who has kindly offered to take on the role.

Scholarships

SoCLA continues to support scholarships across institutions of higher learning and funding of research on topics relevant to our members.

Mentoring Program

Our bespoke Mentoring Program now boasts 100 participants. SoCLA thanks Louise McMananon for her careful and considered selection of pairing mentors and mentees and support to participants during the year.

Keeping members informed

- SoCLA's podcasts showcasing high calibre speakers from across Australia on topical issues relating to the building and construction industry and law, have been well received.
- We have continued to issue regular newsletters, provided access to resources on both the SoCLA website (www.scl.org.au) and the SCL International website (<https://www.sclinternational.org>) We have also had strong presence on social media to help members remain updated and connected with SoCLA and the wider construction industry.

Industry engagement

- SoCLA continues to engage with Government and other regulatory bodies through submissions and exchanges on issues associated with law and regulation.
- As a member of the Australian Construction Industry Forum, SoCLA works with the ACIF in its engagement across the building and construction industry.

A recognition of contribution

The Board of SoCLA does an enormous amount of work to ensure that SoCLA remains relevant to its members and enjoys a strong reputation in the construction industry. Thank you to our dedicated and passionate Board:

- Sean Brady (Vice Chair)
- Kevin Pascoe (Secretary)
- Kate Bower (Treasurer)
- Caroline Beaumaris
- Michael Gibson
- Jennifer Irwin
- Emma Lampard
- Kiri Parr

The members of the Executive, Kevin, Kate and Sean continue to have driven SoCLA's efficient operations.

I would also like to express my sincere thanks to Caroline for stepping in as Acting Chair whilst I was on leave.

Cathie Witcombe's ongoing administrative and support is also greatly appreciated.

The Committees are the backbone of SoCLA. I want to recognise each of the Chairs of those Committees and their Committee members who have volunteered their time.

- Academic: Kiri Parr
- Communications: Melissa Yeo

- Conference: Emma Lampard
- Events: Caroline Beaumaris
- Memberships: Andrew Robertson
- Thought Action: Caroline Beaumaris
- Young Constructors: Sean Kelly

Each of these Committees provide real service to SoCLA and value to members, making SoCLA such a unique and highly valued society.

Finally, SoCLA wishes to record its thanks to Justice Katie Stynes for her commitment and energy as Patron of SoCLA.

As my term as Chair of SoCLA, comes to a close, I am very honoured to have been part of SoCLA's evolution and I am excited for the year ahead.

I wish all members continued success in their endeavours.



Ben Davidson

Chair, Society of Construction Law Australia

29 July 2024