



VICTORIAN BAR

New Barristers' Conference

20 FEBRUARY 2026

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Welcome



A message from New Barristers' Committee Chair, Christopher Brown KC

Thank you for attending the 2026 New Barristers' Conference. The New Barristers' Committee and the Victorian Bar Office have worked very hard over the past 12 months to curate a practical and engaging conference program that we hope you will find invaluable.

We are delighted to bring together so many of our esteemed colleagues from the Bench and the Bar to impart their knowledge and expertise that will help you to refine your legal skills, stay updated on the latest trends in practice and expand your professional networks.

I would like to thank all our highly qualified speakers who have generously volunteered their time. Everyone involved has been very enthusiastic about presenting to you.

This program combines a range of perspectives and expertise. It has been designed to provoke thoughtful discussions, shared learnings and skill-building. We hope you find the sessions engaging, energising and extremely helpful in developing your practice.

I am grateful for the assistance of various committee members and Bar Office staff in co-ordinating the conference, but particularly Jo Dougherty, Stephen Porter, Aggy Kapitaniak, Daniel Briggs, Bryony Seignior, Chong Tsang, D'Arcy Hope, Sam Jayasekara and Kathryn Browne.

Thank you also to our generous sponsors, Legal Home Loans and LexisNexis, for partnering with us. You can find out more about each of the sponsors in this program and through their sessions during the day.

Remember, this conference is for you, and I encourage you to get involved as much as possible, whether that be via engagement with questions and discussions during sessions or at one of the various networking opportunities throughout the day (morning and afternoon tea, lunch and this evening's cocktail function).

I also invite any feedback you may have after the conference as to what you enjoyed or what might be improved at future conferences.

Enjoy the day!

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VICTORIAN BAR

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8.30am – 9.00am | Registration / Coffee

9.00am – 9.20am

Welcome

The Honourable Justice Amanda Chambers was appointed Chief Judge of the County Court of Victoria in 2025, the Court's first female Chief Judge. Chief Judge Chambers was first appointed as a County Court Judge in 2015. Her Honour was also President of the Children's Court from 2015 until 2021, and in 2024 was appointed Head of the Criminal Division of the County Court. Prior to her Honour's appointment to the County Court, Chief Judge Chambers served as a Magistrate for more than eight years.

Fiona Ryan SC, President of the Victorian Bar
The Hon Justice Amanda Chambers, Chief Judge of the County Court of Victoria

9.20am – 10.30am

Session 1 Witness Conference Masterclass: Preparing clear and conscientious witnesses (*Ethics*)

Practical advice for junior barristers about the preparation of witnesses to give oral evidence in trial, with a particular focus on ethical considerations.

Presenters: Bryony Seignior (Chair), Colin Mandy SC, Elizabeth Ruddle KC, Gabi Crafti SC, Tim Scotter SC, Sophie Stafford

10.30am – 11.00am | Morning Tea

11.00am – 11.15am

Navigating the Mortgage Market: Key Considerations for Barristers

This session looks at how to navigate today's mortgage market, cutting through recent changes and exploring the factors that matter when making lending decisions. It is designed to provide practical context in a market where conditions continue to evolve.

Presenters: Legal Home Loans
Cullen Haynes, Director of Sales and Blake McTaggart, Sales Associate

11.15am – 12.15pm

Session 2 Artificial intelligence literacy (*Practice Management*)

This session will equip attendees with a better understanding of what AI is, how it can be useful to barristers in practice, and application of AI resources that may be available to them (as well as their instructors, clients and the courts).

Presenters: Sam Blashki (Chair), Kathleen Foley SC, Edward Moore, Tom Middleton, Damian Curran

12.15pm – 12.30pm

Legal AI and the Modern Barrister: Smart Tools, Safe Practices

How is legal AI being integrated into barristers' practice in a smart and responsible way? This informative session covers how legal AI can enhance your research, drafting and preparation of advice, and highlights key considerations when selecting AI tools, including confidentiality, accuracy and workflow impact. Includes a brief live demonstration of LexisNexis Protege.

Presenter: LexisNexis
Laura Proctor, Head of Sales, Bar and Corporate Markets

Program

12.30pm – 1.30pm | Lunch

1.30pm – 2.30pm

Presenters: Aggy Kapitaniak (Chair), the Honourable Justice Stephen O'Meara, Emily Latif, Naomi Hodgson, Dr Sarah Fischer

Session 3 A healthy practice for me:
Different perspectives on balancing priorities (*Practice Management*)

Panellists will share their personal reflections on how they have achieved a healthy practice at the Bar. They will address how mental and physical health may be managed in the face of the unique stressors of life at the Bar. The panellists' own experiences will provide realistic, practical and specific approaches to achieving a sustainable and healthy practice as a new barrister and beyond.

2.30pm – 3.30pm

Presenters: Sam Jayasekara (Chair), Patrick Doyle SC, Kateena O'Gorman SC

Session 4 Simplifying complexity:
Managing, organising, and presenting
documentary evidence (*Substantive Law*)

This session will offer practical strategies for dealing with voluminous and complex documentary evidence, with reference to some key provisions of the *Evidence Act*. The panel will speak to common traps and practical solutions presented by large amounts and varying kinds of documentary evidence.

3.30pm – 4:00pm | Afternoon Tea

4:00pm – 5:15pm

Presenters: Christopher Brown KC (Chair), the Honourable Justice Elizabeth Bennett, the Honourable Justice Lisa Hannon, the Honourable Associate Justice Catherine Gobbo, the Honourable Associate Justice Peter Fary, his Honour Judge Michael Wise, her Honour Judge Fiona Todd

Session 5 Tips and tricks for new barristers:
Advice from the Bench (*Barristers' Skills*)

A panel of judges from a variety of jurisdictions will share their reflections on, and advice for, new barristers appearing before them.

5:15pm – 5.30pm | Close / Thank You

5.30pm – 7.30pm | Networking Event

Drinks and canapes in the Essoign Club



VICTORIAN BAR

Presenters + Panellists

In order of appearance

Fiona Ryan SC

President, Victorian Bar

Fiona has an extensive trial and appellate practice in areas including accident compensation, institutional abuse, medical negligence, general torts, coronial inquiries, administrative law, and class actions. Prior to coming to the Bar, Fiona worked at Holding Redlich after undertaking articles in 2002. She worked in the personal injury and commercial litigation departments. Fiona was appointed silk in 2021, and elected President of the Victorian Bar in 2025.

The Hon Justice and Chief Judge Amanda Chambers

County Court of Victoria

The Honourable Justice Amanda Chambers was appointed Chief Judge of the County Court of Victoria in 2025, the Court's first female Chief Judge. Chief Judge Chambers was first appointed as a County Court Judge in 2015. Her Honour was also President of the Children's Court from 2015 until 2021, and in 2024 was appointed Head of the Criminal Division of the County Court. Prior to her Honour's appointment to the County Court, Chief Judge Chambers served as a Magistrate for more than eight years.

Bryony Seignior

Victorian Bar

Bryony practises in criminal law and public law. She regularly appears as defence counsel in summary and indictable criminal law matters, and appears in judicial review, merits review, and disciplinary proceedings across a range of courts and tribunals. She signed the Bar Roll in 2023.

Colin Mandy SC

Victorian Bar

Colin was an Accredited Criminal Law Specialist before coming to the Bar. Colin has appeared in all Victorian jurisdictions and most interstate, including murder trials in Perth, drug trials in Sydney, and trials in Brisbane and the Northern Territory. He has appeared in fraud and white-collar criminal trials, and in the trial of Ari Sherani, he successfully defended terrorism allegations before a jury in the Supreme Court of Victoria. Colin practises in a wide range of areas, including occupational health and safety, administrative law, judicial reviews, coronial inquests, and in tribunals and commissions of inquiry.

Elizabeth Ruddle KC

Office of Public Prosecutions
Victoria

Elizabeth joined the Victorian Bar in March 2005 and took silk in October 2020. In December 2020, she was appointed a Senior Crown Prosecutor. At the independent Bar, Liz had a broad practice encompassing commercial, property, regulatory, criminal and proceeds of crime law. At the Crown, she has practised primarily in appeals and judicial review, as well as prosecuting murder trials and proceeds of crime disputes. Liz has taught in the Bar Readers' Course for the past 15 years, had five amazing Readers, served three terms as convenor of the Women Barristers' Association and is currently on Bar Council for the sixth time.

Gabi Crafti SC

Victorian Bar

Gabi practises in large-scale complex commercial litigation. Her practice spans disputes involving insurance, major infrastructure projects, shareholders and directors, financial regulation and superannuation, equity, property and professional negligence. Gabi's expertise is consistently recognised in industry guides highlighting leading barristers in commercial litigation, insurance law and construction law. She is the current Chair of the Insurance Law Section of the Commercial Bar Association and a Director of the Victorian Legal Services Board. Gabi signed the Bar Roll in 2007 and took silk in 2023.

Tim Scotter SC

Victorian Bar

Tim was first admitted in New Zealand in 1993 and practised as a solicitor advocate, increasingly specialising in professional negligence work. He was admitted in Victoria in 2000 and practised as a solicitor for five years, again predominantly in professional negligence work, before coming to the Bar in 2006. At the Bar, Tim commenced with a general commercial practice with increasing amounts of professional negligence work. A significant part of his practice now is professional disciplinary work, in Victoria and interstate. Tim took silk in 2025.

Sophie Stafford

Victorian Bar

Sophie is an experienced advocate specialising in criminal law, regulatory proceedings, and inquiries. She is regularly briefed in complex trials and appeals as junior counsel, including in homicide cases, sexual offences, and corporate crime. Prior to signing the Bar Roll in 2021, she worked as a solicitor advocate at Doogue + George Defence Lawyers and an associate to Justice Michael O'Connell SC.

Sam Blashki

Victorian Bar

Sam practises in commercial and public law, with a focus on property, infrastructure, and technology. Prior to the Bar, Sam was Associate to the Honourable Justice Peter Riordan of the Supreme Court of Victoria, and a solicitor at the Victorian Government Solicitor's Office. Sam is a member of the Victorian Bar Innovation and Technology Committee. He has been accepted into the Master of Laws program at the University of California, Berkeley (commencing 2027), focusing on artificial intelligence and technology regulation.

Kathleen Foley SC
Victorian Bar

Kathleen has a broad practice spanning trial and appellate work in commercial, public law and common law matters. She also has a strong public interest litigation practice. Since 2016 she has been recognised annually in Doyles “Best Barristers” Guide. As a part-time commissioner with the Victorian Law Reform Commission, Kathleen has been involved in the VLRC’s reference “Artificial Intelligence in Victoria’s Courts and Tribunals”. She signed the Bar Roll in 2009 and was appointed silk in 2021.

Edward Moore
Victorian Bar

Edward is a commercial barrister, practising mainly in tax and insolvency. Before coming to the Bar, he held a variety of roles at PwC, Greenwoods & Herbert Smith Freehills, the Commonwealth Treasury and the Australian Taxation Office. He presents and publishes for the Readers’ Course on cybersecurity and technology at the Bar.

Tom Middleton
Victorian Bar

Thomas practises in intellectual property, technology, privacy, regulatory and commercial law. Prior to joining the Bar, he was a technology, media and telecommunications solicitor, providing advice on technology contracts, privacy regulation, intellectual property, and the use of artificial intelligence. Through his experience, Thomas blends technical legal insight with a pragmatic understanding of the commercial drivers of his clients. Thomas also holds two Master of Laws degrees in intellectual property, competition and information law from New York University and King’s College, London. He is further admitted in New York, England and Wales, the Republic of Ireland and New Zealand.

Damian Curran
PhD Candidate
University of Melbourne

Prior to pivoting into a career in technology, Damian practised law in Melbourne and London, specialising in building and construction disputes on major infrastructure projects. In 2024, he commenced his PhD at the University of Melbourne, exploring methods of computational representation of legal cases and legal AI applications. He has an honours degree in Law and Civil Engineering and a Masters in Artificial Intelligence. He works with the University’s Centre for AI and Digital Ethics and has taught across the computing and information systems, law and business schools.

Aggy Kapitaniak
Victorian Bar

Aggy practises crime and regulatory matters, including in commissions of inquiry and IBAC. She is an Accredited Advocacy Coach for the Bar and enjoys regularly coaching Bar Readers. She signed the Bar Roll in 2008.

**The Hon Justice
Stephen O’Meara**
Supreme Court of Victoria

The Honourable Justice Stephen O’Meara was appointed to the Supreme Court of Victoria in 2021 and is one of two judges in charge of the Personal Injury Lists. Prior to his appointment, Justice O’Meara practised at the Victorian Bar for 23 years, particularly in common law and personal injury matters, and took silk in 2011. While at the Bar, Justice O’Meara appeared in several class actions and inquiries, including the class actions concerning the Black Saturday bushfires and the inquest into the Bourke Street tragedy.

Emily Latif
Victorian Bar

Emily has practised in public law for more than 20 years, with a strong practice in discrimination and administrative law. She is an accredited Advocacy Coach for the Victorian Bar and continues to take Readers, and mentors junior barristers, solicitors and law students. Emily is trained in reflective practice and debriefing, and is Co-Chair of the Bar’s Health and Wellbeing Committee.

Naomi Hodgson
Victorian Bar

Naomi signed the Bar Roll in 2011 and specialises in health law (including medical negligence and coronial inquests) and administrative law. She also regularly acts for government entities in torts/ insurance claims. Naomi is a member of the Bar’s Health and Wellbeing Committee.

Dr Sarah Fischer
Victorian Bar

Dr Sarah Fischer, MAPS, is the Victorian Bar’s Wellbeing Manager, providing specialised organisational psychological services to the legal profession. She holds a PhD and Masters in Psychology with organisational psychology endorsement from AHPRA. With over 13 years of experience, Sarah specialises in trauma-informed care, workplace wellbeing, and psychological assessments.

Patrick Doyle SC

Victorian Bar

Patrick practices predominantly in criminal law and appears in trials and appeals for both the defence and the prosecution. He has particular experience in federal and commercial crimes. He also has experience in employment and industrial relations. Prior to signing the Bar Roll, Patrick was an Associate to Redlich JA in the Court of Appeal and before that, he was a commercial litigator with Minter Ellison. Patrick holds an Indictable Crime Certificate, and is on the Victoria Legal Aid Preferred Trial Counsel List.

Kateena O’Gorman SC

Victorian Bar

Kateena has a broad practice, with a focus on large commercial litigation, public law and regulatory proceedings. She has a BCL from Oxford University, where she studied as a Rhodes Scholar, and was associate to Justice McHugh for his final year on the High Court of Australia.

Sam Jayasekara

Victorian Bar

Sam maintains a generalist administrative, public and criminal law practice. She has particular experience in proceedings involving Commonwealth criminal offences, financial services regulation and voluminous and complex documentary evidence. Before joining the Bar, Sam worked in the office of the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions and was an Associate to the Honourable Justice Taylor in the Victorian Court of Appeal. She also advised and acted for various government clients at the NSW Crown Solicitor’s Office and the Victorian Government Solicitor’s Office.

Christopher Brown KC

Christopher practises in commercial law, specialising in insolvency, equity and corporations. He is the Chair of the New Barristers’ Committee and a member of the Ethics Committee. He signed the Bar Roll in 2009 and was appointed silk in 2023.

The Hon Justice Elizabeth Bennett

Federal Court of Australia

The Honourable Justice Elizabeth Bennett was appointed to the Federal Court in 2024. Justice Bennett was admitted in 2005 and practised as a solicitor at Allens, where she specialised in commercial litigation. Justice Bennett signed the Bar Roll in 2009 and was appointed silk in 2021, practising in the areas of administrative law, commercial law, and regulatory law. Justice Bennett was Vice-President of the Victorian Bar (2023-24) and President of the Bar (2024).

The Hon Justice Lisa Hannon

Supreme Court of Victoria

The Honourable Justice Lisa Hannon was appointed as a Judge of the Supreme Court in August 2025, and is presently sitting in the Common Law Division of the Court. Prior to her appointment, Justice Hannon practised as a barrister at the Victorian Bar for 23 years, taking silk in 2020, and had a broad civil trial and appellate practice. Justice Hannon was a Vice President of the Victorian Bar, and a former Vice President of the Commercial Bar Association and Chair of the Victorian Bar Ethics Committee.

The Hon Associate Justice Catherine Gobbo

Supreme Court of Victoria

The Honourable Associate Justice Catherine Gobbo was appointed to the Supreme Court in 2023 after a distinguished career at the Victorian Bar, having been called to the Bar in 2004. Associate Justice Gobbo sits in the Commercial Court.

The Hon Associate Justice Peter Fary

Supreme Court of Victoria

The Honourable Associate Justice Peter Fary was appointed to the Supreme Court in 2026. Associate Justice Fary began his career in 1994 as a solicitor at J.M. Smith and Emmerton (now Gadens Lawyers). In 2000, he was appointed Registrar of the Federal Court and the Federal Magistrates’ Court. Between 2001 and 2025, he practised as a barrister at the Victorian Bar in commercial and insolvency litigation, and was appointed Senior Counsel in 2020. Prior to his appointment to the Supreme Court, Associate Justice Fary was appointed a Judge of the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia (Division 2) in 2025. He is author of the textbook *Family Law and Bankruptcy*.

His Honour Judge Michael Wise

County Court of Victoria

His Honour Judge Michael Wise was appointed a Judge of the County Court in 2024 and is the Judge in Charge of the Banking and Finance List. Prior to his appointment, his Honour had more than 30 years of practice as a commercial barrister, including seven years as a silk. His Honour has a long-standing interest in the arts, serving (amongst other things) as Deputy Chair of the McLelland Sculpture Park and Gallery.

Her Honour Judge Fiona Todd

County Court of Victoria

Her Honour Judge Fiona Todd was appointed to the County Court in 2020. She sits in the Criminal Division. Before her Honour’s appointment, she appeared as counsel in trials and appeals, mostly in criminal cases. Judge Todd also assists in the delivery of writing courses delivered by the National and Victorian Judicial Colleges.



Your health and wellbeing matters



VICTORIAN BAR

The Victorian Bar is committed to supporting the health and wellbeing of our members and their immediate families.

There are a range of crisis management and counselling services available through the Bar's Member Assistance Program, including:

- » PeopleSense by Altius
 - » Free, professional, and confidential counselling service by registered psychologists available 24 hours a day
- » Victorian Bar psychologists who understand the pressures barristers face in their work
 - » Dr Colleen McFarlane, Clinical Psychologist
 - » Dr Dominic Doyle, Clinical Psychologist and Psychotherapist

The Victorian Bar encourages barristers who are in any way concerned about their physical or psychological wellbeing to seek help.

For more information, visit the Health and Wellbeing portal on the Victorian Bar website



VICTORIAN BAR

New Barristers' Conference

Working Group



Christopher Brown KC

Christopher practises in commercial law, specialising in insolvency, equity and corporations. Chris is the Chair of the New Barristers' Committee and a member of the Ethics Committee. He signed the Bar Roll in 2009 and was appointed silk in 2023.



Aggy Kapitaniak

Aggy practises crime and regulatory matters, including in commissions of inquiry and IBAC. She is an Accredited Advocacy Coach for the Bar and enjoys regularly coaching Bar Readers. She signed the Bar Roll in 2008.



Daniel Briggs

Daniel is a commercial barrister specialising in construction, insurance, professional negligence, and corporate law. After beginning his career at Arnold Bloch Leibler in 2009, he signed the Bar Roll in 2013. He currently serves on the Commercial Bar Association Executive and the New Barristers' Committee and is the Deputy Chair of the Building and Construction Section of the Commercial Bar Association.



Chong Tsang

Chong practises in commercial disputes, including complex accounting and financial disputes. He was previously a Senior Associate at Mallesons and an Associate at the Federal Court of Australia and signed the Bar Roll in 2021. He is currently a member of the New Barristers' Committee.



D'Arcy Hope

D'Arcy practises in commercial litigation, and has particular expertise in large-scale litigation and arbitration, construction and engineering, infrastructure, class actions, contract, insurance, and competition and consumer law. Prior to coming to the Bar, D'Arcy was a commercial litigation lawyer in Mallesons' Dispute Resolution Group.



Bryony Seignior

Bryony practises in criminal law and public law. She regularly appears as defence counsel in summary and indictable criminal law matters, and appears in judicial review, merits review, and disciplinary proceedings across a range of courts and tribunals. She signed the Bar Roll in 2023.



Sam Jayasekara

Sam maintains a generalist administrative, public and criminal law practice. She has particular experience in proceedings involving Commonwealth criminal offences, financial services regulation and voluminous and complex documentary evidence. Before joining the Bar, Sam worked in the office of the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions and was an Associate to the Honourable Justice Taylor in the Victorian Court of Appeal. She also advised and acted for various government clients at the NSW Crown Solicitor's Office and the Victorian Government Solicitor's Office.



Kathryn Browne

Kathryn practises in commercial and public law, with a particular specialty in class actions. Before signing the Bar Roll in 2024, Kathryn was a Senior Associate at Slater and Gordon and began her career as an Associate at the Supreme Court. She is a member of the New Barristers' Committee.



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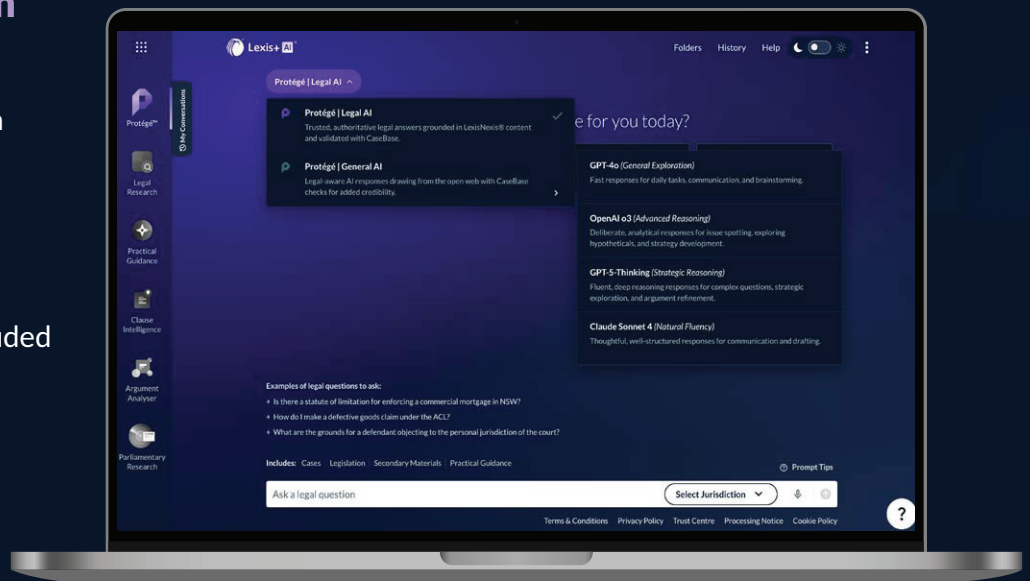
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