



# **Australian Government Legal Service Conference**

Connecting Practice to People



## CPD POINTS

Conference sessions may count towards CPD points for CPD purposes. All Core Area recommendations are based on the [ACT Law Society's CPD Guidelines](#)

Ultimately, attendees must make their own assessment as to whether a particular session is available to claim as CPD. For further guidance, attendees should refer to the CPD guidance in their jurisdiction of practice.

Suggested CPD Points:

**Merging Two Worlds: Using Aboriginal and Western Law for Justice for Aboriginal People**  
*Substantive Law / Ethics*

**Navigating Automated Decision Making in Government**  
*Substantive Law*

**Beyond the Brief: The Power of Human Centred Lawyering**  
*Professional Skills / Practice Management*

**Litigation to Legislation**  
*Substantive Law*

**Panel: First Nations Dialogue**  
*Professional Skills*

## DOWNLOAD THE CONFERENCE APP



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Scan the QR code to get the EventsAIR App

### Event App Code: AGLS25

Your personalised log in details are on the back of your name tag.

### Attendees

You will be able to contact all attendees by in app messages, that agree to have their details listed in the app.

### Program

The program is also available on the app. You can click/tap on the presentations to find information on the speaker and presentation content.

# PROGRAM

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9.00AM      **Intro and Housekeeping**

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9.05AM      **Welcome to Country**

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**Selina Walker**

Co-chair, ACT Reconciliation Council

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9.15AM      **Opening Address**

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**Hon Michelle Rowland MP**

Attorney-General

Attorney-General's Department

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9.40AM      **Merging Two Worlds:  
Using Aboriginal and Western Law for  
Justice for Aboriginal People**

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**Brendan Thomas**

Chief Executive Officer, AUSTRAC

*Brendan Thomas, a leading voice on justice reform, will share his professional experiences and insights on practical ways to bridge two worlds, honouring First Nations law and culture while navigating the structures of the Australian legal system.*

*This session will explore how Aboriginal and Western legal traditions can work together to deliver a fairer, more culturally responsive justice system for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and how this lens can aid Commonwealth Lawyers to improve their systems and practice to better connect with people.*

10.30AM      **Morning Tea**

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11.00AM

## **Navigating Automated Decision Making in Government**

### **Iain Anderson**

Commonwealth Ombudsman

Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman

*Iain Anderson, the Commonwealth Ombudsman, whose office plays a critical role in safeguarding the integrity of public administration will guide us through the complexities of navigating automated decision-making in government in an era where data is increasingly shaping the way governments serve their citizens. His insights will illuminate the risks, responsibilities, and reform principles essential to building systems that serve the public with both efficiency and justice, and how we can incorporate automated decision-making in a fair and transparent manner.*

12.00PM

## **Beyond the Brief: The Power of Human Centred Lawyering**

### **Natalie Wade**

Associate Commissioner

NDIS Quality and Safe Guards Commission

*Natalie Wade will provide practical advice about how to treat legal problems with empathy, and explore how to deliver legal services in government in a way that keeps people and the community at the centre.*

1.00PM

Lunch

2.00PM

## From Litigation to Legislation

### **Bronwyn Worswick**

Chief Counsel

Department of Social Services

### **Rachael Clarke**

General Manager, Payments and Integrity  
Group

Services Australia

*What happens when a problem is identified through litigation which may impact hundreds, or potentially thousands, of individuals? This presentation will step through how the litigation process can identify policy, legislative and administrative issues, and what actions can be taken in response to ensure we are meeting our obligations as Government lawyers and as public servants.*

*By exploring real-life case studies, attendees will learn how agencies respond to adverse judgments, how stakeholders are kept abreast of issues, and how a case for remedial legislation can be made to Government to ensure timely resolution.*

3.00PM

Afternoon Tea

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3.30PM

## **First Nations Dialogue**

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### **Belinda Churnside**

Deputy Chairperson

Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation

### **Carla McDonald**

Branch Manager Community Development  
Program

National Indigenous Australians Agency

### **Selina Walker**

Co-chair, ACT Reconciliation Council

### **Jack Simpson**

Acting Senior Executive Lawyer,  
Commercial, Australian Government  
Solicitor

*This panel brings together leading members currently working in the First Nations space and aims to highlight current legal challenges affecting First Nations communities. Speakers will share their expertise on native title, offer reflections on the lived realities of working with and within the community, and consider ways for Commonwealth lawyers to engage in this space in a culturally respectful way that connects legal practice to people.*

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4.50PM

## **Closing Address**

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### **Tim Ffrench**

AGLS Board Chair General Counsel

Department of Employment and Workplace  
Relations

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## **Hon Michelle Rowland MP**

Attorney-General  
Attorney-General's Department



Michelle Rowland MP was sworn in as Australia's 40th Attorney-General on 13 May 2025.

As the nation's First Law Officer, she is deeply committed to upholding the rule of law and ensuring Australia's legal and justice systems remain equitable, accessible, and continue to operate with integrity.

Before entering Parliament, Michelle built a distinguished career as a senior lawyer specialising in media, technology, and telecommunications.

Michelle was first elected to Parliament in 2010 and has since held key ministerial and parliamentary roles.

In 2013, she was appointed Shadow Minister for Citizenship and Multiculturalism, alongside serving as Shadow Assistant Minister for Communications.

In October 2015, she was elevated to the Shadow Cabinet as Shadow Minister for Small Business and Shadow Minister for Citizenship and Multiculturalism.

Following her re-election in July 2016, Michelle was appointed Shadow Minister for Communications, a role she maintained after being re-elected again in May 2019.

In June 2022, Michelle was sworn in as Minister for Communications. Upon the return of the Albanese Government in May 2025, Michelle was appointed Attorney-General.

Michelle is married to Michael, and together they have two young daughters, Octavia and Aurelia.



## **Brendan Thomas**

Chief Executive Officer  
AUSTRAC



Mr Brendan Thomas commenced his 5-year appointment as AUSTRAC Chief Executive Officer (CEO) on 29 January 2024.

As AUSTRAC CEO, Brendan leads Australia's financial intelligence unit and anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing (AML/CTF) regulator.

AUSTRAC's regulation hardens the financial sector against criminal exploitation and its intelligence provides crucial information to its national security, domestic and international law enforcement partners.

Brendan is AUSTRAC's representative on the ACIC Board, the Serious Financial Crime Taskforce CEO Board, and the Criminal Justice and Law Enforcement Forum. In view of AUSTRAC's role as a member of the National Intelligence Community (NIC), Brendan is also responsible for agency head-level engagement with the Office of National Intelligence and other NIC members.

Brendan is a Wiradjuri man, with significant experience in leading, designing and delivering major public services, especially in the criminal and civil justice systems in NSW, and in leading organisational reform.

Ahead of his commencement with AUSTRAC, Brendan served as a Deputy Secretary at the NSW Department of Communities and Justice, with responsibility for implementing major changes to reduce the over-representation of the Indigenous population in the NSW criminal and child protection systems. Prior to this, Brendan was the CEO of Legal Aid NSW and was formerly the Deputy Secretary at the NSW Department of Justice.



## **Iain Anderson**

Commonwealth Ombudsman  
Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman

Iain Anderson was appointed as the Commonwealth Ombudsman from 1 August 2022 for a 5-year term.

As the Commonwealth Ombudsman, Mr Anderson is also the ACT, Defence Force, Immigration, Law Enforcement, National Student, Private Health Insurance, Overseas Student, VET Student Loan and Postal Industry Ombudsman.

As a senior public servant with extensive leadership experience and over 32 years of service before his appointment, Mr Anderson developed and implemented transformational change across a wide range of legal and social policy areas, including the Commonwealth civil justice and criminal justice systems, family law, native title, Royal Commissions and Australia's territories.

Mr Anderson worked in 6 different Commonwealth departments and agencies, including acting as Secretary of the Attorney-General's Department for an extended period.

He is a Director of the Australasia and Pacific Region of the International Ombudsman Institute and is on the Board of Directors of the Institute.

Mr Anderson holds a Bachelor of Economics and a Bachelor of Laws from the University of Sydney.



**Natalie Wade**

Associate Commissioner  
NDIS Quality and Safe Guards Commission



Natalie Wade is a pioneer in advancing disability rights committed to driving systemic change and ensuring equality for people with disabilities. In October 2024, she was appointed as the Associate Commissioner of the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission. Prior to this, she was the Founder and Principal Lawyer of Equality Lawyers, providing expert legal representation to people with disabilities and their families. In 2023, Natalie delivered Australia's inaugural Disability Leadership Oration with a brief to 'set the national agenda'. Her oration focused on ending the segregation of disabled people in all settings, but especially housing, through disabled leadership.

Natalie is regarded as one of Australia's foremost disability human rights lawyers and was appointed to lead the first reform to the National Disability Insurance Scheme in response to the NDIS Review, through the NDIS Provider and Worker Registration Taskforce. The taskforce provided 11 recommendations and 10 implementation actions to the Government on a proposed system of regulation for NDIS providers and workers. Natalie's contributions span across law reform and human rights campaigns advancing the rights of women and girls with disabilities, migrants with disabilities and leading advocacy for a Human Rights Act in South Australia.

Natalie authored Disability Rights in Real Life, a disability rights law handbook for people with disabilities and represented Australia at the United Nations Conference of State Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (16th session). In recognition of her contributions, she was named Australian Young Lawyer of the Year in 2016 and more recently was awarded the 2024 Dennis Mutton Leadership Award.



## **Bronwyn Worswick**

Chief Counsel  
Department of Social Services





Bronwyn is the Chief Counsel of the Department of Social Services (DSS) where she works in support of programs and services to improve the economic and social wellbeing of individuals, families and vulnerable members of Australian communities. Prior to joining DSS in 2021, Bronwyn spent two decades as a lawyer in the Army training, educating and advising senior ADF commanders on legal issues impacting military operations in Australia and overseas. She was also the General Counsel of the Department of Veterans' Affairs from 2019 to 2021 with responsibility for legal matters as part of the Department's mission to support veterans and their families.

Bronwyn is committed to her role as a government lawyer as part of Australia's legal system in designing and applying the rules which regulate our society, and cares deeply about institutional integrity and the responsibility of government to protect and promote the interests of all Australians.



**Rachael Clarke**  
General Manager,  
Payments and Integrity Group  
Services Australia

Rachael is the General Manager of the Legal Compliance and Remediation Division at Services Australia, where she works to ensure that service delivery aligns with the requirements of legislation and policy.

Prior to this, Rachael was the General Counsel of the Litigation Branch in Services Australia and Special Counsel for the Robodebt Royal Commission response, bringing with her 20 years experience as a lawyer. She led the implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission for Services Australia, and continues to lead the Income Apportionment response.

Rachael has extensive experience leading hundreds of staff to deliver complex projects which respond to emerging issues and trends at pace. She is passionate about driving service delivery that is efficient, customer centred and sensitive to the needs of society's most vulnerable.





## **Belinda Churnside**

Deputy Chairperson  
Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation



Belinda Churnside is a proud Ngarluma woman, born and raised on Ngarluma Ngurra, where she continues to live on Country today. A passionate advocate for her culture and people, Belinda has twice served as Acting CEO of the Ngarluma Aboriginal Corporation (NAC).

She currently holds directorships with both the Ngarluma Aboriginal Corporation and the Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation (MAC), where she also serves as Deputy Chair. Belinda is a founding member of the Ngarluma Green Energy Working Group and Director of the newly established Ngarluma Green Energy Company. Managed entirely by Ngarluma Traditional Owners and focused on sustainable and community-led development of large-scale renewable energy .

Belinda has been a key advocate for the recognition of Murujuga as a UNESCO World Heritage Area and played an instrumental role as a representative on the World Heritage Committee. With over 15 years of corporate experience, her expertise spans executive leadership, management, cultural heritage, and negotiations.



**Carla McDonald**

Branch Manager Community  
Development Program  
National Indigenous Australians Agency

Carla McDonald is a proud Aboriginal woman, descendant of the Stolen Generations of the East Kimberley with connection to Kitja Country.

Carla is the Branch Manager of the Community Development Program in the Jobs and Economic Development Group within the National Indigenous Australians Agency. Prior to this she was the Director of Legal Services at the Women's Legal Centre ACT.

Carla started her legal career as an Indigenous cadet and government lawyer in the Attorney-General's Department before moving to the NSW South Coast where she worked in general practice law firms doing wills and estates, criminal law and family law. Carla then moved back to Canberra and became an Accredited Family Law Specialist before returning to Government as a lawyer in Indigenous Affairs within the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, with carriage of sensitive historic abuse matters and class actions. Carla was also an Executive Officer to a Deputy Secretary at the Department of Health and Aged Care before moving to the Women's Legal Centre.



**Selina Walker**

Co-chair, ACT Reconciliation Council



Ngunnawal woman Selina Walker is a respected emerging elder and leader whose integrity has supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and reconciliation across the ACT.

The granddaughter of Aunty Agnes Shea, a recipient of the Order of Australia and a former ACT Chief Minister's Senior Citizen of the Year, Selina continues her grandmother's legacy of influencing and driving change with her unwavering efforts.

Since 2018, Selina has promoted reconciliation as co-chair of the ACT Reconciliation Council.

As a founding member of Yerrabi Yurwang Child and Family Aboriginal Corporation, she helps improve outcomes for Aboriginal families and children, especially those in out-of-home care.

Selina advocates for Indigenous people within the justice system as a member of the ACT Victims of Crime and Justice Committee and has held roles to improve all children's educational outcomes in the Catholic school system.



## **Jack Simpson**

Acting Senior Executive Lawyer, Commercial,  
Australian Government Solicitor

Jack is a proud Aboriginal man, who for over 10 years has advised Commonwealth agencies on contract, procurement, construction and property law matters.

He has particular expertise in complex infrastructure projects and agreements to facilitate Australian access to new medicines. He has a longstanding interest in supporting junior Commonwealth lawyers



## **Tim Ffrench**

General Counsel,  
Department of Employment  
and Workplace Relations



Tim Ffrench is General Counsel, First Assistant Secretary, in the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations based in Canberra. Tim provides legal advice to the Secretary and executive of the department on a wide variety of legal matters (except those relating to the workplace relations program) and leads the Legal and Assurance Division of approximately 85 legal and non-legal staff.

Tim is also responsible for advancing the department's integrity agenda and holds the role of Chief Risk Officer and Privacy Champion. Tim is also his department's SES graduate sponsor.

Tim has extensive experience in the management of government legal practices and was previously a member of the then Social Security Appeals Tribunal for four years.

Tim has a particular interest in integrity and ethics, the development of effective and supportive graduate programs and in building closer ties between public and private sector legal practices.

# NOTES

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