# 

# BLIND CITIZENS AUSTRALIA

ABN: 90 006 985 226

2017-2018

Year in Review

## Mailing Address:

## 247 Flinders Lane Melbourne Vic. 3000

## Tel; 03 9654 1400; 1800 033660

## [bca@bca.org.au](mailto:bca@bca.org.au)

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# Cover Photos:

**Top Left:** BCA Past President Michael Simpson Launching the BCA NSW/ACT State Division.

**Top Right:** Professor Ron McCallum AO acknowledging receipt of the David Blyth Award at the 2017 BCA National Convention. President John Simpson, CEO Emma Bennison and WBU President Dr Fred Schroeder look on.

**Centre Left:** The Australian Human Rights Commission’s Community Organisation Award, presented to BCA in December 2017. The award is a clear acrylic representation of a person holding up a globe of the world. The inscription reads; "HUMAN RIGHTS AWARDS 2017, Community Organisation Award, Winner, Blind Citizens Australia"

**Bottom Left:** A screen shot from the video produced by BCA as our winning entry to the Blackbaud "BBCON $10K Challenge". The photo shows a woman with a small child held high above her head in a field of poppies. The text overlay reads "With a $10,000 donation from Blackbaud Blind Citizens Australia will be able to advocate nationally, with a focus on ensuring audio description is available on Australian TV. So people who are blind or vision impaired can enjoy it with their friends and family.

**Bottom Right:** The HESTA Community Sector Award, won by BCA in September 2017. The award is in clear acrylic and is shaped as a five point star. The inscription reads "HESTA Awards Community Sector, Social Impact 2017 Finalist. Blind Citizens Australia".

# The Year in Review

# For the year ended 30 June 2018

# Overview

Looking back over the 2017-18 financial year, our organisation has much to celebrate. It is difficult to reconcile the confident, engaged and sustainable BCA of today with the organisation which was in crisis less than three years ago. You need only look back to the recommendations from the 2015 BCA Leaders’ Summit to be reminded of how far the organisation has come over the past year. Thirty one of the fifty five recommendations from the Summit have been achieved and thirteen others are in the pipeline. The Board recognises and celebrates these achievements and acknowledges the consistent hard work of members and staff as being instrumental to our success.

We have continued to focus our efforts on building a sustainable organisation equipped to deal with future challenges; ensuring we have credibility with our members and stakeholders; building strong partnerships whilst maintaining our independence; and developing the capacity of our current and future leaders. The Board and staff continue to work tirelessly to ensure we make progress on all four of these priorities. Our rapid growth over the past twelve months has been due primarily to the fact that members and stakeholders have taken up our many invitations to re-engage with BCA, and we thank you for your confidence in our organisation's ability to represent your interests.

## Staffing

Our staff, (past and present) have been critical to our organisation’s success this year. We now have staff based in four states and most work remotely. We would like to take this opportunity to sincerely congratulate and thank all staff, past and present for their tireless dedication and hard work on behalf of BCA members.

## Awards and Recognition

In August 2017 BCA was the winner of the "BBCON $10K Challenge". The challenge was sponsored and organised by software development company Blackbaud Pacific, and our entry demonstrated via an audio described video the importance of advocating for audio description on television.

In September BCA was recognised for our advocacy work as one of five organisations to be selected as finalists in the social impact category of the HESTA Community Sector Awards. While we did not win the award, being a finalist was a significant achievement.

And in December we were honoured to win the Australian Human Rights Commission’s Community Organisation Award. The award recognises organisations that have a proven track record in the advancement of human rights in the Australian community. These Awards have been presented by the Australian Human Rights Commission since 1987.

Five community organisations were short-listed as finalists. BCA received the award in recognition of its key role in bringing about significant changes which have improved the lives of Australians who are blind or vision impaired. These have included successfully advocating for tactile ground surface indicators, and for the introduction of blindness-specific requirements into the education, transport and accessible premises standards, to name a few.

The award was presented at a ceremony held in Sydney on 8 December. Over 500 people were in attendance, including the Attorney-General, other senior politicians, the Human Rights Commissioners and numerous community leaders.

In receiving the award, the current BCA leadership team acknowledged and thanked our members and former leaders for their tireless commitment to “changing what it means to be blind” in Australia for over forty years.

# Member Engagement

## National Convention

BCA’s 2017 national convention was held in Melbourne from 13 to 15 October. The event was a huge success and attracted over 150 attendees. We were delighted with the number of young people and first time attendees who joined us, thanks to the support of the Department of Social Services and Vision Australia. We also acknowledge and appreciate the support and participation of our sponsors throughout the convention.

The internet streaming of the event also reached a new level of success, with over 100 people listening in from five countries across the weekend. Highlights were also broadcast via the RPH Network and many people participated via social media and through our new text messaging service.

The convention program included workshops targeted at students on study techniques, a workshop on building self-confidence and communication skills and an introduction to audio editing. Other highlights included a session on emerging technologies, a look at historical perspectives on blindness and a session on employment. There was also an opportunity for recommendations from members on the future work of the organisation to be brought to the convention for the new Board to consider. The convention concluded with an audio described film screening and also featured an adaptive technology exhibition. You can listen to audio recordings of most convention sessions by visiting the audio page on the BCA website at [www.bca.org.au](http://www.bca.org.au).

Several awards were presented at the convention dinner. These included The David Blyth Award, which recognises a person who has made an enduring contribution to improving the lives of people who are blind or vision impaired. The 2017 award was presented to Professor Ron McCallum AO in recognition of his outstanding contribution as a role model to blind and vision impaired Australians and his passionate and committed leadership as a member and Chair of the UN Expert Committee for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Three Certificates of Appreciation were presented to individuals who have made a significant contribution to the work of BCA. The recipients were Jenny Dawson, for her long-standing dedication to the work of our National Women’s Branch; Lyn Eagers, for maintaining our Brisbane Branch for over 20 years; and Patricia Stillman for her passionate and tireless advocacy on behalf of people who are blind or vision impaired. Pat had been in poor health and sadly passed away the next day. We subsequently arranged for her certificate to be presented to her husband Ron at a ceremony in Bundaberg.

## Our Branches

BCA has thirteen branches around Australia, each serving the needs of members in particular regions or with special interests. During the reporting period, some branches have focused on peer support activities which bring people who are blind or vision impaired together, while others have concentrated their efforts primarily on advocacy work and some have managed to do both.

In May, a new branch was launched in Tasmania at a gathering in Launceston, attended by our President and CEO. The Sydney Branch remained in recess to avoid duplication between its work and that of BCNSW, whilst the consolidation of the two organisations was under consideration.

The NSW/ACT Coordinating Committee, chaired by Stephen Belbin has played a significant role in strengthening relationships and building strong communications mechanisms between branches in NSW and the ACT. We also convene occasional branch presidents meetings and our branch presidents e-mail list is used to share information among the group.

Branch presidents, and/or representatives from most branches attended our Leadership Development Forum in July. This provided an excellent opportunity for branches to share ideas and build connections with one another. Our sincere thanks to branch presidents and to all those who contribute to the work of our branches. In doing so, you provide our members with opportunities to connect with and learn from one another and to collectively advocate for the changes which make a tangible difference in their communities. To find out more about branch activities, visit the BCA website, www.bca.org.au.

## BCA’s First State Division

At the 2017 Annual Meeting, BCA members voted to amend the Constitution to allow for the formation of state divisions. A set of guidelines were developed to support the functioning of state divisions and to clarify the respective roles and responsibilities of state division committee and staff.

Late last year, members of the Association of Blind Citizens of NSW, (BCNSW) and BCA members voted to consolidate the two organisations. This resulted in the formation of BCA’s first state division. A state division committee, chaired by Joana D’orey Novo was established and the first state division plan was developed. The plan covers a fifteen month period from April 2018 to June 2019. It was developed through a facilitated workshop held in Sydney in February 2018 involving NSW Board members, all members of the NSW/ACT state division committee and key staff.

In the meantime, BCA staff worked closely with the caretaker management committee of BCNSW to facilitate the winding up of the organisation, including ensuring NSW Government funding was retained for the 2018-19 financial year.

## Member Communications

We continued to communicate with members through a range of mechanisms. These included:

* “Blind Citizens News”, which received a makeover when Jonathan Craig commenced as its new editor in the second half of the year;
* Our audio magazine, “SoundAbout” which was produced for the final time this year. We thank all of those members who have assisted in its production and content development for more than twenty-five years.
* Our weekly national radio program and podcast, “New Horizons” which continued to be presented and produced by Vaughn Bennison. This fifteen minute information package is broadcast through 23 radio outlets, is available as a podcast and is distributed through the Vision Australia Library. We thank Vaughn for his ongoing commitment to this project.
* Members have enjoyed robust discussion about issues that affect them through BCA’s email distribution lists.  This provides a peer-support and discussion mechanism.  BCA also provides updates on events and policy work through these email lists.
* We continued to increase our web and social media presence this year. Our Facebook following has increased by 65% and engagement with our Facebook posts has increased by 221% during the financial year. Our Twitter followers have increased by 15% and engagement with our tweets has increased by 350% during the year,
* We became more active in the media through our advocacy campaigns and awareness raising initiatives.

We introduced two new communications platforms this year:

* Our new inbound and outbound text messaging service enables members to receive immediate and timely information about current BCA activities and to provide us with feedback and ask questions via text message. This is particularly critical for people who are Deafblind and those with speech impairments.
* We also implemented a new phone system which not only facilitates remote working for our staff, but also provides information about current BCA activities, campaigns and events via the telephone keypad. Callers can also provide anonymous feedback via the system.

## Member Skill Development

In recent years there has been a distinct move towards children who are blind or vision impaired attending mainstream schools. Although this has several advantages it has been identified that many children do not have the opportunity to build relationships with other blind or vision impaired students.

Parents of children who are blind can also miss out on the opportunity to share experiences and knowledge with other families and learn from older adults who are blind. This can lead to increased social isolation and a lack of self-advocacy skills.

BCA is committed to supporting programs which respond to this issue. So in 2017, we partnered with Blind Citizens NSW and The San Francisco LightHouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired to send six people who are blind or vision impaired to work for two months as Peer Counsellors at the Enchanted Hills Camp for the Blind (EHC) in California.  The project took place between June and August of 2017.

This opportunity provided applicants with the skills and experience of providing peer mentoring and leadership for the blind and vision impaired community.

One attendee said:

*“Spending a summer at EHC provided the opportunity for personal growth and the continued development of leadership and team work skills. It was also an inspiring time to think about the ways in which we could recreate an Australian version of the program, where we could not only provide campers with a fun social week away, but provide a variety of employment opportunities for our blind and vision impaired community. Working at EHC also provided the opportunity to develop relationships with people who are blind or vision impaired throughout the world, as many international volunteers make their way to EHC each year.”*

Another reported:

*“The camps are entirely focused on giving the blind and low vision campers the time of their lives and from the reports back they succeed at this exceptionally well. Activities covered such things as archery, craft, swimming, paddle boats and woodwork, not to mention 'riflery'.*

# Sustainability and Growth

## Funding and Finance

BCA ended the year in a strong financial position. The Finance, Audit and Risk Management Committee, chaired by Treasurer, Daniel Stubbs, is responsible for monitoring the organisation’s finances and risk management strategy. Full details of our organisation’s finances and the Independent Auditors Report are contained in our *"Directors and Finance Reports 2017-18"* available on our website, or in your preferred format on request.

The Board and staff have continued to work hard to maintain and diversify our funding. In addition to the core funding we receive from the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services, we are appreciative of the ongoing support we received from the Jeffrey Blyth Foundation and from Vision Australia. In the 2017-18 financial year we implemented a Memorandum of Understanding with Guide Dogs Victoria, which includes financial support and other collaborative initiatives. We also negotiated a similar arrangement with Guide Dogs NSW/ACT which came into effect from July 2018. We thank both organisations for their commitment to support the work of BCA.

For the second time, we received an additional grant from the Department of Health and Human Services through its Disability Advocacy and Innovation Fund. We also received funding through the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO) to support our core operations and funding from the NDIA through AFDO to build organisational capacity. Our national convention was supported again this year through the National Disability Conference Initiative from the Department of Social Services.

In addition, we were delighted with the support members with the capacity to do so offered through our regular donations program, now known as "BCA Backers". Members also donated generously in response to our member appeals. Our thanks to all who made a contribution, whether large or small for demonstrating your support to BCA during the financial year. Your donations have contributed to the successful outcomes detailed in this report.

## Partnerships and Collaborations

During the year, the Board reaffirmed its strong commitment to building strategic relationships across the blindness sector and beyond.

Collaborative relationships have been maintained with Vision Australia through a continuation of our long-standing Memorandum of Understanding. We also implemented a collaborative agreement with Guide Dogs Victoria and concluded a similar MOU with Guide Dogs NSW/ACT. By the close of the financial year we were in discussions with Guide Dogs Queensland and the Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children to further similar arrangements.

**The Australian Blindness Forum** provides a mechanism for blindness service agencies, technology providers and BCA to work on policy and strategic issues that impact across the sector. BCA has two positions on the ABF Board and, through the involvement of our CEO and President, makes an ongoing contribution to this work.

**AFDO,** the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations, brings together eleven disability specific peak organisations and a range of state-based "Disabled Persons Organisations" to represent the views of people with disability to Government and to the corporate and community sectors. BCA has been an active member of AFDO since its formation in 2002 and is represented on the AFDO Board by President John Simpson. During the year under review we continued to both contribute to and benefit from this collaboration.

**Vision 2020 Australia** is the Australian arm of an international alliance that brings together eye health professionals, blindness service providers and consumer representative organisations to address issues of blindness prevention, sight restoration and specialist service provision. In Australia, BCA is an active participant in the Vision 2020 Independence and Participation Committee. President John Simpson chairs this committee and various staff members contribute to the committee's work, which has focused on the interaction between the service provision agencies and Government in areas such as the NDIS, Aged Care, Employment and other advocacy issues.

## Leadership Development Forum

We held our first ever leadership development forum in Melbourne from 7 to 9 July 2017. The forum brought together 50 key members of the organisation, including directors, staff, presidents of local branches, emerging leaders and others with key roles in the organisation, for a weekend of presentations and discussions involving fifteen presenters. The objectives of the forum were to build leadership skills, increase BCA's capacity to engage with marginalised and isolated people and to begin the process of establishing a cohesive network to provide peer support to the organisation's leaders.

Participants were enthusiastic about the gathering and many reported feeling proud to be part of an organisation which is working hard to restore its place as the national representative voice of all Australians who are blind or vision impaired. In the words of one participant:

*“BCA is now a modern, relevant and effective organisation. Thank you for the invitation to experience and be part of this quiet but very definite and total transformation.”*

## Diversity Strategies

During the Leadership Development Forum, we considered how we could improve our engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds; and people who are isolated for various reasons. The forum agreed that BCA would:

* Utilise existing organisations and networks to build stronger connections with marginalised groups;
* Work to increase representation of people from diverse cultures and backgrounds in our organisation through volunteering and employment opportunities;
* Reduce isolation through the use of social media, teleconferencing and social gatherings which are fun and family-friendly and which help to build an aspirational culture among people who are blind or vision impaired, their families and communities;
* Work hard to make sure meetings at all levels of the organisation are accessible, safe, engaging and purposeful;
* Commit to meeting people where they are at, and to being clear about the reasons why we want people to join our organisation.

Other work our organisation has undertaken in this area has included:

* Convening the first Aboriginal Blind Persons Gathering in Sydney in partnership with First Peoples Disability Network. This gathering brought together fifteen Aboriginal people from across Australia to share experiences and to highlight the issues which place unnecessary burdens on their lives.
* Establishing a Cultural Diversity Advisory Group. The purpose of the group is to provide advice to our organisation on how best to ensure our projects, information and services are relevant and accessible to people who are blind or vision impaired from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
* The addition of a language translation feature on BCA’s website. The feature is accessible throughout the site and translation to more than 100 languages is available.
* Ongoing work by our National Women’s Branch in relation to the prevention of violence and abuse against women who are blind or vision impaired.

# Representing Australians who are Blind or Vision Impaired

## Systemic Advocacy and Campaigns

This year, we continued our focus on some key areas in relation to our systemic advocacy and campaign work. These included campaigning for an audio description service on Australian television; ensuring the NDIS and My Aged Care systems meet the unique needs of people who are blind or vision impaired; the inaccessibility of touch screen EFTPOS terminals and ATMs; airline accessibility; and more.

### Audio Description

Activities included:

* Facilitating the Audio Description Blindness Sector Working Group, to ensure a united and consistent approach to the campaign.
* Participation in the Minister for Communications' Audio Description Working Party, including contributions to its report released in December 2017.
* Spearheading a grass roots campaign in relation to amendments to the Broadcast Services Act, which earned strong support from the ALP and members of the cross bench.
* Creation of an awareness raising video about audio description.
* Working with the Public Interest Advocacy Centre to progress various legal matters in relation to audio description.
* Delivery of a presentation to the 2018 conference of the Round Table on Information Access in relation to audio description.

### NDIS and My Aged Care:

Activities included:

* Delivery of 20 workshops and teleconferences to over 120 participants to help them navigate the NDIS and My Aged Care.
* Development of a range of fact sheets and resources as an adjunct to the workshops.
* Campaigning to ensure people who are blind or vision impaired can receive information from the NDIA in their preferred format.
* Meetings with various politicians, including the Minister for Aboriginal Health and Aged Care, in relation to the inequities between the NDIS and My Aged Care.
* Participation in the NDIA’s "CEOs Forum" for CEOs of diagnostic specific peak bodies.
* Individualised support was provided to Victorians who are blind or vision impaired in relation to navigating the NDIS and My Aged Care.

### Touch Screen Banking Products:

Activities included:

* A postcard campaign to make business owners aware of the impact of touch screen EFTPOS terminals on people who are blind or vision impaired.
* Working with the Public Interest Advocacy Centre to support members undertaking legal action in relation to the Commonwealth Bank's Albert EFTPOS terminal.
* Undertook various media interviews in relation to the issue.

### Airline Access:

Activities included:

* Working with Qantas and Virgin Australia in relation to various accessibility issues.
* Inviting members to share their experiences of airline accessibility to inform our advocacy in this area.

## Policy Work

### Submissions and Consultations

During the reporting period BCA made ten submissions on issues such as the National Disability Strategy, individualised funding mechanisms (including the National Disability Insurance Scheme and My Aged Care system), employment, human rights, banking accessibility, accessibility of state and federal elections and public transport access.

### National Policy Council

Our National Policy Council was chaired by Vice President, Lynne Davis until the 2017 Annual General Meeting; and by Director, Fiona Woods thereafter. The NPC has begun work on updating BCA's existing public policies and prioritising the development of new policy. Their major focus for the year though, has been a significant piece of work in relation to a policy around expectations of blindness service providers.

## Individual Advocacy

Our individual advocacy service has continued to provide assistance to people who are blind or vision impaired in relation to a broad range of issues, including barriers to employment and education, public transport, immigration, the NDIS and My Aged Care, housing web site accessibility and more. As part of the arrangements under our new Memorandum of Understanding with Vision Australia, this year, Vision Australia began referring Victorian clients requiring individual advocacy services to BCA. We also began discussions to put similar arrangements in place with Guide Dogs Victoria.

# International Engagement

## BCA’s Involvement in the World Blind Union

The World Blind Union, (WBU), is the international body representing the 285 million people who are blind or vision impaired across 190 member countries. BCA has contributed to the WBU Asia Pacific magazine, "*East Wind*" and provided editorial feedback on request. We have also disseminated surveys, media releases and other information of interest to our members and stakeholders. Finally, as part of his role on the WBU Asia Pacific Board, Bill Jolley has continued to represent the Asia Pacific Region on the World Executive. Bill has also contributed to a number of regional initiatives on behalf of BCA, including as facilitator of a leadership training course in Bangkok in December 2017. Our thanks to Bill for his work in this area on behalf of BCA.

## Visit by WBU President Dr Fred Schroeder

We were privileged to have Dr Fred Schroeder, President of the World Blind Union as keynote speaker for our 2017 national convention. Dr Schroeder is highly regarded in the United States and internationally as a strong and effective advocate for inclusive education and rehabilitation. He discussed the importance of seeking support from other blind people to reduce discrimination and reminded us that we should not allow the low expectations of society to limit us.

In addition to his convention involvements, and with support from Virgin Australia, BCA coordinated an itinerary which saw Dr Schroeder visit Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne. He visited the Australian Human Rights Commission where he met with Disability Discrimination Commissioner Alastair McEwin and presented to commission staff; was guest speaker at a reception hosted by disability service provider, Life Without Barriers and Blind Citizens NSW to celebrate White Cane Day; and delivered a national webinar to Vision Australia staff. He also presented at the Australian Blindness Forum in Canberra. Along with former BCA President and Executive Officer Bill Jolley and current CEO, Emma Bennison, Fred visited Vision 2020 Australia to participate in a video conversation for World Sight Day. He also met with staff at the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission and visited Guide Dogs Victoria.

We estimate that during his visit, Dr Schroeder spoke to well over 300 people. We extend our heartfelt thanks to Fred for spending time with so many of us and allowing us to benefit from his wisdom and international perspectives.

# Closing Remarks

We are proud of the progress our organisation has made over the past twelve months and hope that you, our members are too. There is always more to be done, but we now have a strong foundation on which to build. Our thanks to all Directors and Members of board standing committees, (the Finance, Audit and Risk Management Committee and National Policy Council) for your unwavering dedication to supporting our organization. We also extend our thanks to all staff, past and present for your outstanding contributions throughout the year. Most importantly, thanks to you, our members for the many and varied ways you support our organisation. It is chiefly due to your belief and commitment that BCA is once again a strong and united voice representing Australians who are blind or vision impaired.

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# The BCA Team

## BCA Directors who served in 2017-18

* Mick Baker; Member Finance, Audit and Risk Management Committee
* Chelsea Bartlett; Social Media Coordinator and Communications Committee member
* Stephen Belbin; Branch Liaison Coordinator and Chair NSW/ACT Coordinating Committee
* Lynne Davis; Vice-President and Chair National Policy Council (2017)
* Helen Freris; Member National Policy Council
* James Manders; Member Finance, Audit and Risk Management Committee (term concluded October 2017)
* John Simpson; President; Chair Vision 2020 Independence and Participation Committee; Board Member Australian Federation of Disability Organisations; Board Member Australian Blindness Forum
* Daniel Stubbs; Chair, Finance, Audit and Risk Management Committee and BCA Treasurer
* Prue Watt OAM; Member Communications Committee
* Fiona Woods; Deputy Chair National Policy Council (2017); Chair, National Policy Council (2018)
* Emma Bennison (non-voting Member); Company Secretary; Board Member Australian Blindness Forum; WBU Delegate;

## Finance Audit and Risk Management Committee (FARM) Members who served in 2017-18

* Mick Baker
* Emma Bennison
* Rocco Cutrie
* Tony Grant
* Bill Jolley
* James Manders
* Daniel Stubbs (Chair)

## **National Policy Council Members who** served in 2017-18

* Robert Altamore
* Lynne Davis (Chair to October 2017)
* Rowena Dowling
* Helen Freris
* Lauren Henley
* Angela Jaeschke
* Greg Madson
* Krystel Malcolm
* Doug McGinn
* Jennifer Parry
* Steve Richardson
* Justin Simpson
* David Squirrel
* Martin Stewart
* Julie Sutherland
* Fiona Woods (Chair from October 2017)

## BCA Staff - November 2018

* Sally Aurisch; Acting NSW/ACT Coordinator and Project Officer
* Naomi Barber; Project Officer
* Emma Bennison; Chief Executive Officer
* Anna Briggs; Executive Assistant
* Rikki Chaplin; Advocacy Officer
* Kathie Elliott (formerly Kelly); Funding and Communications Consultant
* Tony Grant; Finance and Administration Manager
* Jennifer Grimwade; Policy and Submissions Consultant
* Angela Jaeschke; Acting Policy and Advocacy Manager
* Krystel Malcolm (maternity leave); NSW/ACT Coordinator
* Samantha Marsh; Information and Administration Officer
* Kristin Nuske; Support Linkages Officer
* Jennifer Parry; NSW/ACT Administration and Communications Officer

## Staff Who Resigned in 2017-18

* Bruce Dolphin; Bookkeeper
* Lauren Henley; Policy and Advocacy Manager
* Melea O’Connell; NSW Administration and Communications Officer
* Katrina Taylor; National Policy Officer