

FINANCIAL REVIEW

News - Legal Affairs

Law firms may face equity targets

Katie Walsh

249 words

4 September 2015

The Australian Financial Review

AFNR

First

31

English

Copyright 2015. Fairfax Media Management Pty Limited.

Barristers are pressing law firms to set targets that would force them to send between 10 and 35 per cent of all briefs to female counsel in a bid to boost the paucity and quality of work handed to women.

Fewer briefs, shorter speaking roles and lower pay are all part of the reality for female barristers. In the Federal Court, hearing times are between 40 and 160 times shorter for women than their male counterparts.

The NSW Bar Association has committed to a new equity and diversity policy that promotes setting targets for 2017 and 2019 for the proportion of briefs sent to women counsel of all ranks. The association wants firms and public service bodies to collect and report data on counsel briefed during the year.

"There is a lot of work to do to make the bar a more diverse and welcoming environment but the steps being taken with these initiatives show that the willingness to make it happen is there," said NSW Bar Association president Jane Needham, SC.

"Without full participation for all, the bar will not reflect the society within which it operates."

Barristers, law firms, government representatives, clerks and in-house counsel all pitched in to efforts behind the policy, in response to a damning 2014 Law Council of Australia study on retaining and promoting women.

The NSW Bar is among signatories to the Law Council's new Diversity and Equality Charter.

Fairfax Media Management Pty Limited