

Legal team wins NSW Excellence Award

1 September 2011

The Fair Work Ombudsman's legal team has been awarded the NSW Excellence in Government Legal Service Award for its innovative use of in-house lawyers to conduct all its civil penalty litigations.

The team accepted the Award last night at the annual NSW Government Solicitors' conference and dinner in Sydney.

Fair Work Ombudsman Chief Counsel Janine Webster says the award recognises the Agency's efforts in cutting the cost of Government legal service delivery.

"Earlier this year, the Attorney-General granted our legal team a 12-month approval to use in-house lawyers to run all cases," she said.

"It was an extension of a process which began in 2008 in which we were given approval to use our internal team for court matters involving employee underpayments."

Ms Webster says the use of in-house lawyers resulted in a reduction of external legal expenditure by about 30 per cent last financial year.

"Based on a blended hourly rate of \$150 an hour for our own lawyers, compared to an average rate of \$303 an hour for an external lawyer, \$418 for a senior associate or \$515 for a partner, the Fair Work Ombudsman could cut the cost of these litigations by up to 50 per cent," she said.

"The cost savings have, and will, free up additional resources to conduct more court proceedings."

Ms Webster added that allowing the Agency to run its own litigations had also assisted the Fair Work Ombudsman to attract and retain skilled and talented lawyers.

"Maintaining an in-house practice means that lawyers are able to maintain and build upon their litigation skills and keep them current, which has proven to be very important in the retention of valuable skilled staff," she said.

The Legal Group also took a leading role in the advancement of women at the bar last financial year. "Last year we briefed about 109 barristers and 53 of those briefs were to women," Ms Webster said.

The Fair Work Ombudsman's Litigation Policy can be found in the guidance notes of the Fair Work Ombudsman's website.

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