

# PSA CPSU NSW WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

9-10 SEPTEMBER 2025









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## 95 YEARS STRONG

### 9-10 SEPTEMBER 2025

### PROGRAM

#### DAY ONE

**Tuesday 9 September 2025**

8:30am **Registration**

9:00am **Acknowledgment of Country** Binowee Bayles

9:15am **Welcome to the Conference and Housekeeping** Leanne Smith, Women's Council Chair

9:20am **General Secretary's welcome** Stewart Little

9:25am **President's address** Nicole Jess

9:30am **History of Women in the PSA and Women's Council** Panel and documentary film

10:15am **Morning Tea** Sponsored by Maxxia

11:00am **Keynote speech** Jelena Dokic

12:00pm **From policy to practice: Domestic violence in the workplace** Mihalja Gavin

12:45pm

2:00pm

2:30pm

3:30pm

6:00pm

**Lunch** Sponsored by WageCover

**Positive change in women-dominated workplaces: Child Protection**

**Caseworkers** Kate Washington, Minister for Families and Communities and Disability Inclusion

**How to plan for your financial security** Pascale Helyar-Moray

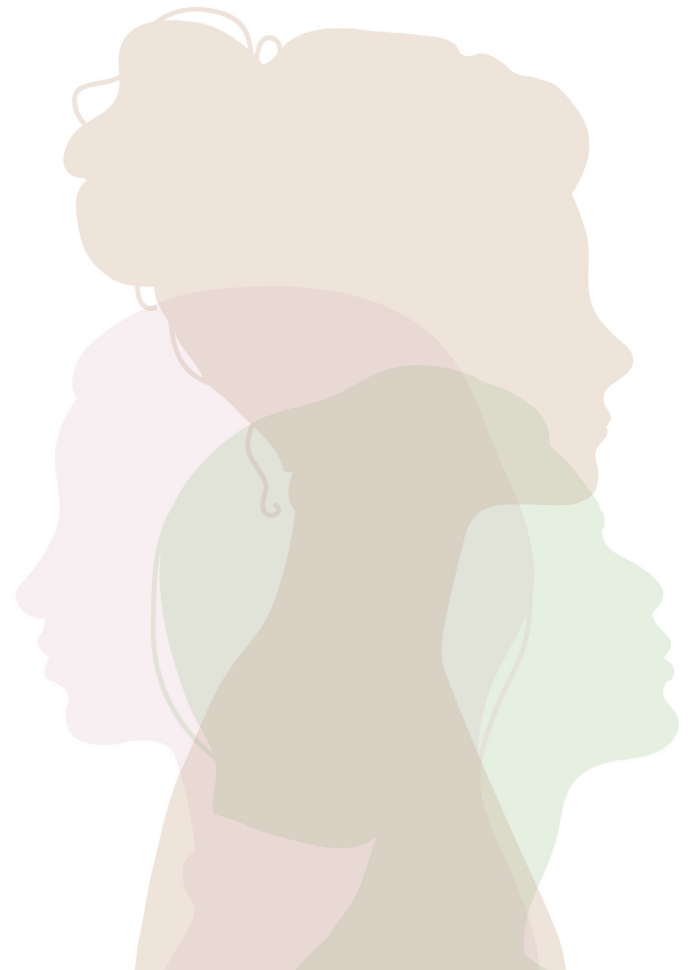
**Women's safety** Hannah Tonkin

**Conference dinner** Sponsored by Australian Mutual Bank, Aware Super and McNally Jones Staff  
Sheraton on the Park, 161 Elizabeth Street Sydney  
*Welcome drinks from 5:30pm*

## DAY TWO

**Wednesday 10 September 2025**

- 9:00am **Welcome back**
- 9:05am **Recap video from day one**
- 9:15am **Sexual harassment in rural workplaces**  
Skye Charry
- 10:00am **Workplace health and safety**  
Kelli Jovanovski
- 10:45am **Aware Super presentation**  
Anastasia Polites
- 11:00am **Aged care advice** Jennifer Langton
- 11:15am **Morning Tea** Sponsored by State Super
- 12:00pm **Domestic violence summit** Panel
- 12:30pm **Aboriginal Education Officer**  
Ruth Simms
- 1:00pm **Close of conference**
- 1:30pm **Women's Council meeting**  
Women's Councillors and Women Central  
Councillors to attend.  
Observers welcome





# PRESIDENT'S WELCOME

## **Our voices are impossible to ignore, thanks to our union and Women's Council.**

Welcome to the 2025 PSA CPSU NSW Women's Conference.

Our union, and its 95-year-old Women's Council, are proud to be a part of a long tradition of women standing up for each other at work. We stand together in the face of challenges such as unequal pay, limited opportunities for advancement, harassment and discrimination. Together, women create networks of solidarity that challenge these barriers and foster a more supportive, inclusive culture.

One of the most significant ways women support one another is by amplifying each other's voices. For 95 years, Women's Council has been doing just that.

The PSA CPSU NSW and Women's Council have never been afraid to call out unfair treatment. Women who intervene when colleagues experience sexism, harassment, or bias send a strong message that such behaviour is unacceptable. These acts of courage create safer workplaces and demonstrate the value of collective accountability.

Ultimately, like all union members, when women look out for one another, they contribute to

reshaping workplace cultures. By fostering solidarity, they ensure that progress toward equality is shared, sustainable, and deeply rooted in everyday practice.

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## **OUR UNION IS PROUD TO BE PART OF A LONG TRADITION OF WOMEN STANDING UP FOR ONE ANOTHER**

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Enjoy Women's Conference as we commence another 95 years of standing up for one another.

**Nicole Jess,  
President**



# FROM THE GENERAL SECRETARY

## **Your union is always by your side.**

Welcome to the 2025 PSA CPSU NSW Women's Conference, where we celebrate the critical role our union has played in advancing the rights and protections of women working in the NSW public sector, as well as in areas such as TAFE, universities, disabilities and private and state-owned corporations.

These workplaces employ large numbers of women, many of whom face persistent challenges such as gender pay gaps, insecure work, and balancing caring responsibilities with professional demands. Unions such as ours are here to provide a collective voice to fight these injustices and to win outcomes that no employer would give us voluntarily.

One of the most significant contributions of unions is their advocacy for gender equity. Since the early days of the 20th century, our union has fought for equal pay. We have gone on to fight for recognition of part-time and casual workers, and stronger anti-discrimination measures.

For women in workplaces where casualisation is widespread, such as schools, we have campaigned for more permanent positions and job security, ensuring that women are not trapped in precarious employment.

We have also played a vital role in supporting women's access to paid parental leave, flexible work arrangements, and protections against harassment and bullying.

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## **SINCE THE EARLY DAYS OF THE 20TH CENTURY, OUR UNION HAS FOUGHT FOR EQUAL PAY**

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We can look back with pride at what we have achieved. However, during Conference it is vital that we plan for our next battles, and do our utmost to create better workplaces for the women we represent.

**Stewart Little,  
General Secretary**



## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

### **Our voices will not be silenced.**

There is always a backlash.

During the 1920s, when Australian society still largely viewed women as wives, mothers and housekeepers, the PSA was ahead of the game, demanding an end to gender-based inequality in our pay.

Pressure began to be placed on the PSA executive for more representation of women and more action on issues important to women members. However, not everyone was on board, and then PSA president, William Augustus Flynn, told the Australian Public Service Federation conference in Perth that, “Fundamentally, women are not honest.”

*The Sydney Morning Herald* of the day reported this, infuriating PSA women members. A huge meeting was organised by the women’s clerical subsection, where “the council room was crowded to overflowing and many women were unable to gain admittance.”

Mr Flynn, not surprisingly, declined to attend. Regardless of his thoughts about women in the Public Sector, things were on a roll.

Ninety-five years after it was formed, the Women’s Council continues its fight for true equality

in the workplace. It has fought against anachronisms such as the marriage bar and unequal pay.

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### **HELP US CELEBRATE THE AMAZING WOMEN WHO HAVE DONE SO MUCH FOR OUR WORKPLACES**

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Our workplaces now have policies against sexual harassment, have places for lactation and our employment hours can often be adjusted for greater work-life balance.

Welcome to Women’s Conference and help us celebrate the amazing women who have done so much for our workplaces,

**Leanne Smith,  
Chair of Women’s Council**





## 95 YEARS STRONG: OUR FIGHT FOR WOMEN AT WORK

**For the past 95 years, the PSA CPSU NSW Women's Council has been an integral part of our union's fight for true equality. With every win, our workplaces improve for the women who follow in our footsteps, giving them the foundations to strive further on behalf of their fellow union members.**

Women win when women work together, and Women's Council gives us a chance to develop ideas and ensure they remain on our union's radar.

Sixty years before women in NSW won equal pay for equal work, the PSA was already campaigning on this issue. In 1915, the union formally demanded that the Public Service Board pay women the same as men.

From 1916, the PSA maintained a group dedicated to women's issues in the public service. Social change is often brought about in trying circumstances, and this development took place against the backdrop of the First World War, when women joined the Public Sector in greater numbers to fill vacancies left by men fighting in Europe.

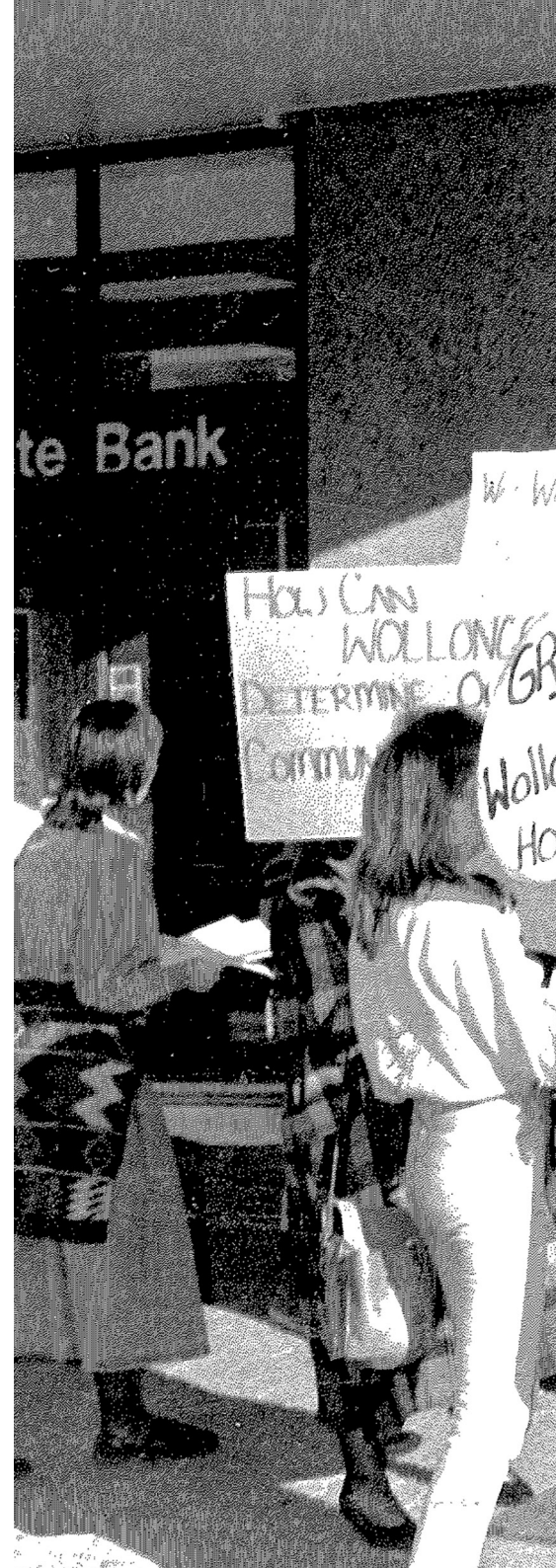
However, women members realised

the group needed to be formalised, and 95 years ago the PSA created the Women's Auxiliary, which was later changed to Women's Council. Its first meeting, held on 30 May 1930, adopted a constitution and secured women positions on both the PSA Executive and Central Council, giving them a strong, official voice within the union.

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**AMONG THE MOST  
TIRELESS ADVOCATES FOR  
WORKPLACE EQUALITY WAS  
JEAN ARNOT**


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 **HOWARD'S  
"JUSTICE"**  
- only for  
the rich!

**JUSTICE?**  
**Who cares?**  
**Howard doesn't!**  
**WE DO!**  
 **LEGAL AID  
MEANS JUSTICE**



This was one of the first bodies of its kind in Australia's proud trade union movement. A union formed by a group of men was now on the vanguard of improving workplace rights for women.

All this took place at a time when men were still seen as traditional breadwinners and women seen as homemakers. So entrenched had this attitude been, that women in the Public Sector were expected to quit their jobs once they married: another issue the Women's Council campaigned on.

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### **WOMEN'S ACTIVISM WITHIN THE PSA CPSU NSW GREW ALONGSIDE WIDER SOCIAL CHANGE AS AUSTRALIA LOOKED TO ADDRESS INSTITUTIONALISED SEXISM THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY**

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Among the most tireless advocates for workplace equality was Jean Arnot, a State Library of NSW librarian who joined the PSA in the 1930s to fight for equal pay. Outraged that she often earned less than male subordinates, she took her fight to her employers and the State Government. And she knew that as a union member, she would have the backing of the PSA.

During the Second World War, the Women's Auxiliary lobbied government as women again flooded into the public service, demanding not just equal pay but also permanency for women stuck in temporary roles. Ms Arnot raised these issues in lectures, publications, and even a 1946 ABC radio broadcast.

Today, the library at PSA House bears Ms Arnot's name in tribute to the determination she brought to the union's fight for wage equality.

Women's Council's efforts bore fruit and employment conditions improved. In January 1958, women clerical officers won 85 per cent of the male pay rate. Later that year, Premier J.J. Cahill announced his government would legislate for equal pay, a commitment realised with the 1958 NSW Industrial Arbitration (Female Rates) Amendment Act. While it did not deliver full equality, it marked a major breakthrough in the quest for true wage parity in the workplace.

Soon to follow was an end to the archaic, intrusive rules demanding married women leave the Public Sector. Many women had, until this point, kept their marital status hidden from employers.

Women's activism within the

PSA CPSU NSW grew alongside wider social change as Australia looked to address institutionalised sexism throughout the country. In 1972, the Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission finally recognised equal pay for work of equal value. A year later, the Women's Auxiliary became the Women's Council, and the Government Agencies Women's Sub-Division was formed.

Success breeds success and a union that started as a group of male Public Sector workers evolved to be much more diverse. The proportion of women in the PSA surged from 26 per cent in 1965 to 39 per cent in 1975, tripling female membership numbers.

Today, women make up more than 60 per cent of the PSA CPSU NSW's extraordinarily diverse membership.

The 1970s brought new energy, with Women's Council members staging demonstrations at PSA conferences, marching with equal pay banners in May Day processions, and surveying women across the union about their workplace experiences.

In 1981, the PSA launched its annual Women's Conference, the second union in Australia to do so. The first, attended by 200 women, tackled issues such as child care, permanency, part-time work, and workplace safety. Feminist Anne Summers gave the

keynote address, urging women not only to gain new skills but also to demand the right to use them.

Success also brings detractors, with some men feeling threatened by the changes brought about by Women's Council. In the 1970s and 1980s there were a number of attempts by men in the union to abolish Women's Council altogether. However, women members organised and ensured these moves were ultimately unsuccessful and Women's Council could continue its role in fighting for truly equal workplaces.

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### **IN 1981, THE PSA LAUNCHED ITS ANNUAL WOMEN'S CONFERENCE, THE SECOND UNION IN AUSTRALIA TO DO SO**

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For more than 40 years since, Women's Conferences have driven significant advances: domestic violence leave, lactation breaks, and bereavement leave for stillbirths among them. Yet, as Summers noted in 1981, many of the same struggles persist.

In the 21st century, improvements continued for women in our union. Two successful pay equity cases, one in Jean Arnot's former workplace, the State Library and

the other in the state's schools, brought about massive change for women members. In both cases, courts ruled in the union's favour, demanding wages be increased in female-dominated workplaces so that they reached parity with similar workplaces that were dominated by men.

In recent years, the PSA CPSU NSW Women's Council has been at the forefront of positive change in not only the workplaces it covers, but throughout Australia.

In 2007, members at the University of NSW successfully introduced Family and Domestic Violence Leave into an Enterprise Agreement. This was an Australian first, giving workers the chance to take leave when leaving violent relationships.

Family and Domestic Violence Leave has since become a workplace standard nationwide, and even the International Labour Organisation is pushing this as an ideal workplace right for workplaces worldwide.

Our union has won improved parental leave, not just for women but for men so child-rearing can be shared and women's careers less likely to stall as families are started.

There are still battles to be won. The PSA CPSU NSW is fighting on behalf of members to be at the forefront of improved reproductive leave.

The history of the Women's Council is one of resilience, courage, and collective determination. It has been at the forefront of a nationwide fight by Australia's union movement to improve working lives for women. Many of the benefits gained for our members have flowed on to other sectors: when we win for us, we win for all.

Women's Council lives up to true union values: equality, respect at work and fair pay.

Without its tireless work, our workplaces would be vastly different. The gender wage gap would be wider, flexible working conditions a pipe dream and our workplaces would be blighted with excessive harassment and violence. Promotions would be disproportionately allocated to men and conditions such as Family and Domestic Violence Leave and lactation facilities unheard of.

Our employers know there is a body looking out for women's interests at work. And they take notice. When the PSA CPSU NSW and Women's Council work together to win, all women in our workplaces win.

Our union has a long tradition of women standing up for one another and for justice in the workplace. For 95 years, the Women's Council has kept it on course.











## SPEAKERS



### **Jelena Dokic, Commentator and former tennis professional**

At the age of 16, Jelena Dokic upset world number one Martina Hingis at Wimbledon. The following year she made the semi finals at the same tournament.

However, this young prodigy, who arrived in Australia as a refugee, endured abuse at the hands of her father for more than 15 agonising years, starting at the tender age of 6.

Ms Dokic has become an influential voice. She is a sought-after speaker, a compelling TEDx presenter, and a revered commentator.



### **Pascale Helyar-Moray, Entrepreneur**

For her services to business and to women's affairs, Pascale Helyar-Moray was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia in the Australia Day 2024 Honours Lists.

She is the founder of Grow My Money, a world-first platform enabling users to turn their shopping into mortgage or superannuation savings.

Prior to her startup life, Pascale held senior marketing roles at a number of large financial companies.

Passionate about gender equality, Ms Helyar-Moray served as Director of Communications for the Australian Gender Equality Council.



### **Mihajla Gavin, Academic**

Mihajla Gavin is Senior Lecturer in the Management Department at the University of Technology Sydney Business School. She is elected President of the Association of Industrial Relations Academics of Australia and New Zealand (AIRAANZ).

Dr Gavin is currently researching workplace responses to family and domestic violence (FDV) including implementation of FDV leave. Other projects have focused on school teachers' working conditions and teacher union strategy in Australia.

Her award-winning research has had demonstrable impact via expert testimony, regular features in media, submissions to government and independent inquiries, and partnerships with industry.

## SPEAKERS



### **Kate Washington, NSW Minister for Family and Community Services**

Following the 2023 election of the Minns Labor Government, the member for Port Stephens, Kate Washington, was appointed Minister for Family & Community Services and the Minister for Disability Inclusion.

Since then, Ms Washington has worked with the PSA CPSU NSW to fix a Child Protection system that has suffered from years of neglect, improving the grading of workers and ending a system that saw children cared for by agency staff in motels and caravan parks.

She has been a member of the NSW Legislative Assembly since 2015.



### **Ruth Simms AM, Aboriginal Education Officer**

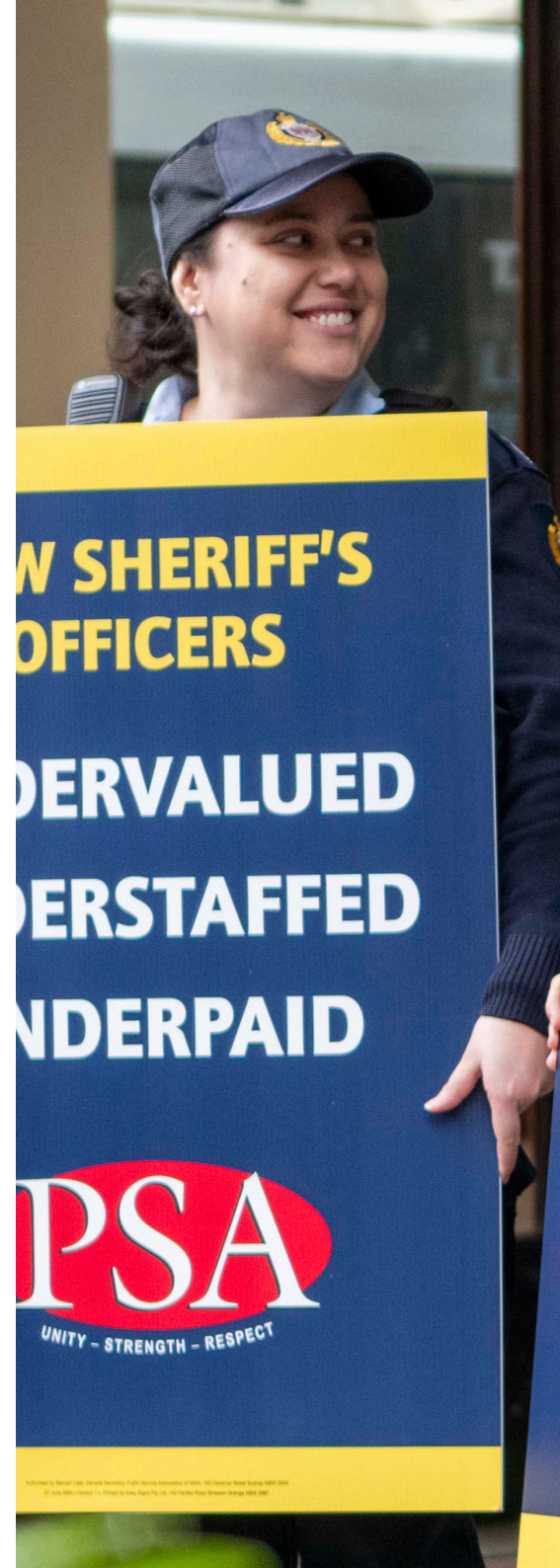
Ruth Simms is one of the most respected Aboriginal Elders in the Shoalhaven region.

Aunty Ruth grew up in La Prouse, learning about traditional bush foods, language and medicines from a young age.

Today, she lives in Nowra, working as an Aboriginal Education Officer (AEO) in local primary schools. She has a Diploma of Education and is passionate about embedding indigenous perspectives into the curriculum.

She is currently the longest serving AEO at the NSW Department of Education and remains a strong advocate for her people.

In 2012, Aunty Ruth was awarded an Order of Australia Medal (OAM) for her contribution to education.









## SPEAKERS



### **Hannah Tonkin, Women's Safety Commissioner**

Hannah Tonkin commenced as the inaugural NSW Women's Safety Commissioner in 2023.

In this role, she provides leadership across the whole government to improve responses to domestic, family and sexual violence.

Previously Ms Tonkin worked as an international human rights lawyer at the United Nations, as the Director of Disability Rights at the Australian Human Rights Commission, and as a barrister in London and Adelaide.



### **Kelli Jovanovski, Principal Inspector at SafeWork NSW**

As Principal Inspector with SafeWork NSW, Kelli Jovanovski plays a key role in the Respect at Work Taskforce, which aims to promote a culture of respect and safety in NSW workplaces.

Her strong educational background in Occupational Therapy, has provided Ms Jovanovski with a unique understanding of the complexities involved in ensuring worker safety and well-being.

She is passionate about creating a safe and respectful work environment.



### **Skye Charry, Associate Professor of Law at the University of New England**

Skye Charry is a national expert in workplace sexual harassment and rural culture.

In addition to her academic role, Dr Charry works directly with organisations across Australia to deliver workplace culture reviews, gender equity strategies, and sexual harassment training through S.A.C. Consulting Australia, which she co-founded.

Her research has shaped major reforms, including the Australian Human Rights Commission's Respect@Work report.

Dr Charry is the author of *Whispers from the Bush*, a landmark study on sexual harassment in rural workplaces that inspired the documentary *Grace Under Fire*.

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