

# On the trail of the carbon footprint

**Alex Boxsell**

Law firms must reduce their use of electricity, air travel and paper if they are to substantially decrease their impact on the environment, a report by sustainability group Australian Legal Sector Alliance (AusLSA) reveals.

Electricity was the biggest source of emissions for firms in the 2009-10 financial year, with little variation per employee between those with fewer than 100 employees and those with more than 1000, the report, released this week, shows.

The report sets out the environmental consumption of executive member firms Clayton Utz, DLA Phillips Fox, Henry Davis York, Jackson McDonald, Maddocks, McCullough Robertson, Norton Rose and Swaab Attorneys.

Electricity caused 69.3 per cent of emissions, an average of 3.1 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO<sub>2</sub>e) per employee emitted across the eight firms. The firm with the most employees, Clayton Utz, was responsible for 3.64 CO<sub>2</sub>e tonnes per employee across 1869 staff. Swaab, the smallest firm by headcount at just 68, was responsible for 3.13 CO<sub>2</sub>e tonnes per employee.

By comparison, the US Environmental Protection Agency has estimated the average passenger car emits 5.5 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>e a year.

In the report, AusLSA urges firms to consider automatically switching off computers, reducing use of print-



**Malcolm Turnbull ... one of the key weapons in the battle for greater sustainability is awareness.**

Photo: JASON SOUTH

ers and copiers and installing sensor lights to reduce electricity use.

Clayton Utz chief operating officer Stuart Clark called on other firms to be transparent about emissions, saying it was "important that the major firms show leadership".

Clayton Utz will move in June to new Sydney premises at 1 Bligh Street, which Mr Clark said was the first six-star environmentally rated building in Australia. It will help the firm reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 42 per cent and features sensor lighting, recycled

black water and more efficient heating and cooling.

Electricity use as a major source of emissions for firms was followed by travel, with air travel making up an average of about 23 per cent of all emissions, the AusLSA report says.

There were variances depending on size and national footprint of firms and location of clients. Firms with global networks had the highest proportion of emissions due to flights, making up 33.4 per cent of Norton Rose's emissions and 32.8 per cent of DLA

Phillips Fox's. Paper was another large source, 123 kilograms used by each employee every year. Two firms – HDY and McCullough Robertson – have invested in carbon emission offsets worth 907.5 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>e.

The report was launched at HDY in Sydney by the federal opposition spokesman for communications and broadband, Malcolm Turnbull, who said participating firms were showing great leadership on climate change at a time when "there probably isn't a lot of leadership around".

"One of the key weapons in the battle for greater sustainability is awareness," he told the audience.

By measuring their firm's emissions, managing partners were learning more about the efficiency of their businesses and how to work in a smarter way, Mr Turnbull said. The AusLSA report was important in encouraging a rational and objective debate, he said, and could also help firms find ways to save money.

The joint chairs of AusLSA – HDY chief operating officer Kelvin O'Connor and Maddocks chief David Rennick – said in the report participating firms had made "a brave decision" to "publish their environmental performance alongside their peers".

Mr O'Connor said at the launch it was important as a sector to understand the benchmarks for consumption of resources, and that the participating firms' decision to disclose was "gutsy" and "should be applauded".

Micael Johnstone, manager of the Legal Sector Alliance in England and Wales, told the audience about 200 UK firms had signed on since it was launched in 2008, about a third of practising solicitors in England and Wales. Forty-four firms had disclosed emissions, including Hogan Lovells, which cut emissions 30 per cent for the year, he said.

"Law firms have never come together to collaborate like this," he said. "They are normally fiercely competitive." He said there were plans to establish an alliance in the US.