


[Top Stories](#) » [Firms continue green fight](#)

Firms continue green fight

Posted Nov 10 2011, 07:07 PM by Lawyers Weekly

✓ Recommend

 Emily Wilson recommends this.

 Tweet

0

The Australian Legal Sector Alliance (AusLSA) has presented its second sustainability report, revealing the environmental consumption of its member firms for 2010-2011.

Speaking at Clayton Utz's Sydney office last night (10 November), Henry Davis York's chief operating officer and co-chair of AusLSA, Kelvin O'Connor, said the report "shouldn't be used as a league table" because each firm differs in work practices, client base, size and geography.

"Sustainability is a journey, not a competition," said O'Connor, adding that it was "encouraging" to see more firms coming forward and sharing the same ideals in an industry which is "normally quite adversarial".

Since its launch and inaugural report in March 2011, AusLSA has gained 20 new members, eight of which reported their environmental consumption this year. This brings the total number of firms reporting to 15.

One firm which stands out in the latest report, in terms of reducing its environmental impact, is Swaab Attorneys. The Sydney firm reduced its energy footprint by around 27 per cent through a project called "half lights", which involved every second fluorescent light in the office being removed.

"Our main criterion was, 'How can we do it cheap?'" said Swaab CEO and AusLSA board member Bronwyn Potts.

"Some of the firms have got some really fancy wonderful electronic systems. Instead, we had this simple project," she said.

This year, AusLSA broadened its reporting requirements for firms to include outsourced as well as internal paper production in their data. This saw Swaab's paper footprint increase, but Potts is confident the firm can even out its paper levels in the next reporting period.

"This year we are now busily weighing everything, so I think that's an encouragement to staff. When they know that their paper's going to be weighed when they throw it into that recycle bin, they might actually think twice," she said, adding that the firm has given iPads to each lawyer and is working on getting them to engage and enjoy using tablet devices.

On average, AusLSA reporting members consumed 115 kg of paper per employee this year - a 7 per cent decrease from the previous period.

Senior associate Charlie Knaggs from Net Balance Foundation (AusLSA's provider of sustainability advice, assurance and research) said there are "really clear business drivers" for implementing initiatives around efficiency.

High flying

The latest report reveals that reducing a firm's business travel footprint is one of the greatest challenges.

Air travel footprints (which make up 33.3 per cent of reported emissions) increased over the last reporting period to "almost pre-GFC levels", said O'Connor.

However, due to Australia's size and geographic isolation on the international stage, air travel will remain the predominant mode for lawyers.

"We don't like to travel, believe it or not," said Clayton Utz's chief operating officer and AusLSA board member Stuart Clark.

"But it's a fact that we have to travel to meet clients. National firms have to get around, so we have to be realistic."

O'Connor said AusLSA will further investigate ways to mitigate air travel with video conferencing and sensible forward-planning strategies next year.

The Alliance has also unveiled a new reporting logo, which each member firm will adopt to show their affiliation with AusLSA, and Knaggs made it clear that it is not too late for other firms to join.

"If [a firm] came in now, they'd have to back flip five months of data to report in time for the next report, and it should be relatively easy for them to [do] that," he said, adding that there were mentors from AusLSA's executive members available to assist newcomers.

Filed under: clayton utz, henry davis york, environment, green, Australian Legal Sector Alliance, AusLSA, energy consumption