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Colin Biggers & Paisley's bloodless leader switch and crowd-surfing DLA Piper



"They look like they're about to break into Habeas chorus", noted one Fairfax staffer. DLA Piper partner David Leggatt leads The Hash Pipers at LawRocks, with partner Rhys Davies (left), partner James Morse (back, drums) and client Ben Forrest (right). Supplied



by [Katie Walsh](#)

The iron throne at Colin Biggers & Paisley will seat a new leader from October, but here's a spoiler alert: there won't be any bloodshed.

After a decade as managing partner of the eastern seaboard practice, **Dunstan de Souza** will make way for his deputy **Nick Crennan**.

For the past year, Crennan has shadowed de Souza as part of a deliberate, drawn-out succession plan. The firm has known for the past five years of de Souza's intention to step down as leader on his 55th birthday – putting him two months behind schedule.

"It's almost luxurious to be able to shadow your predecessor and take notes," says Crennan.

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Colin Biggers Paisley incoming managing partner Nick Crennan: "Big, fancy shoes to fill". Supplied

"He thinks I'm writing a book about him. I won't be."

De Souza has overseen two mergers, taking the firm from around 22 partners in Sydney to a [70-plus network](#) stretching to Melbourne (Monahan + Rowell in 2012) and Brisbane (Hemming + Hart in 2013) and boasting [revenue growth above 40 per cent since](#).

Crennan credits De Souza with having done an "extraordinary job": establishing the firm's strategic plan ("when they're sick of hearing about the strategic plan, you're finally getting through", de Souza likes to say), maintaining a healthy culture, and traversing controversy (the firm acted for the Obeid family in the past; [former managing partner Nick di Girolamo](#) was CEO of Australian Water Holdings and [partner Greg Skehan](#) was a director, but the NSW Independent Commission Against Corruption inquiry made [no adverse findings against them during its high profile inquiry](#) into the company).

At a high level the strategy is straightforward: being "famous" in its areas of expertise, chiefly property, construction and insurance.

Crennan will manage a \$10 million technology investment over the next three years and work to boost diversity and flexibility for its millennial-dominated body of staff.

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Johnson Winter & Slattery partner Peter Slattery, minus his bass guitar: a member of the firm's rock band that will perform at the IBA conference in October. **Jessica Hromas**

"Most of all we've got to maintain our culture," he says.

Both he and Crennan are firm 'lifers': de Souza joined in 1985, Crennan three years later.

Indian born and south Sydney "Shire" raised de Souza is not headed straight to the beach. He will stick around as a sounding board; the firm just has to work out what to call him.

"There have been some creative suggestions," says Crennan.

"At the moment we're sticking with 'senior partner'.

"I have big, rather stylish shoes to fill," Crennan says.

The firm slates its successful expansion down to a focus on "one firm"; in particular, emphasising practice leaders and groups, not geographical ones.

But embarking on a nation-building journey in this hyper-sensitive market has its challenges.

Class warfare

McCullough Robertson, the Queensland heavyweight that has made its way down the coast over the past seven years, will farewell another from its Sydney office as planning and environment partner **Samantha Daly** prepares to join Johnson Winter & Slattery.

Earlier this year it [lost its Sydney property team led by Brett Hawkins and Justin Madden](#) to would-be ASX market darling Thomson Geer.

Moves elsewhere carried promotions. Melbourne-based Herbert Smith Freehills property development lawyer **Carla Deluca** has joined **Virginia Briggs'** team at MinterEllison, leaping from senior associate to partner in the process, after almost 12 years at HSF. Which sounds vaguely familiar: just last month Sydneysider **David Taylor** made the same leap from senior associate to partner, moving after a decade at HSF to join Minters.

Taylor co-authored a chapter on the topic of litigation funding in HSF's impressive tome published this year to celebrate 25 years of class actions in Australia, along with partner **Jason Betts** and senior associate **Christine Tran**.

Another chapter, on forensic issues, was written by Federal Court judge **Jonathan Beach**. Of course, the much-admired judge is too modest to refer to his own work. Instead, within a judgment last week setting out the court's approach to competing class actions against infant food manufacturer Bellamy's, Justice Beach [referred to the 2002 class actions textbook written by HSF's Damian Grave, Ken Adams and Betts](#).

How do we know?

Because we have [read the judgment on Austlii](#), that trove of free legal information run by UTS and UNSW.

And doesn't it look lovely. A facelift was revealed this week, to much excitement from those who contribute to the more than 700,000 hits the site receives each day. You now have the option to print Justice Beach's decision (or any document) in either a "pretty" format (37 pages), or "eco-friendly" one (26 pages). Of course, should [some politicians care to research New Zealand's citizenship laws](#) (yes, Austlii includes New Zealand laws among its 776 databases), they might not find the results terribly pretty regardless of the printing format.

Pretty is in the eye of the beholder, after all.

For Norton Rose Fulbright, its hire of M&A partner **Jasmine Sprange** from Clayton Utz delivers a week-end morale boost after news of departures from its merger partner-in-waiting Henry Davis York.

Sprange joins in October, along with tax specialist **Paul O'Donnell** who will join from Ashurst.

Countering the flow of partners heading out, the firm noted the other ten lateral hires to have joined since January last year and two more to come ([including High Court justice Jamie Edelman's cousin, Adam Edelman](#)).

Elsewhere, upstart NewLaw outfit Keypoint Law will welcome commercial and dispute resolution lawyer **Suzy Schmitz** to its Melbourne office next month. Schmitz, who started her career 15 years' ago at Clayton Utz before heading to the UK, joins from the firm's London quarters. She says sticking with the firm was the "natural decision" for her, having seen how it has "revolutionised" the UK market.

It is a natural time to return to Australia, now the steady tick-tock of Big Ben has paused for restoration work, sending the city into a near Brexit-sized state of disillusionment.

Crowded rock scene

The verdict is back from the [annual LawRocks band competition held last Thursday night](#): DLA Piper's smoking-good "indie" band, The Hash Pipers, triumphed. The night ended with an encore, culminating in DLA's commercial litigation partner **David Leggatt** leaping into the cheering masses for some crowd surfing – an incredible leap of faith in an audience heaving with rivals, particularly for a professional liability lawyer who helps structure risk management programs.

The emcee for the night, Norton Rose Fulbright partner **Rob Buchanan**, said the "proper punk-rock band" put on a "class act".

They beat [last years' winners, NRF's The Thorns](#), along with another six teams including Minters' Mintellica. The X-Factor-style judging panel included a mandatory "Mr Nasty", which Hearsay is told was played convincingly by Pinsent Masons partner **Andrew Denton** (nothing to do with his [firm taking Buchanan and three others from NRF](#), we trust).

Money raised from the 470 concert goers in attendance went to The Smith Family.

The DLA crew will take their winning high to the global version of the event, to be played out at The Metro Theatre in Sydney during the International Bar Association's all-encompassing conference in October. Winners from [previous competitions](#) – JWS (featuring leader **Peter Slattery** on bass), HSF and NRF – and four global groups including one from Ashurst will also play.

Bounce for women's AFL

Firms will compete on a different field this weekend in the annual Winneke Cup in Melbourne, a long-running AFL and netball competition played between law firms, which doubles as a charity fundraiser.

This year there is reason to cheer even before the centre bounce: for the first time the women, usually relegated to the netball courts (not that there's anything wrong with that), will take part in the footy, inspired by [this year's first ever official AFL women's comp](#).

Maddocks has pulled together a full team of 25, who will take on an all-stars team combining players from Lander & Rogers, HSF, Allens, K&L Gates, Clayton Utz, Ashurst and Corrs Chambers Westgarth in a 40 minute long match.

Maddocks lawyer **Elizabeth Murphy** said the cup was a good opportunity for firms to compete in a different arena. All-stars, be warned: Murphy has form.

"It was my first season playing football this year after a 15-year hiatus and I enjoyed every minute of it [injuries and all]," she says.

We will hope for no bloody noses; there are enough in the market already.

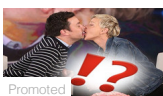
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