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LGBTI NETWORK AT HERBERT SMITH FREEHILLS

MESSAGE FROM THE HON. MICHAEL KIRBY AC CMG

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I pay respects to the Firm and I congratulate the LGBTI network on its second anniversary.

We, in Australia, have always been proud of Freehills as a distinguished and innovative legal practice.

But we must admit that it was the association with Herbert Smiths that added the dynamic that produced the LGBTI network and a new attitude to variations in sexual orientation and gender identity in a professional setting. This was not the first time that Australians, including Australian lawyers, had been stimulated to think bigger thoughts by our association with England. We have come a long way since I was a young lawyer and the Privy Council was Australia's final court. But the whole world is now awakening to the issues of justice and equality for LGBTI people. Lawyers have to play a part in this process. HSF must be a global leader.

On 11 February 2015, my partner Johan van Vloten and I reach our 46th anniversary together. He was with me on every day of my public and judicial life; and he still is. What a blessing this has been for me! It is perfectly possible for gay people to be happy and successful. I was, and am, a highly disciplined and focused lawyer, who happened to be gay. I am not defined by my sexuality; but it is a part of me. So those who have a problem have to get over it. Quickly. Including in the workplace. Including in the courtroom. Also in the world.

Ensuring respect and equality for all employees, whatever their sexual orientation or gender identity, is not only the right thing to do. It is also good for business. It provides an empowering work environment. Employees bring their whole selves to work. Increasingly this is happening throughout our country. I applaud the way it is happening throughout your Firm. I pay tribute to those, gay and straight, who have brought this about. Stress and depression are very big issues in the Australian legal profession. The LGBTI network at HSF is an important contribution to diminishing one cause. Empathy and kindness should encourage the network to give leadership and example for other causes.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'W. van Vloten', written in a cursive style.