

## THE BIG INTERVIEW

# Setting ourselves apart in Australia

Josh Sgro and Kate Perumal provide an update on the Firm's progress in Australia.



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**I**t's nearly six years since the Firm opened its Australia operation, so we caught up with office executive partners Kate Perumal (Sydney) and Josh Sgro (Melbourne), to get an update on progress and to find out what we do to deliver a client experience that sets us apart from our competitors.

White & Case entered the Australian market in 2015. Since then, the team has grown rapidly from 12 to 26 partners as of 23 September 2022 in a wider team of 180 across our Sydney and Melbourne offices.

The Australian offices are particularly strong in the energy and infrastructure sectors, covering project development and finance, M&A, dispute resolution, international arbitration, antitrust and tax.

Sydney Partner Kate Perumal explains: "We are extremely happy with the growth achieved over the past six years. We continue to grow across our practices thanks to the continued recruitment of top-quality talent.

"When we opened, White & Case was not well known in the domestic Australian market, but I am pleased to hear this perception is changing fast thanks to our growing reputation for excellence."

Since opening in the market, the Australia team's client list has expanded to include the State of Victoria, Transurban, Fotowatio Renewable Ventures, Copenhagen Infrastructure Partners, Neoen, Brookfield, INPEX, QIC, IFM, Plenary, AusNet, Igneo Infrastructure Partners, TasNetworks, MMG, Beach Energy and Sojitz.

Melbourne Partner Josh Sgro says: "We're continuing to see significant opportunities in the energy, infrastructure and mining sectors across both offices and continue to act on some of the largest and most complex mandates in these sectors both in Australia and across Asia.

"Particular areas of growth include renewable energy and energy transition projects (such as renewable energy zones and transmission and battery projects) and large-scale transport and infrastructure projects in Australia and Asia.

"We're also continuing to see strong growth in M&A transactions in these sectors, particularly with secondary market transactions and take-private transactions."





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KATE PERUMAL, PARTNER, SYDNEY

Recent highlights have included advising on the development of the AU\$50 billion Suburban Rail Loop project (a new 90km underground rail line in Melbourne) and advising Transurban on the AU\$6.7 billion West Gate Tunnel project (a 4km toll road also under construction in Melbourne).

We've also worked with Fotowatio Renewable Ventures (FRV) on the sale of 49 per cent of FRV Australia to Canadian pension fund OMERS, and advised on the redevelopment of the Sydney Fish Market, the world's third largest fish market.

Other highlights have included advising Neoen on Australia's largest battery project and a role advising one of the Firm's key clients on the most high-profile public market M&A transaction in Australia.

Kate says: "Alongside our domestic work, we're seeing an increasing volume of cross-border mandates, particularly into Asia. One recent example is the work we're doing with our Singapore office to advise Sun Cable on the Australia-Asia PowerLink Project, the development of the world's largest green-energy export project."

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KATE PERUMAL, PARTNER, SYDNEY

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"All this means we're extremely well integrated into the wider network."

Making White & Case in Australia a great place to work has also been a priority and the team is proud to have implemented an award-winning graduate program across Melbourne and Sydney, which consistently attracts top talent to the Firm.

Graduates often benefit from a six-month rotation to another Asia Pacific office, giving them a priceless personal development opportunity while strengthening ties further afield.

Josh comments: "Both offices are currently planning renovation work to help us accommodate our growing teams and we are supporting people as we adapt to hybrid working."

"While maintaining our togetherness during Covid-19 was as challenging here as it was anywhere else in the world, we're enjoying the chance to get together and socialise again in 2022."



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JOSH SGRO, PARTNER, MELBOURNE

Regular social events include an inter-office 5km fun run, Halloween celebrations and end of year parties. The team even braved a long-haul flight to have 25 participants attend the 2022 White & Case World Cup in Berlin.

Kate says: “Both offices are also heavily involved in pro bono work including our commitment to make a team member for a six-week secondment to work in Indigenous organizations in West Kimberley, Western Australia, as we begin our new partnership with non-profit initiative, the Jawun program.

“Another highlight was the successful representation of an elderly woman in her claim against builders who left her home incomplete and full of defects, obtaining her enough funds to complete the work.”

Looking ahead, our offices in Australia are determined to continue their contribution to the Firm’s 2025 Strategy and in particular how we offer a client experience that sets us apart from our competitors.

Josh says: “We’re increasingly seeking to leverage the depth of our infrastructure and energy experience and expertise in Australia by working in conjunction with our Asian based partners and lawyers to advise clients on cross border and/or complex mandates in Asia Pacific.

“This includes transferring our knowledge to other jurisdictions. For example, the Australia team was proud to advise on the world’s first large-scale battery project and that experience has since helped the Firm win mandates in other jurisdictions.”

Kate adds: “We’ll only truly set ourselves apart from our competitors in our client experience by being One Firm and offering our clients a truly compelling blend of industry experience and legal knowledge across jurisdictions.

“If we can achieve this, I’m sure both offices will continue to capitalize on our success in Australia and throughout the Asia-Pacific region, continuing to grow our cross-border mandates while retaining our focus on our people and culture.”



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