

# Lawyers' join the A-team

## EXCLUSIVE

A survey of the nation's best lawyers has thrown up some unexpected results

CHRIS MERRITT  
LEGAL AFFAIRS EDITOR

A SURVEY of leading general counsel has identified 109 lawyers who have been nominated by their clients as their nation's best.

The survey results, which appear exclusively in *The Australian*, indicate corporate Australia is reassessing which firms have the most legal firepower.

The general counsel have nominated a legal 'A-team' that is dominated by lawyers from Freehills and other big national firms.

But they also believe leading mid-tier firms have more top lawyers than much larger organisations normally considered to be part of the top-tier.

The survey shows the top seven firms provided 65 of the A-team's 109 lawyers.

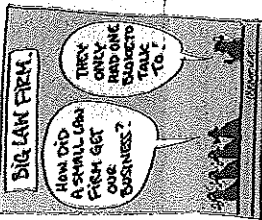
But one of those top seven firms is Maddocks, an organisation normally considered to be part of the mid-tier. Maddocks had more lawyers nominated to the A-team than industry giant Malletts Stephens Jacques and Corns Chambers Westgarth, which is one of the nation's most successful corporate law firms.

Other mid-tier firms that were favoured by the general counsel included Melbourne's Cornwall Stodart and Brisbane's McCullough Robertson.

The general counsel decided that McCullough Robertson, which has just two offices outside Queensland, has more top lawyers than DLA Phillips Fox and Baker & McKenzie firms that are part of international networks.

One of the most surprising aspects of the survey is that no lawyers from the Australian arm of Norton Rose were nominated by the general counsel for inclusion in the A-team.

The survey, which was conducted for the Australian Corporate



Legal Affairs and the Corporate Lawyers Association of New Zealand, asked 160 general counsel to nominate those lawyers who would be part of their 'ideal firm'.

The survey is referred to in the recently published Legal Department Benchmarking Report that was assembled for ACLA and CLANZ by law firm consultant Ronald Pol of Team Factors.

But the names of those lawyers and their firms were not included in the benchmarking report. They are contained in a supplement that has been provided to *The Australian*.

The growing respect for mid-tier firms is in line with another part of the benchmarking report that shows the general counsel expect to reduce the amount of work going to the big firms.

But while planning cutbacks for big firms, the general counsel are also planning to increase the amount of work going to smaller practices.

The survey results indicate also that the Australian Government Solicitor has a stronger reputation for legal expertise than many of the law firms that pitch for federal government work.

The AGS, a government-owned law firm, has more lawyers in the A-team than some of the leading private firms.

Most of the general counsel covered by the survey said they had very positive experiences in buying legal services. But 42 per cent of Australian general counsel said none of the law firms had exceeded their expectations.

## AUSTRALIA'S BEST LAWYERS AS JUDGED BY THEIR CLIENTS

**MELBOURNE**  
Andrew Clark  
Julie Couch  
Michael Gray  
Paul Hughes  
Chris Jose  
Stephen Kerr

**BRISBANE**  
Ewen Couch  
John Greig  
Michael Irest  
Peter James  
Ken MacDonald

**SYDNEY**  
Elspeth Arnold  
Adrian Chai  
Roger Davies  
Tony Davies  
Tony Hill

**PERTH**  
Mark Bohen  
Ian Bloomfield  
Dale Booth  
Darren Foote  
Andrew Hoy

**MELBOURNE**  
Bruce Cowley  
Amanda Dodds  
Frank Ginter  
Antra Hood  
Sonja Ilic

**MELBOURNE**  
Martin Shalukovsky  
Kristin Stammer  
Kaman Tsoi  
John Ware  
Juliana Warner  
Irene Zettler

**MELBOURNE**  
Mark Hayes  
Melanie Olynk  
John Rantino  
Marryn Tier

**MELBOURNE**  
Amanda Bodger  
Jim Boynton  
Roger Featherston  
Justin McDonnell

**MELBOURNE**  
Guy Aitken  
Libby Haigh  
Andreas Markus  
Marianne Peterswald

**MELBOURNE**  
Bernadette Rayment  
David White

**MELBOURNE**  
Jonathan Cheyne  
Stephen Humphreys  
Jack Hodder

**MELBOURNE**  
Barry Brown  
James Daniel  
Rodney Stone  
Dale Cliff

**MELBOURNE**  
Louise Houlihan  
John Hutchings  
Nicole Stevens-Warson  
Bill Spain  
Luise Woodward

**MELBOURNE**  
Kristen Groser  
Derek Pocock  
Peter Stewart  
Darren White

**MELBOURNE**  
Jenny Davis  
Frank Lawson  
Mark Kenney  
Harold Werksman  
Scott Lambert

**MELBOURNE**  
Peter Nelson  
Simon Taylor

**MELBOURNE**  
Peter Joly  
David Krishnan  
Anton Eaton  
Marianne Gibney  
David Honey

## HOW THE LAW FIRMS RATE

Firm	Top lawyers nominated by general counsel
Freehills	12
Allens Arthur Robinson	10
Blake Dawson	10
Cornwall Stodart	10
Minter Ellison	9
Maddocks	8
Malletts Stephens Jacques	6
Australian Government Solicitor	4
Cornwall Stodart	4
Gilbert + Tobin	4
McCullough Robertson	4
Corns Chambers Westgarth	3
Holding Redlich	3
Spartke Helmore	3
Cartier Newell	2
Chapman Tripp (NZ)	2
DLA Phillips Fox	2
Baker + McKenzie	1
ClarkeKam Lawvies	1
Dibbs Barker	1
Kemp Strang	1
Middletons	1
Norton + Nowell	1
Norton Gladhill	1
Racelliff Taylor	1
Thynne + McCarty	1
Firm unidentified	4
TOTAL	109

Source: Legal Department Benchmarking Report, 2010, April

ONLINE - Hear Ron Pol explain the survey's findings. [www.theaustralian.com.au/business/legal-affairs](http://www.theaustralian.com.au/business/legal-affairs)

## Level playing field as smaller firms push into top rankings

no longer a guaranteed measure of success, particularly in difficult times, when clients are increasingly concerned to secure the most cost-effective representation.

That is confirmed by research undertaken by the Legal Department Benchmarking Report for this year.

Australian general counsel experience intense pressure to reduce law firms' costs, and 84 per cent reported pressures to curb expenditure.

Some of the big firms are also expected to bear the brunt of these pressures.

None of the general counsel surveyed for this report, who were mostly based in the east, said they were not entirely because of

\$1.6 billion on lawyers annually, expect to increase their use of big firms. In their drive to cut costs and maximise the value proposition, as many as 30 per cent expect to reduce their use of national full-service firms over the next two years.

The impact on the big firms is even more pronounced among the largest corporate clients.

The benchmarking report finds that 40 per cent of these big companies expect to reduce the amount of work allocated to national full-service firms.

Yet they also plan to make greater use of local full-service and specialist or boutique firms.

This is not entirely because of

cost. Commerciality of advice, value for money and optimal outcomes all feature more highly than hourly rate comparisons.

If these firms get more work, not because they are cheaper but because they deliver exceptional service and great outcomes, they rightly deserve their top positions in the clients' ideal law firm recommendations, alongside their mega-firm peers.

Ron Pol, a director of Team Factors, produced the Legal Department Benchmarking Report for the Australian Corporate Lawyers Association and the

New Zealand



## changes

CHRIS MERRITT

THE rise of the mid-tier firms has come as no surprise to ANZ Bank general counsel Bob Santamaria.

Over time, he has noticed that outstanding lawyers are no longer to be found only within the giant firms that make up the old top tier.

And he believes one of the factors behind this shift is the decline of collegiate culture at big firms.

It has been replaced, in his view, with what he describes as a much tougher, business-like approach.

"Law firms now are being run more as businesses and for profit, and that is affecting lawyers, good and bad," Mr Santamaria said.

"There will be very, very good lawyers who are lauded by some of that approach that is applying in the big firms."

"I have been talking to one such person who almost perfectly fits that mould. And that person will almost certainly finish up at one of the mid-tier firms."

He believes the best mid-tier firms are also run in a businesslike manner but are not viewed as being as voracious for profit.

Mr Santamaria, who is the son of the late public intellectual of the same name, has spent a lifetime in the law and is perfectly placed to assess the changing nature of practice.

Before taking up his appointment at ANZ three years ago, he had been executive partner in charge of the corporate and commercial department at Allens Arthur Robinson.

He said the culture at Allens had been extremely supportive and collegial, a combination that top lawyers still valued.

He was unsure whether the pecking order of the nation's law firms was changing, but he was sure that some of the best lawyers had abandoned the top tier and had deepened the pool of expertise in smaller practices.

He cited the example of Maddocks and boutique firm Johnson Winter & Slatery.

"Johnson Winter & Slatery is a firm with really top-quality people, but you don't think of them in that bracket as the top five or six firms, do you?" he said.

He said JWS managing partner Peter Slatery had attracted top-quality lawyers, "and you know it has been recruiting out of the big firms".

Mr Santamaria said the ability of law firms to attract or retain top lawyers depended on leadership.

He believed the success of firms depended on "setting the right tone" in order to engender loyalty among top lawyers who might otherwise go elsewhere.