

ANNUAL WORKPLACE LAW MASTERCLASS

TUESDAY 18 AUGUST 2026

8.00 AM - 5.00 PM



Live at Sofitel Brisbane Central
or via our online event platform



COOPER GRACE WARD
LAWYERS

EVENT OVERVIEW

In a year marked by significant reform and regulation, this masterclass provides essential insights into workplace law and compliance that your organisation needs to stay ahead. Leading legal experts will explore the latest developments shaping the Australian employment landscape, including emerging workplace law trends, psychosocial hazard management, performance management legalities, privacy and AI governance, contractor compliance, and WorkCover risks in professional environments.

This practical, one-day event is tailored for executives, HR leaders, in-house counsel and safety professionals responsible for managing people, legal risk and workplace strategy. Whether addressing everyday HR issues or advising the board on compliance, this event equips you with the knowledge and tools to act confidently and effectively.



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8.00 am - 8.30 am Registration

8.30 am - 9.15 am
Workplace Law 2026 - What are the trends and what you must do next

Speaker : Annie Smeaton, Partner

In this opening session, Annie Smeaton delivers the high-level legal update that every employer needs. She will cover key changes and trends for 2026 and beyond, including payday superannuation, junior award rates, gender equality reporting, increased government paid parental leave, underpayment of wages and non-compete clauses.

With a sharp focus on legal risk, policy updates and operational implications, this session provides the essential legal context for everything that follows. You will walk away with a clear picture of where Australian workplace law is headed and what practical steps your business should be taking now.

9.15 am - 10.00 am
Three years on: Evolving best practice in psychosocial hazard management

Speaker : Gemma Sharp, Special Counsel

Psychosocial hazards in the workplace – including stress, workplace violence, harassment and excessive workload – continue to pose significant risks to employee wellbeing, productivity and overall workplace safety. Three years after Queensland introduced its Code of Practice for managing these hazards, it is critical for senior leaders to revisit and enhance their organisation's approach to identifying, assessing and controlling psychosocial risks. This session will examine case studies that highlight the ongoing legal and operational consequences of inadequate management, providing a clear understanding of current compliance requirements and evolving best practice frameworks.

Designed specifically for HR executives, WHS leaders and senior managers, this session will equip you with updated practical strategies to strengthen your organisation's psychological health and safety systems. You will gain essential insights into your legal obligations under Queensland's workplace health and safety legislation, along with effective risk management techniques to foster a culture of psychological safety. You will leave with actionable takeaways to safeguard your workforce and strengthen your business resilience.

10.00 am - 10.30 am Morning tea

10.30 am - 11.15 am
Mastering performance management: legal insights and best practice

Speaker : Aiyana O'Meara, Senior Associate

Managing performance can be a difficult but critical exercise in ensuring a productive workforce. Whether you're seeking to refine existing performance management processes or build new frameworks, this session provides essential insights to help you lead with confidence and safeguard your organisation's interests.

In this session, Aiyana O'Meara will guide you through the legal frameworks governing performance management, helping your organisation stay compliant while fostering a culture of accountability. Learn best practice approaches that not only enhance employee performance but also support fair and transparent processes to protect your business. Discover practical strategies to manage underperformance lawfully, covering the full range of available options and how to minimise legal risks while fostering a motivated and productive workforce.

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11.15 am - 12.00 pm

Recent Queensland common law claims for primary mental injuries

Speaker : Kim Willis, Senior Associate

Workers' compensation claims for what are known as 'primary mental' injuries can be challenging for employers to manage, both under statutory law and common law. These claims generally require careful consideration of evidence gathered over time, including oral testimony from multiple witnesses. Such evidence is often coloured by perception and time.

In this discussion, we will review decisions from the Queensland District and Supreme Courts between 2024 and 2026 to identify any new trends in judicial consideration of 'primary mental injury' common law claims.

12.00 pm - 12.45 pm Lunch

12.45 pm - 1.30 pm

Privacy reform update and AI adoption and governance in the workplace

Speaker : Phil Vickery, Partner

This session explores key workplace issues to consider amid the rapid changes brought about by technology and AI. Ongoing reforms to privacy law – and increasing scrutiny of artificial intelligence use in the workplace – mean now is the time to understand your legal exposure. Phil will provide an update on reforms to Australian privacy law and examine the new statutory tort for invasion of privacy, highlighting the implications for HR and business leaders. He will also unpack various AI risks and discuss the National AI Centre's guidance on best practices for responsible AI adoption.

1.30 pm - 2.15 pm

Contractors, casuals and compliance – navigating tax and super risks in 2026

Speaker : Tom Walrut, Special Counsel

Think engaging workers as contractors or casual employees will exempt you from superannuation, PAYG and payroll tax obligations? Think again.

As both the ATO and state revenue authorities ramp up compliance activities in these areas, more employers are facing unexpected tax liabilities because of how they classify and engage workers.

In this session, we will unpack the tax risks associated with engaging workers as contractors or casuals, highlight common superannuation pitfalls (including how to calculate ordinary time earnings) and explore the PAYG and superannuation implications of worker misclassification. We will also cover enforcement actions against employers who fail to classify their workers correctly for tax purposes.

A critical takeaway: directors can be held personally liable if a company fails to pay PAYGW and superannuation guarantee charges, with the ATO actively issuing director penalty notices.

2.15 pm - 2.30pm Afternoon tea

2.30 pm - 3.15 pm

Employee termination and redundancy

Speaker : Isabella Clements, Associate

When an employee's role is no longer required due to operational changes, employers must follow specific steps to ensure a redundancy is lawful.

In this session, Isabella Clements will unpack the key legal principles surrounding genuine redundancy, outline obligations around redeployment, explain how to calculate redundancy pay entitlements and share practical tips for minimising risk.

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By examining recent decisions, you will gain clarity on how to properly consult employees about proposed redundancies and how to effectively assess workforce composition to satisfy redeployment requirements.

3.15 pm - 4.00 pm
Ask the experts – panel Q&A

Speakers:

Annie Smeaton, Partner
Phil Vickery, Partner
Gemma Sharp, Special Counsel
Tom Walrut, Special Counsel
Aiyana O'Meara, Senior Associate
Kim Villis, Senior Associate
Isabella Clements, Associate

Wrap up the day with direct access to our expert panel of speakers. This interactive session gives you the chance to ask questions, clarify insights and explore practical applications of the day's key themes. Whether you're facing legal grey areas, policy dilemmas or leadership challenges, bring your questions and benefit from the collective expertise on stage. No hypotheticals are off limits.

4.00 pm - 5.00 pm
Networking and refreshments

Connect with like-minded professionals over drinks and light refreshments. This is your opportunity to continue the conversation, share insights from the day, and build valuable connections with peers, speakers and industry leaders. Whether you're swapping strategies or sparking new collaborations, it's the perfect way to close out the Masterclass.



Annie Smeaton
Partner
Workplace relations & safety



Phil Vickery
Partner
Corporate advisory



Gemma Sharp
Special Counsel
Workplace relations & safety



Tom Walrut
Special Counsel
Tax and revenue



Aiyana O'Meara
Senior Associate
Workplace relations & safety



Kim Villis
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Insurance



Isabella Clements
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