

Meet the lawyers spearheading NZ's latest projects

Anderson Lloyd's new partners discuss the trends, challenges and opportunities for New Zealand's projects and infrastructure

Projects and infrastructure is a "creative, big picture thinking" area of law, and it attracts lawyers who love thinking outside of the box. It is also facing some major challenges in New Zealand, from costs and funding to legislation reforms, market volatility, and the impact of climate change.

To meet growing demand, New Zealand law firm Anderson Lloyd recently boosted its projects and infrastructure practice with the addition of two new partners. Alex Booker began her career in 2006, and has been promoted to partner after working on a number of ambitious property, energy and resources projects. Lauren Whitehead joined Anderson Lloyd in April and brings over 16 years of industry experience, her most recent role being Acting General Counsel at KiwiRail.

For Booker, the opportunity to work with "diverse technical teams over many months" is a huge part of why she loves this area of law.

"You can form great friendships and have a lot of laughs," Booker tells *NZ Lawyer*.

"I also have a degree in science, and have come from a practical farming and quarrying background. My life experience, skill set and keenness for direct client engagement and achieving results has naturally seen my practice grow successfully in this space."

Lauren Whitehead's journey began with a 3-month internship at a global Sydney law firm, and she hasn't looked back since. She says that working with talented people has been "inspirational" and an important part of her career journey, and being a projects lawyer has

allowed her to engage across a broad variety of disciplines, keeping her work consistently varied and interesting.

"I absolutely loved the internship," Whitehead recalls. "The lawyers took me under their wing, offered me great opportunities to learn and I loved the camaraderie of working on Public Private Partnership (PPP) transactions -even the "all-nighters"!"

"As a projects lawyer, you interact with many other specialists across the firm and industry - whether with finance, tax, environment, resource management and planning or corporate," she adds.

"You're never working in a silo, so the work is both interesting and engaging."

"Big challenges and big opportunities" for New Zealand projects

It's no secret that New Zealand - like most of the world - is in a challenging economic environment. Adding to the ongoing market volatility, there is an increasingly urgent need to address climate change and reduce emissions - but with costs rising and legislative reform ongoing, kicking this into full gear is proving challenging.

Whitehead says she's seen "a lot of issues" around cost escalation and funding, both for the cost of labour and materials, energy and resources adding to overall inflation. However, she says that this is unlikely to be a "long-term trend" post-pandemic, though it continues to be an issue for ongoing projects.

"A more lasting challenge is to address climate change, which impacts not only where infrastructure is built (or re-built in the case of recent catastrophic weather events), but also addressing risk allocation and delays due to weather and changes in building codes," she explains.

"There is another issue to resolve around the construction industry's contribution to emissions

Meet the lawyers spearheading NZ's latest projects (Continued)

reductions, and a switch to new types of construction materials that have less of an environmental impact.”

She notes that labour and skills shortages have also been an ongoing challenge, along with constraints in the supply of materials. The uncertainties around the future pipeline of work haven't helped, and are making it tough for New Zealand to effectively address the shortages because of the lack of commitment in the sector.

“New Zealand has a large backlog of infrastructure needs,” Whitehead says.

“I'm concerned with how and when these critical projects are going to be sponsored and funded. My personal view is there is a strong rationale for the PPP model, and other alternative financing options. We have already seen this in New Zealand, with some path finding infrastructure projects. We need to do more of this.”

“None of these issues are new. But we need strong leadership in this sector and political will.”

Alex Booker agrees that the shift to a low-emissions economy is going to be “in sharp focus” over the next few years, with resource management reforms and the promotion of renewable energy. She says there are “both challenges and opportunities” for the future, and Anderson Lloyd is positioning itself to become a prominent player in the renewable energy space.

The firm already has specialists in wind, solar, hydro and green hydrogen projects, and has a strong track record of delivering large-scale water conservation, storage and irrigation projects.

“With a team of specialists in climate change law, Anderson Lloyd is well-equipped to advise clients on the New Zealand emissions trading scheme and other climate change responses,” Booker says.

“We are working across a number of comprehensive property developments, and projects in the energy and resources sector, including renewable energy projects.

“As infrastructure and project trends continue to evolve, Anderson Lloyd is poised to provide clients with innovative solutions and strategic advice to navigate the changing landscape.”

Backing the next generation of lawyers

In addition to their impressive track record in the projects space, Booker and Whitehead are also actively involved in encouraging young lawyers to develop their technical abilities and further their careers.

Booker highlights that diversity of thought has always been valued at Anderson Lloyd, and she has seen this consistently when sitting around the table as a project consenting lawyer.

“I would encourage all young lawyers to be aware of how much value their skills and viewpoints can add to discussions and to not be shy about expressing their opinions,” she says.

For Whitehead, her key piece of advice is to be grounded, authentic and genuine every day, and to have a supportive group of mentors who hold you up and inspire you. Ultimately, she encourages junior lawyers to “back themselves” - to decide how they want to live, and just go for it.

She says having this mentality is particularly important for young women, who often feel they have to choose between growing their career and starting a family.

“Another thing I would say is don't give up,” Whitehead says.

“This might be changing more and more now, but I've seen quite a few female lawyers give up their careers when they start to have families. I would encourage those women to keep connected to their careers in some way even if there are some challenging times.

Meet the lawyers spearheading NZ's latest projects
(Continued)

“You can have a long-term career that will continue to grow and build and you will look back when your children are older and be grateful for an amazing career that can take you in many directions.”