

INFRASTRUCTURE WOMEN IN FOCUS



WIN NZ has been established to increase the visibility of women in the infrastructure sector. Every month we profile a different woman working in a different part of the industry. If you would like to be profiled, or would like to nominate someone to be profiled, please answer the questions below and send your picture through to [Natasha](#).

We'd like to introduce Emma as our next Woman of Focus. In addition to her role at Gallaway Cook Allan Lawyers, Emma also sits on the WIN Otago/Southland Chapter Committee as Chair.



EMMA BURKE

PARTNER

GALLAWAY
COOK
ALLAN 

1. What company or organisation do you work for and what is your role there?

I am a partner in the Commercial Team at Gallaway Cook Allan, a full service law firm with offices in Dunedin and Wanaka. While I have experience across a broad range of commercial matters, my real passion is procurement and construction law. I have acted on many construction and infrastructure projects over the past 18 years, and I love working collaboratively with clients and their consultants and being part of the wider project team. I particularly enjoy working on local projects because it is very satisfying being able to watch their progress through to completion.

2. Tell us about your career background and how you got to this position/role?

My law degree was structured around a career in litigation and after I graduated I was supposed to start as a litigation graduate at a top tier firm in Auckland. However, just before I was due to start, the two head litigation partners left to form a boutique firm, so I was reallocated to a commercial team that at the time was doing a lot of work in the energy sector, particularly in relation to wind farm developments. There was something very appealing to me about the tangible nature of this work, and that was what first sparked my interest in construction law. After several years in Auckland I moved to London where I worked solely on PPP projects, and spent a lot of time in the Middle East working on new power generation developments. When I returned to Dunedin, a lack of local specialist construction lawyers has enabled me to carve out a niche for myself and allowed me to work on many exciting construction and infrastructure projects, both locally and nationally.

3. Tell us about a project are you currently working on and why it interests you?

It is hard to talk about a current project in any detail because of the commercially sensitive nature of what we do, but I can say that I have been working on a significant infrastructure project in the energy sector over the past year which has been hugely rewarding. While I have a real passion for the law itself, people are at the heart of what we do and when you have a high performing project team it makes my job so enjoyable. The client I am currently working with has an incredibly talented team, they trust us and value our advice and they take us on the journey with them, which is the perfect formula for a successful project.

4. What's the hardest job you've ever done and why?

There are a number of different things that can make a job hard, but I think when you are truly passionate about your work these challenges are all part of the fun (but don't come without some stressful moments along the way!). There are plenty of projects I have been involved in that haven't gone to plan, but in my mind that is when the real work starts. It is hugely satisfying being able to work alongside the project team to navigate a path through any obstacles that present themselves. In my experience there are a few things that are essential to approaching these challenges in a positive way: knowing you have the confidence of your client, having access to excellent support, trusting in your ability and giving in to the process – the solution isn't always obvious and it can take some time to get there.

5. Can you think of one example where your "diversity" has materially affected the outcome of a work situation or project, either positively or negatively?

Family has always been my number one priority and I have never been apologetic about that. When I was working at another firm I was struggling to move forward in my career, but I couldn't figure out why because I was working very hard and achieving excellent results. One of the female partners took me aside and told me that while it was fine to prioritise family, it would be better if I wasn't so vocal about it because some of the other partners "didn't get it". This was hugely disappointing to me, and such a lost opportunity to educate those partners. It is very important to me to feel aligned with firm culture, and not surprisingly I ended up leaving that firm not long after that. Although it was a negative experience for me at the time, ultimately the outcome has been positive – as a partner I now have the opportunity to influence our firm's values and culture, and ensure we promote a supportive and inclusive approach to diversity.

To learn more about opportunities for a career with Gallaway Cook Allan Lawyers [click here](#).

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