

# Cassandra Heilbronn

## Regulation Legal Manager in Sports & Entertainment at the Royal Commission for AIUla in Saudi Arabia

**Calli Tsipidis**, Legal Counsel at Fox Sports, sits down with **Cassandra Heilbronn**, Regulation Legal Manager in Sports & Entertainment at the Royal Commission for AIUla in Saudi Arabia, to discuss International Women's Day.

Prior to her move to Saudi Arabia in May 2019, Cassandra was a Senior Associate in Sports, Insurance & Corporate Risk at MinterEllison. Her practice areas saw her acting in commercial matters with worldwide sporting organisations, corporations and sponsors and in player disputes on behalf of clubs and governing bodies. Cassandra is a sought after keynote speaker, travelling worldwide to present on sports and corporate risk issues and is a frequent commentator on matters affecting women in sport and women in the legal profession. She was the President of Women Lawyers Association of Qld from 2016 to 2018, previously held directorships at Surfriider Foundation and Squash Australia; and was an Advisory Board Member for Brisbane Heat. Cassandra is the Founder of The Prominenti Society; a speaker platform featuring only female speakers worldwide. In 2017, Cassandra was named in the Top 20 under 40 in Queensland Business Monthly. She has been named in the 2015 and 2017 Who's Who List of Australian Women.

**CALLI TSIPIDIS:** What does a typical day look like for you? What is involved in your current role?

**CASSANDRA HEILBRONN:** I am the Regulation Legal Manager in Sports & Entertainment at the Royal Commission for AIUla in Saudi Arabia. The project I am currently working on is overseeing the drafting of secondary regulations on two projects: Sports & Entertainment and Foreign Investment, for the region of AIUla, which is an area here in Saudi Arabia. AIUla is full of beautiful landscapes (including a UNESCO World Heritage site) and is currently a residential region. The Royal Commission is helping to develop the natural sites and increase tourism in the area. As such, we need to make sure the regulations are suitable for the residents, as we are enhancing their local community, and are also



attractive for foreign investors while making sure we are covering off all tourism requirements, such as safety and security. In short - I am drafting secondary regulations for some areas of law for this town – it's absolutely amazing!

What has been really different from my previous jobs is that I am not necessarily the woman with the pen in the hand at all times and there is more of an oversight and managing role. There is a team of lawyers who are drafting the regulations in accordance with our project requirements and deliverables. The secondary regulations are being finalised for approval – so we are in the midst of finetuning wording and making sure the language is easily readable and can also be translated to Arabic, so no meaning is lost.

My work day will typically start later and finish later – which is part and parcel of Middle Eastern corporate culture. The biggest change for me moving from Australia was not being

such an early bird! In the past, I had a daily alarm at 4:55am, would go to the gym and would typically be at my desk by 6:30 - 6:45am each day. I've been here for 18 months and I am still training my body to adjust to more of a sleep in. The other major change is adjusting to the different demands involved with working in-house and in a government role... and not recording my time, though I feel I am the only lawyer who would actually say that I miss recording my time!

The pressures here are different from those of a more 'westernised' practice, for example something that is urgent in Australia you would stay up for all night – but here, they use the word "urgent" on a more realistic basis. It is not necessarily a slower way of practice or a lesser workload, but there is a shared understanding of the importance of work-life balance so that timeframes are more realistic.

Also, being someone who has worked in advocacy for women whilst in my role as President of

the Women Lawyers Association of Queensland, it is interesting to note that the theory and issues around flexible work, maternity leave, equal pay and the like – that we have been battling in Australia and continue to battle – is not on the radar here as it's almost a “non-issue” and what we would call a “benefit” in Australia is simply “the normal” here. Flexible work is readily accessible and actually put into practice (both pre and during Covid). Everything is based on respect and I enjoy being part of this culture.

**TSIPIDIS:** Did you always want this job? If so, what did you do to position yourself to get it? If not, how did your career path lead you here?

**HEILBRONN:** I wanted to be a lawyer from when I was 8 years old, so it's safe to say that I am all for career planning and setting life goals. I set myself quarterly, yearly, 3 and 5 year goals and I work regularly with my Executive Coach on these goals.

In 2018, I decided I wanted to make the move overseas by 2020. I always thought I would go to the US given the sports market there – the money in sport in America is vastly different to what we see in Australia, it's a different type of dynamic and skillset required and something I was very keen to explore. However, in November 2018, as I was about to board a plane, I received a phone call about an opportunity in the Middle East. It sounded almost too good to be true, so I told them to call me back after my flight – and they did. I was shocked that they were serious about the offer; I knew nothing about practice in Saudi Arabia, the law or even life here. It had been a while since I had interviewed for a role, so I thought to myself “let's just do this”. In January 2019, they flew me to Dubai for an interview. By late February I had the job and I moved over in June 2019. The Middle East was not on my radar at all but it is one of the best decisions I have ever made.

I would still like to make the move to the US one day, but my project is ongoing and I still have things I want to accomplish here. As Saudi is opening up for tourism,

we are seeing developments and opportunities arise, so you never know what is next.

**TSIPIDIS:** What advice would you give to your younger self?

**HEILBRONN:** Slow down and enjoy the time. At university, I was in such a rush to start working and to be a lawyer. Getting a job as a law clerk was a priority, to the point where I was working 4 days a week in my final year, whilst studying 5 subjects a semester. In hindsight it wasn't the best decision. Yes, there are benefits to putting your career and studies first. You certainly build up a great skillset and learn discipline in managing competing priorities, however I wish I had taken more time to just enjoy being a university student.

**TSIPIDIS:** What developments do you see on the horizon in 2021 for the communications and media legal landscape?

**HEILBRONN:** When I focus on Australia, the biggest development I foresee is in defamation – will we see a unified, national approach enacted? It will take a lot of work but I think it could be worthwhile.

Additionally, I am intrigued as I follow the continued intersection of social media and the law. As we grow in our understanding of the perils of social media, that is, the increase of misinformation, the instantaneous access to information, potential for ‘censorship’ and ‘independent fact checking’, I anticipate we may see reforms in this space in the near future.

**TSIPIDIS:** What's the greatest risk you've taken as a professional?

**HEILBRONN:** Definitely the move to Saudi Arabia. My life in Australia was easy (so to speak) and I had things sorted – I had a great job, I had a great network and I could have stayed and just kept going. Without knowing what life would be like or what to expect, I sold everything I owned and moved over here to Riyadh. It was a big risk – personally and professionally. If I moved here and realised the role or location were not for me, I feel like

I would be coming back to Australia with egg on my face, however the risk paid off well and truly. From all of this I hope people realise the Middle East is a potential destination for a career move, especially for lawyers. It's nothing like what people would expect – I mean, yes it is hot, but it's a fantastic market full of opportunities and experiences you may not have considered before. I am truly living my best life here!

**TSIPIDIS:** Who is one woman in the industry whom you really admire, and why?

**HEILBRONN:** There are many women I'd like to mention here – I'll narrow it to two if possible. Firstly, Margaret Cunneen SC, who was a Crown Prosecutor and Deputy Senior Crown Prosecutor for many years and now Barrister at Law at State Chambers. Margaret is someone I admire for her perseverance. Where she has had a job to do, she persevered through the obstacles and just got it done. No grandstanding or shirt-fronting tactics necessary – which I think is something that is needed by females in law. Secondly, Edwina McCann, editor-in-chief of Vogue Australia. When we look at media in Australia, we were not seen as one of the front runners when it comes to fashion, particularly when compared to America and Europe. However Edwina has helped bring Australian fashion to the forefront, so we have more of a spotlight which, in turn, has helped to showcase Australian fashion and Australian designers – so much so that we are seeing Australian designs being worn on red carpets on a regular basis now. I admire that Edwina used more discreet publicity tactics, and sought to change how people consider Australia and the fashion industry here. I think she has made such a difference to Australian media publications, fashion and Australian business generally.

I admire these women not for their business practices, political viewpoints or the area they work in, but because of their personal values and attributes – their perseverance, they are dynamic and they are true to themselves.