

# Jane van Beelen

## Chief Legal and Regulatory Officer, nbn

While **Jane van Beelen** is a lawyer by trade she has also sculpted a complementary career as a regulatory powerhouse in the telecommunications industry. **Jessica Norgard**, Senior Legal Counsel at nbn, sits down to talk to Jane van Beelen about the culmination of these two passions as nbn's Chief Legal and Regulatory Officer.

**JESSICA NORGARD:** How did your career path lead you to be Chief Legal & Regulatory Officer at nbn?

**JANE VAN BEELAN:** Following early paralegal experience in family law (my Dad's profession), I started as a solicitor in a large commercial law firm. Still a baby lawyer, I got the opportunity to work at Telstra doing a combination of legal and regulatory work which really shaped my career path. I ultimately led the Telstra Regulatory team for over a decade and was the Regulatory and Compliance Executive for my last two years at Telstra. Leading the Legal and Regulatory (L&R) functions at nbn was a great opportunity and next step. The role aligned my personal sense of purpose in recognising the importance of the telecommunications industry and its infrastructure to consumers, businesses, communities and the nation. With my experience to date and in this leadership role, I felt I could make a difference.

**JESSICA:** What does an example day look like for you?

**JANE:** I wear multiple hats throughout my day – I lead the L&R function, including a team of fantastic people; I engage with our regulatory stakeholders, I'm General Counsel to the CEO and the Executive Committee (ExCo), and I help lead the company as part of the ExCo.

At the moment, my schedule is (MS Teams) meetings heavy, but I try to connect 1:1 with team members regularly, and make time to think about and work on the function, the business and the strategy. I'm also walking every day, which helps my mental and physical wellbeing!

**JESSICA:** What energises you about your work?

**JANE:** The purpose of nbn is the driving force behind everything – it is incredibly engaging. Connectivity has proven to be so crucial, especially in the past two years. I enjoy collaborating with great people across the company to solve problems and make progress, which is one of the highlights of working in-house. From a people perspective, seeing team members really develop and shine is incredibly rewarding. I also find the subject matter inherently challenging and interesting (at least it is to me – I realise telco regulation isn't for everyone!)

**JESSICA:** What are some advantages that you see about having the legal and regulatory functions integrated under one leader?

**JANE:** The expertise and capability are different and complementary, but the business doesn't always appreciate the fine distinction. Being under one leader enables us to work to provide an integrated service to our business clients. It doesn't magically happen, though – we are having to be deliberate in working on how Legal & Regulatory work together to efficiently deliver an integrated service where that is what the business needs. The goal is to support the business and customer objectives being achieved in a lawful way and with L&R risks managed, and such that our people can thrive.

**JESSICA:** What developments do you see on the horizon for the telecommunications legal landscape?

**JANE:** The telecommunications landscape is shaped by its regulatory environment, ongoing substantial infrastructure investments, the ubiquity of demand for telco services across a vast geography, and a huge opportunity to harness rapidly evolving technology to enable the digital economy, drive efficiency and improve the customer experience.

There are a number of key developments on the legal landscape for telco which include:

- Substantial enhancements to the regulation of security of critical infrastructure, and the associated compliance and governance requirements;
- A more agile approach to transformation programs, systems and process development (including those we undertake with third party partners). We need to ensure these programs are set up for success, with clear requirements and accountabilities;
- More generally building in compliance as companies seek to automate processes and systems;
- Sustainability objectives, reporting and governance is a growing area for many corporates, including telcos;
- Using data to uplift the customer experience;
- How lawyers can systematise, including the use of tools such as AI to do standard advising and drafting, to enable us to truly partner with our business clients to help navigate our complex commercial and regulatory environment;



- Identifying and retaining the best legal talent for our business in a fast moving and competitive market; and
- Addressing the disadvantage of remoteness, digital ability, affordability, and other issues such as resilience and crisis response, responsibly and sustainably as an industry, as broadband is now regarded as an essential service – although these are really more social and policy issues than legal ones.

**JESSICA:** What advice would you give to the next generation of leaders in the industry?

**JANE:** Take every opportunity to build experience in a range of areas of law, especially if you aspire to be a General Counsel. But also become expert in at least a few key areas – you want depth and breadth. Also remember it's not just about building legal knowledge – your broader skills, such as simple and impactful communication, evaluating risk, understanding financial analysis – should also be a priority. It's important to be proactive in thinking about your career – what you want from it and when, what opportunities will best provide the pillars upon which you build; but be open enough to recognise that opportunities come in a range of shapes and sizes, and your career is most unlikely to be, and indeed richer for not being, a singular linear progression. You may even benefit from taking a non-legal role for a period!

If you have the opportunity to work in-house, remember not to interpret your legal role too narrowly. It's not enough to be satisfied just understanding the legal issues – pursue broader understanding of the technology, the commercial imperatives, the market, the policy and regulatory framework, to be a true business partner.