

Thursday, 5 February 2026

## Putting NSW in the Asia Pacific legal spotlight

### **NSW's world-leading rule-of-law reputation can turbocharge a push to make the state an international jurisdiction of choice for the Asia Pacific (APAC) region.**

The new President of the Law Society of NSW, Ronan MacSweeney, has outlined his priorities for 2026 at this evening's traditional Opening of Law Term function, in the presence of legal leaders, including the state's Chief Justice and Attorney General.

"In a time of global uncertainty and instability, NSW's golden reputation for the fairness, the efficiency of our justice system, and the legal profession that serves it, can help make the state a legal services hub for APAC," Mr MacSweeney said.

"Our rule-of-law reputation can fuel a virtuous cycle of increased economic activity, encouraging governments to make substantial investments to modernise our courts, which benefits all NSW citizens. These issues are at the core of my President's Priorities for my term this year."

During 2026, Mr MacSweeney will focus on these President's Priorities:

- Providing legal practitioners with the support and resources required to meet their regulatory obligations, including compliance with the new AML/CTF regime;
- Empowering the profession in our shared responsibility to protect the rule of law, and defend the integrity of the justice system, including by demonstrating the necessity of an independent legal profession;
- Improving access to justice for all court users, through advocating for increased investment in both physical and digital court infrastructure; and
- Promoting NSW as a legal jurisdiction of choice within the Asia-Pacific region.

Mr MacSweeney, who was raised and educated in Ireland, noted that the Irish Government had leveraged its post-Brexit position as the European Union's only common law jurisdiction to become a regional legal and business powerhouse.

Among the prominent legal figures attending tonight's function is Ireland's Attorney General, Rossa Fanning SC, a contemporary from Mr MacSweeney's university days. MacSweeney said he's benefited from discussion with Mr Fanning about what lessons NSW can learn from the successes of the [Ireland For Law](#) initiative.

"Trade in Ireland's legal services has [eclipsed](#) the international exports of Jameson Irish Whiskey and Guinness combined. With a rule-of-law reputation that's globally respected, and just short of half of Australia's legal profession, NSW is at the cusp of being able to make a similar impact in our region of the world," Mr MacSweeney said.

"The potential influx of new international legal work need not be limited to litigation and dispute resolution. Sydney is already [ranked](#) among the top 25 global financial centres, and eighth in the Asia Pacific, just behind Beijing. With a burgeoning legal sector, more work on major complex international financial transactions can be expected to follow."

"This is a long-term goal, but I am committed during my term as President of the Law Society to work in partnership with the profession and government towards writing the next chapter in NSW's international legal success story."

Many law practices will this year become subject to new anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing (AML/CTF) regime obligations. Mr MacSweeney has committed to continuing the Law Society's extensive support for the profession meeting both new and existing regulatory obligations as another of his President's Priorities.

"Both independently and in partnership with the Law Council of Australia, the Law Society of NSW has engaged in multiple rounds of effective consultation with AUSTRAC over the contents of its AML/CTF framework. We will continue to provide and update [resources](#) for solicitors to assist their compliance with the new obligations," Mr MacSweeney said.

"This Priority includes strengthening the ability of practitioners to comply with their ethical and professional obligations. An important aspect of this is the range of free services designed to guide and assist practitioners that we offer through our Professional Support Unit."

Mr MacSweeney's elevation to Law Society President comes after a career spanning 25 years across private practice, government and the not-for-profit sector. After studying at the University of Galway, he earned bachelor's degrees in law, and in economics and English, and a master's in law from the University of Edinburgh, along with studies in human rights and criminology at the Netherland's University of Leiden as part of an EU sponsored program.

Mr MacSweeney's record of service to the solicitor profession stretches back to his role as student representative on the Education Committee of the Law Society of Ireland. He moved to Sydney to practice law in the early 2000s.

A decade ago, Mr MacSweeney joined the Law Society of NSW's Diversity and Inclusion Committee, serving as Chair for five years. He also served as Chair of the Government Solicitors Committee. He was first elected to the Council of the Law Society in 2018, became Junior Vice President in 2024, and served as Senior Vice President last year.

Mr MacSweeney's President's Charity for 2026 will be the Justice and Equity Centre's [Homeless Persons' Legal Service](#), reflecting his career-long support for fairer access to justice.

"I'm also inspired to choose to support this vital service through the example set by my mother as I grew up in the west of Ireland. At this time, Ireland was not the economic success it is today. One of my vivid memories was my mother's compassion for homeless people who came to our door seeking help," Mr MacSweeney said.

Donations to the President's Charity can be made [here](#).

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