

# BRISBANE TURNS 25 AND FROM HUMBLE BEGINNINGS BECOMES SIXTH LARGEST OFFICE IN NETWORK

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News - By **Michael Back**

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Herbert Smith Freehills' Brisbane office has turned 25 and is celebrating growing from a small team where Christmas parties could be held around the dining table to becoming the sixth largest office across the firm's global network.

The office was established in 1990 on the back of client demand and as part of a national strategic growth plan for what was then Freehill, Hollingdale & Page. The office began without the alliance of a local firm and faced many challenges as a new entrant to the Brisbane market, including restrictive state-based practising regulations and a looming recession.

Brisbane Managing Partner Michael Back - who was seconded from Sydney to establish the new office and has remained ever since - said 25 years ago lawyers from New South Wales and Melbourne were referred to as 'southerners'.

"Queensland at that time was much more parochial than it is now, with many barriers to prevent 'Southern Firms' entering the Queensland legal market. For example, we couldn't call ourselves Freehill, Hollingdale & Page because under the then regulations, named partners in the firm's brand had to reside in Queensland. We operated instead as Byrne, Nosworthy & Doyle, the surnames of our three Brisbane resident partners," Michael said.

"On top of that, tapping into a new market was exceptionally challenging and not long after we started we faced the added hurdle of the 1992 recession. This made it even more important for us to quickly identify our key clients and recruit the very best partners, lawyers and support staff.

“After a rocky start, the office expanded and gained momentum and the client base grew to include Lendlease, the Queensland State Government and QIC. A quarter of a century on, we have grown from four partners to 22, with a total headcount of around 220 people. This makes us the sixth largest office in the global Herbert Smith Freehills network and about the same size as Herbert Smith Freehills’ Paris office.

“As testament to our exceptional client service, we still have many clients like Lendlease that have been with us from the beginning, something I am particularly proud of,” Michael said.

Resources, real estate, energy, the government sector and dispute resolution are key areas of expertise for the office.

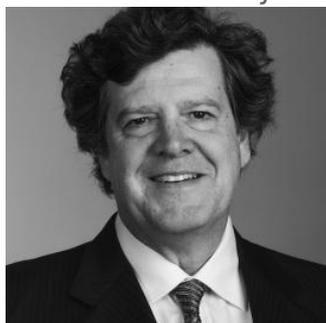
“We had a huge amount of growth during the resources boom, with clients including BHP Billiton, Santos and Wesfarmers. While this sector is not as flat out as in the boom days, there’s still plenty of work for us in the resources and energy sectors, driven by consolidation and M&A activity.

“The Brisbane office has also led the way on PPPs, having advised the Queensland Government on their first PPP, the Southbank Education and Training Precinct (SETP) and going on to advise on most of the social infrastructure PPPs that have taken place in Queensland.

“Brisbane is also integral to the firm’s strong Asia Pacific presence, acting as a key pathway into Australia for Asian businesses and investors, especially in the real estate and real estate funds sectors. Our expertise in advising Asian investors has also created opportunities for Herbert Smith Freehills globally.”

## KEY CONTACTS

If you have any questions, or would like to know how this might affect your business, phone, or email these key contacts.



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