

Press Release

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Withers expands into Australia with strategic alliance and senior hire

International law firm Withers has continued its strategy of expanding into key markets for high net worth clients by establishing a presence in Australia. Today sees the launch of a new alliance offering tax and corporate services, called Withers SBL, as well as the hire of new immigration law partner Rita Chowdhury.

Withers SBL is a new alliance in Australia, consisting of the market-leading tax firm Balazs Lazanas & Welch LLP, located in Sydney, former Ashurst corporate partner Justin Shmith, based in Melbourne, and headed for Withers by Rita, also based in Sydney.

"This alliance represents a huge step forward in the development of Withers' international footprint. Australia offers a great range of opportunities for Withers, not just as a stand-alone market for successful people, but also as an integral part of the regional Asia-Pacific market," says Withers Managing Director Margaret Robertson.

"We have monitored the Australian legal market for growth opportunities for many years and the range of services and skills offered by Rita and the Withers SBL alliance provide an incredibly strong entry proposition into what is a fairly fragmented field for private client firms. Our alliance partners will work closely with our teams in Hong Kong and Singapore to benefit from the vigorous flow of business between Australia, China and South East Asia more broadly. They will also work with our European and US teams to provide cutting edge advice to their Australian clients as they expand their investments outside Australia," adds Margaret.

Rita Chowdhury

Rita is one of Australia's leading immigration lawyers and is recognised in the Global Who's Who of Corporate Immigration Lawyers. Rita has led corporate and private client immigration practices at Deloitte and Baker & McKenzie and formed her own practice earlier in 2014. Rita's team includes associate Sandy Natarajan, a former senior legal officer with the Department of Immigration and Border Protection, and paralegal Irene Halforty. Rita and her team will add to Withers' rapidly growing global Immigration practice, which was established in 2012 with the hire of US partner Reaz Jafri, and has subsequently grown through the arrival of UK consultant Philip Barth in 2013, and Hong Kong-based Director of Immigration Mark Lanning earlier in 2014.

"I am very excited to have joined Withers at this pivotal moment in their international growth strategy. Demand for Australian immigration advice is at an all-time high, as wealthy Asian families look to move here, and I look forward to working with my new colleagues in the international Immigration team to build the leading regional practice," comments Rita.

Balazs Lazanas & Welch LLP

Balazs Lazanas & Welch LLP (BLW) was established in 2009 by three former tax partners of Baker & McKenzie. BLW focuses on tax (primarily income tax and goods and services tax), trusts and estates matters and tax disputes and investigations, and is consistently ranked as one of Australia's leading domestic tax practices.

Withers and BLW will collaborate exclusively within the SBL alliance on all relevant areas of work. Founding partner John Balazs comments: "We have built a well-respected specialist tax practice, and are recognised in particular for our work on tax disputes and tax investigations. These attributes fit extremely well with Withers' preeminent position as a leading international firm for tax advice, and the firm's substantial recent investment in its tax

investigations capabilities. Withers SBL will be an excellent platform on which to join up our local profile with the international capabilities of the larger firm."

Justin Shmith

Justin Shmith is an experienced corporate lawyer with extensive experience in M&A and cross border investment, especially between Australia and Asia. Justin was most recently a partner in Ashurst's corporate and commercial team in Melbourne and was formerly its Asia Practice Leader. He is recognised in Chambers Global 2014 for M&A involving China and has spent a number of years in China. He has established his own practice which will now work under the Withers SBL banner.

"I believe that there is a significant and underserved market amongst high net worth individuals and entrepreneurs in Australia or who may be looking to migrate to Australia, and Withers SBL will be perfectly positioned to tap into this with the backing of Withers' international network and expertise. I think Australian clients can benefit from the kind of international market leading private client experience that Withers can bring. My background has involved a lot of work in Asia, and specifically in China, and I also intend to focus on collaborating with Withers' Asian practice to capitalise on the incredible demand for expert private client advice amongst the region's rich and successful business people and families," says Justin.

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About Withers

Withers is an international law firm dedicated to entrepreneurs, successful people and their businesses.

With over 110 partners and more than 300 other lawyers, we have unparalleled expertise in commercial and corporate, tax, trusts, estate planning, financial services, litigation, real estate, charities, philanthropy and social impact investing, employment, family law and other legal issues facing individuals and their families. The firm has advised 34% of the top 100 UK Sunday Times Rich List and over 20% of the top 100 US Forbes list, as well as numerous families in Asia.

Withers has offices worldwide in Sydney, London, New York, New Haven, Greenwich (Connecticut), San Francisco, the British Virgin Islands, Hong Kong, Singapore, Geneva, Zurich, Milan and Padua.

For more, visit www.withersworldwide.com