

## Lawyerly ranks the top law firms for class actions



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Eleven law firms reign supreme in the legal market for class actions in Australia, with ten or more class actions on their plates, and two firms are way ahead of the pack, according to Lawyerly's inaugural ranking of the country's top class action groups.

An increase in litigation, and class action defence work in particular, drove Australia's commercial legal market to one its best years ever last year.

Lawyerly's Class Action Powerhouses ranking acknowledges those firms that are driving this market on the plaintiffs side and the firms companies are turning to the most to wage a class action defence.

## Class Action Powerhouses, 2019

Source: **LAWYERLY**

<i>Ranking</i>	<i>Law Firm</i>	<i>Total Class Actions</i>
1	Herbert Smith Freehills	26
1	Maurice Blackburn	26
3	King & Wood Mallesons	18
4	Clayton Utz	16
5	Quinn Emanuel	14
6	Corrs Chambers Westgarth	12
6	MinterEllison	12
8	Allens	11
8	Shine Lawyers	11
8	Slater & Gordon	11
11	Johnson Winter & Slattery	10

### The Powerhouses

On the plaintiffs side, Maurice Blackburn scored the top spot on Lawyerly's Class Action Powerhouses list, with 26 active class actions. The 100-year-old plaintiffs firm tied with Big Six firm Herbert Smith Freehills, the top player on the defence side, which is also working on 26 representative matters.

But with 140 class actions before the courts, 27 of which were filed this year, there's no shortage of work to go around. (Three competing class actions filed against RCR Tomlinson were recently consolidated, bringing this year's total to 25.)

King & Wood Mallesons and Clayton Utz snagged the number three and four spots on our list of the firms involved in the most class actions. The litigation giants are almost neck and neck, working on 18 and 16 class actions, respectively. Big Six firms MinterEllison and Allens have also gotten in on action, with 12 and 11 class actions, respectively. Missing from the Powerhouses list is Ashurst, which is working on just 6 class actions.

Three Class Action Powerhouses are in a class of their own, doing both plaintiffs and defence-side work. These three firms -- US litigation ace Quinn Emanuel Urquhart & Sullivan and elite Australian litigation shops Corrs Chambers Westgarth and Johnson Winter & Slattery -- have doubled their chances at a piece of the pie.

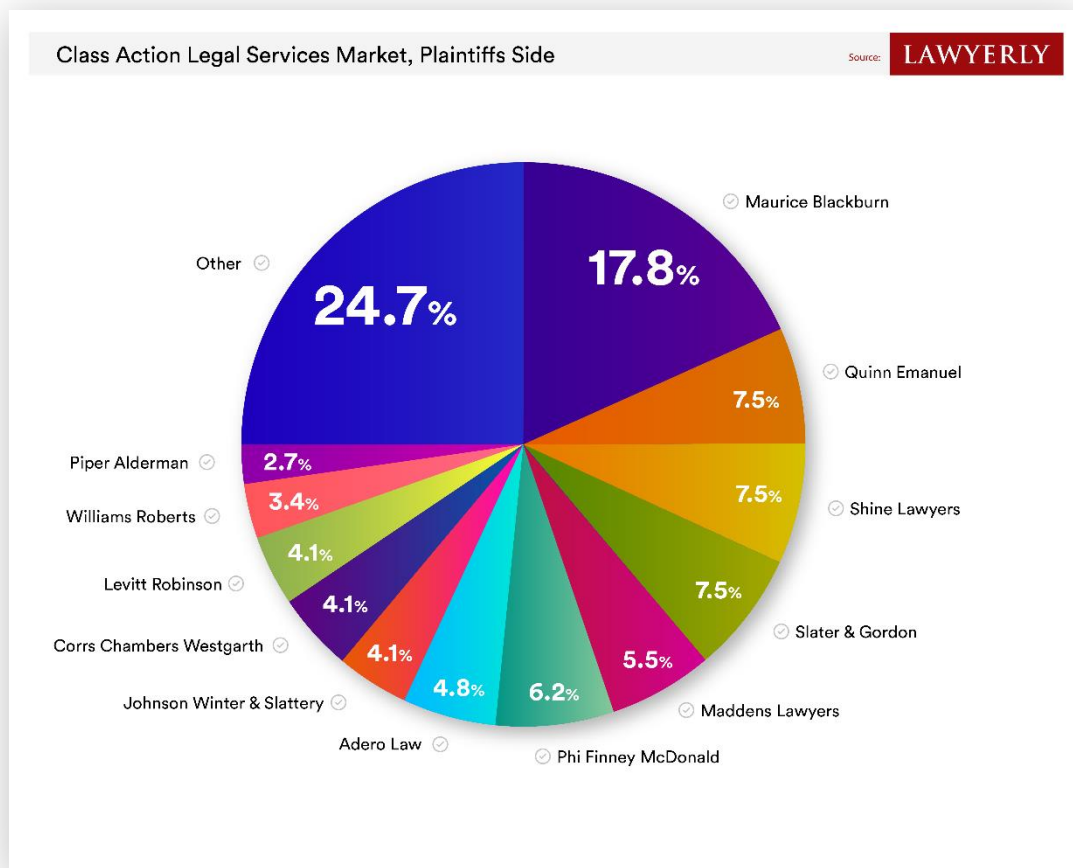
Quinn Emanuel is working on 14 class actions, 11 of which it filed on behalf of plaintiffs, while Corrs Chambers Westgarth and Johnson Winter & Slattery are working on 12 and 10 class actions, respectively. These firms are prosecuting 6 class actions each.

Established plaintiffs giants Slater and Gordon and Shine Lawyers have also landed spots on Lawyerly's Powerhouses list. Along with Maurice Blackburn and Quinn Emanuel, the firms are driving the class actions market, having each filed eleven of the class actions that are before the courts.

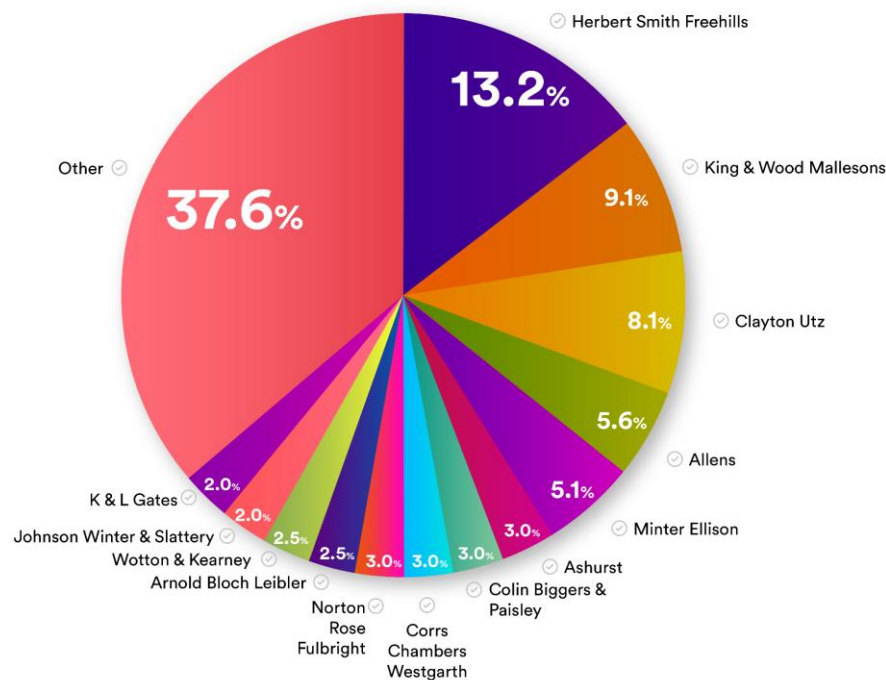
## Snapshot of the market for class action work

There are currently 139 active class actions before the courts, 87 in the Federal Court, 34 in the NSW Supreme Court, 11 in the Victoria Supreme Court and 7 in the Queensland Supreme Court. (Lawyerly's ranking also included one group matter in the WA Supreme Court, which is not technically a class action.)

In total, 82 law firms are representing either the plaintiffs or defendants in one or more class action proceedings. Despite its dominance, Maurice Blackburn has just 18 per cent of the plaintiffs-side class action work. Forty-two law firms are representing the plaintiffs in one or more class action before the courts.



On the class action defence side, there's even more work to go around. While Herbert Smith Freehills is the dominant player by far, it has just 13 per cent of the market. Fifty-two law firms are representing the respondents in one or more active class actions.



In assigning equal weight to each matter, Lawyerly's analysis of the class action legal market does not account for the complexity and worth of the matters themselves, nor the billing rates charged by the firms working on them.

Eleven law firms are working on both sides of the aisle in class action proceedings. They are Baker McKenzie, Clyde & Co, Corrs Chambers Westgarth, Johnson Winter & Slattery, Levitt Robinson, Mills Oakley, MinterEllison, Piper Alderman, Quinn Emanuel and William Roberts.

### A crowded bench: Competing class actions and multiple respondents

While much has been made of winners and losers in the class action beauty parade, a number of class actions before the courts are being jointly led or managed through cooperation agreements, including:

- the Dick Smith class actions (Corrs Chambers Westgarth and Johnson Winter & Slattery)
- the BHP class action (Maurice Blackburn and Phi Finney McDonald)
- the Vocation class action (Slater and Gordon and Maurice Blackburn)
- the Brambles class action (Slater and Gordon and Maurice Blackburn)
- the Bellamy's class action (Slater and Gordon and Maurice Blackburn)
- the AUSTRAC-related class actions against the Commonwealth Bank (Maurice Blackburn and Phi Finney McDonald)

Note: while the RCR Tomlinson class actions have been consolidated, it's still not known if multiple firms will be running the case.

Still other class actions are being jointly managed by the courts, such as the VW emissions cheating litigation, which includes five class actions, and the toxic foam class actions against the Commonwealth of Australia.

Class actions are also generating considerable work on the defence side as more parties, such as auditors, executives and insurers, get dragged into proceedings. Thirty-five of the current class actions, or around 25 per cent, have more than one law firm at the defence table. All of these are cases involve multiple respondents or cross-respondents, an indication of the complexity of the matters and the increasing likelihood of a more complex settlement process.

And with more sophisticated players eyeing the class action market and more big fish on the line, this trend shows no sign of letting up.

*Methodology: With assistance from Monash Business School Professor Vince Morabito, we compiled a ranking of the firms involved in the most class actions using court databases, Lawyerly's database of 2,500+ articles and information provided by the firms themselves. Lawyerly was not able to identify defence counsel in seven of the 140 class actions before the courts.*