



**CHIEF JUSTICE'S CHAMBERS  
FEDERAL CIRCUIT AND FAMILY  
COURT OF AUSTRALIA**  
Owen Dixon Commonwealth Law Courts  
305 William Street, Melbourne Vic 3000  
Telephone: +61 3 8600 4355  
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17 September 2021

Presidents of each of the Bars and the Law Societies  
of the Australian legal profession

Dear Presidents,

As many registries of the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia (Divisions 1 and 2) (the Courts) continue to experience enduring lockdowns and restrictions, it is appropriate to recognise the extraordinary work that the profession has undertaken since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in March last year.

On behalf of the Judges, Registrars, Family Consultants and staff of the Courts, I wish to take this opportunity to thank each member of the profession for their extraordinary work in supporting their clients, their colleagues, and the Courts. In all jurisdictions of the Courts, practitioners have been professional, diligent, and quick to adapt to electronic hearings. In the family law jurisdiction in particular, practitioners have continued to prioritise the safety and welfare of vulnerable parties and children involved in court proceedings. The ability of the Courts to maintain necessary levels of access to justice in these challenging times is directly reliant upon the support and cooperation of the profession. That support and cooperation has been unwavering.

As we all know, it is highly likely that electronic hearings will continue in many registries for months to come. The pressures that this has and will place upon members of the profession, and their families, is not lost upon the Judges, Registrars, Family Consultants and staff of our Courts. We will continue to do all that we can to communicate and cooperate with the profession and support them going forward. To that end, the Courts will endeavour to accommodate any reasonable request made for extensions of time when necessary, and members of the profession should feel comfortable in jointly approaching the chambers of a Judge or Registrar with such requests where appropriate. Practitioners should not feel stressed



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if they need a brief suspension of an electronic hearing to attend to an unforeseen interruption. We recognise everyone is doing their best to cope with a range of competing demands in these challenging times.

During the lockdown in Victoria last year, I communicated to the Victorian Attorney-General that many of the matters listed in our Courts were urgent and priority cases, and that legal practitioners should be allowed to go into their chambers or offices where it was impractical to work from home. I will be writing to Attorneys-General in applicable States and Territories reiterating this message to them.

As we transition from the current restrictions, the Courts will continue to work with members of the profession to ensure that the need for fair hearings is balanced at all times with ensuring the safety of all who work in, and interact with, our Courts.

I once again commend all members of the profession for their continuous efforts and cooperation.

I ask that you distribute this letter to your members, and please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any concerns.

Yours sincerely

The Honourable Justice Alstergren  
Chief Justice  
Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia (Division 1)  
Chief Judge  
Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia (Division 2)