

MEDIA RELEASE



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Lawyers to Benefit from Single Entry to Online Commonwealth Courts

The Commonwealth Courts Portal was launched today by the Attorney-General, Robert McClelland, at the Commonwealth Law Courts building in Melbourne.

A first in Australia, the Portal is a single entry point to access secure web-based information about cases before any one of the three courts.

“The Portal will make life so much easier for lawyers – from their office they will be able to keep track of their cases, including documents filed and future events, as well as outcomes and orders made,” Chief Justice of the Family Court Diana Bryant said today.

It was made possible when all three courts adopted Casetrack, a case management system developed by the Family Court, and shared the infrastructure on which the system is based.

“In the future, the Portal will be a platform for the delivery of a range of other integrated e-services including lodging documents and applications on line,” Acting Chief Justice of the Federal Court Peter Gray said.

Services planned for the future include providing individuals with secure access to their information and the ability to attend hearings electronically with all the necessary information available in the one environment.

“For a court that seeks to provide access to justice to all Australians regardless of their geographic location, the Portal will significantly benefit people in rural and regional areas who will no longer have to travel to a registry or engage agents in the city to file their court documents,” Chief Federal Magistrate John Pascoe added.

Legal practitioners, through their firm, will be able to search for information in any of the three courts and have a view of the information which is specifically designed to suit the needs of the user, all through a single user ID and password.

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For more information, contact Janet Miller, Media Manager, Family Court of Australia, on 03 8600 4357 or 0438 285 741.

BACKGROUND



COMMONWEALTH COURT'S PORTAL

What is it?

The Commonwealth Courts Portal is a joint initiative of the Family Court of Australia, the Federal Court of Australia and the Federal Magistrates Court of Australia.

It is the interface through which all eCourt services can be delivered. As a single web-based gateway, it allows any authorised user – such as a lawyer, judge, litigant or journalist – to immediately see a list of their files or files of interest to them.

Benefits

Subject to their security profile and to the rules and practices of the particular jurisdiction, users will soon be able to undertake electronic transactions such as lodging documents, submitting draft orders, requesting hearing dates and accessing future listings.

The Portal should prove extremely helpful to an external litigator managing multiple files in multiple jurisdictions. They will be able to view all the files that they are a party to or in which they are briefed to appear.

Much of the information is sourced from Casetrack, the courts' case management system, however, using modern portal aggregation technology, it can be presented in a single, central way, providing greater convenience.

The Portal allows external users to engage with the court systems directly and search for information themselves without assistance from court counter staff. This do-it-yourself model has the potential to provide a faster, more convenient service for users and reduce the workload for registry staff associated with data entry and file searching.

The benefits to the profession, other users and the courts include:

- the use of one single user name and password to log on to any available e-service from any of the participating jurisdictions. This means they do not need to remember and maintain multiple passwords for multiple online systems

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- all court services will be delivered by a consistent easy-to-use consistent interface so lawyers and other users do not need to learn multiple systems
- courts can learn from each other's experience and share software development, implementation, support, maintenance and hosting costs associated with the portal facility
- users will be able to see all relevant files and associated information as soon as they log onto the system rather than having to trawl manually through multiple systems and internet locations to locate it from disparate sources
- extended hours of access to court services.

The Future

At present the Portal is delivery platform that is secure and reliable.

It is anticipated that the Portal will provide electronic lodgement of documents in August 2008 and users will be able to lodge initiating documents in the first quarter of 2009.

The Commonwealth Courts Portal has the potential to deliver a range of different services. Subject to consultation with users, these may include:

- The capacity to remotely file new or supplementary documents and forms without attending court and more quickly than by post.
- Automatic generation of documents that incorporate data already entered into Casetrack.
- All information related to a file, including events, results, outcomes, orders, party contact details, documents lodged and dialogue exchanged, to be available.
- Information relating to documentary evidence to be held in only one location.
- Transcript information that is integrated with the electronic courtfile and duplicate of data will be avoided.
- Judgments linked into the document lists of the files to which they relate.
- A fee payment system with the capacity to manage corporate accounts and credit card payments, to generate transaction reports for individual law firms or organisations and enable the user to download summaries of e-lodgement transactions.

Other possibilities include:

- eSearching of court files
- eCourtroom – interactive collaborative forums for interlocutory proceedings
- On-line Orders – parties can submit drafts and the judge can post final orders
- eTrials – integration of the official court record with large scale collections of electronic evidence.

Cost

The development costs of the Portal were shared between the three courts and were approximately \$1 million.

At this stage, it is not expected that there will be any additional fees or costs for users.

Security/Privacy

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There is a secure connection between the user and the information. The information is provided in subsets rather than complete files and there is an identification and authentication process that each user must go through.

All the Courts taken the privacy of parties and the confidentiality of their file material very seriously. As each stage is rolled out, this aspect will be closely monitored.

Payment

A system of payment is being developed in consultation with users to take account of the different needs of self represented litigants as well as major international law firms.

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