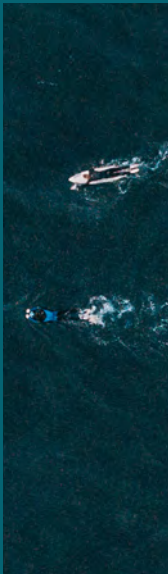


Community and international engagement

This part outlines how the Federal Court works beyond the courtroom to support access to justice, strengthen public understanding of its role, and contribute to the development of the legal system in Australia and internationally. Through court support services, community engagement and international collaboration, this work helps court users, builds confidence in the administration of justice, and reinforces the Federal Court's place in Australia's system of government and the wider legal community.



Supporting accessible justice

Accessible justice is central to public confidence in the administration of justice. The Federal Court’s work in this area includes supporting litigants in person, facilitating access to legal assistance, and ensuring Federal Court processes are as accessible and inclusive as possible.

One way the Federal Court contributes to accessible justice is through its promotion and facilitation of alternative dispute resolution processes, and the efficient resolution of disputes by registrars, as described in **Parts 3 and 5** of this Report. These measures go towards reducing the financial barriers that prolonged litigation can pose to accessing justice, as well as encouraging out-of-court settlements in less adversarial settings where parties are on more equal footing. In this **Part 6**, other ways the Federal Court contributes to accessible justice are explored.

Litigants in person and pro bono assistance

‘Litigants in person’ are people who appear in court without a lawyer to represent them. There are litigants in person across all areas of the Federal Court’s areas of practice. Litigants in person may be unrepresented for a range of reasons, including financial pressures and difficulties obtaining legal assistance. Some litigants in person may believe they simply do not need a lawyer.

Federal Court proceedings often involve complex legal and procedural issues. These can be very difficult to navigate for a person who does not have legal expertise. While judges and Federal Court staff can explain basic procedures to litigants in person, they cannot give legal advice. The Federal Court must ensure that all its proceedings are conducted fairly, efficiently and according to law.

The increasing number of litigants in person in the Federal Court raises important access to justice considerations. It also affects the way the Federal Court manages its proceedings, including to ensure that meritorious proceedings are given sufficient resources and that unmeritorious proceedings do not take up unnecessary time and cost.

The following data shows the scale and distribution of litigant in person (LIP) proceedings allocated to judges over the last three reporting years.

LIP allocations: 3 year comparison

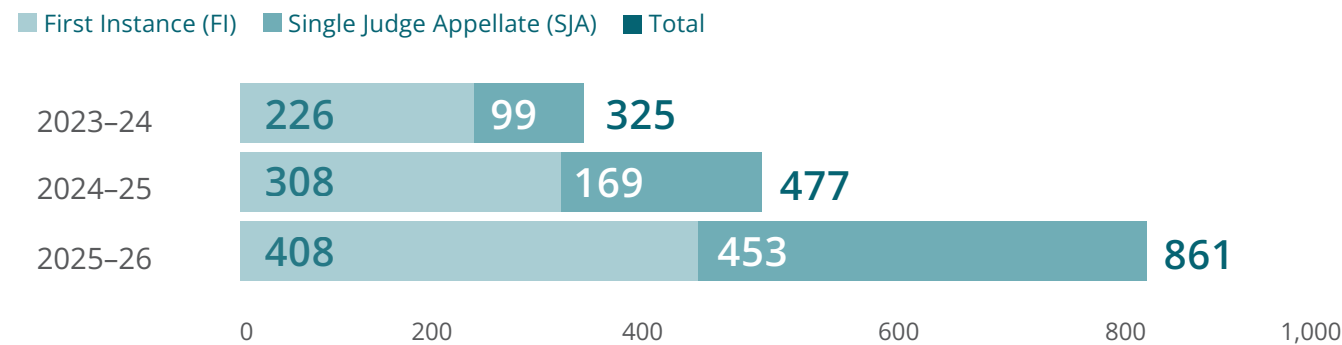


Figure 6.1: Proceedings commenced by litigants in person in the Federal Court’s original and appellate jurisdictions and allocated to judges over the last three financial years, by whether proceedings were First Instance (FI) or Single Judge Appellate (SJA) proceedings. Full Court litigant in person proceedings are excluded. Please refer to explanatory memorandum under table 6.2 for explanatory notes

Key trends in proceedings commenced by litigants in person and allocated to judges in 2025-26

The data shows a substantial increase in proceedings commenced by litigants in person and allocated to judges in 2025-26. Total allocations increased from 477 in 2024-25 to 861 in 2025-26, with the largest growth occurring in single judge appellate proceedings.

Migration proceedings accounted for more than half of all litigant in person allocations in 2025-26. Administrative and Constitutional Law and Human Rights, Commercial and Corporations,

and Employment and Industrial Relations proceedings also had significant numbers of litigants in person.

This distribution demonstrates why a coordinated Federal Court-wide response is required, combining early identification, clearer information, active case management and more targeted pro bono referral pathways.

Table 6.1 Proceedings commenced by litigants in person and allocated to judges over the last three financial years, by NPA and by whether proceedings were First Instance (FI) or Single Judge Appellate (SJA) proceedings. Full Court litigant in person proceedings are excluded.

LIP allocations by National Practice Area	2023–24			2024–25			2025–26		
	FI	SJA	Total	FI	SJA	Total	FI	SJA	Total
Administrative and Constitutional Law and Human Rights (excluding Migration)	88	10	98	110	11	121	120	17	137
Migration	64	69	133	88	127	215	106	380	486
Commercial and Corporations	34	5	39	55	13	68	91	18	109
Employment and Industrial Relations	22	10	32	27	10	37	51	30	81
Other NPAs (*)	18	5	23	28	8	36	40	8	48
Total	226	99	325	308	169	477	408	453	861

Table 6.2 LIP allocations by registry commenced

	2023–24			2024–25			2025–26		
	FI	SJA	Total	FI	SJA	Total	FI	SJA	Total
NSW	64	52	116	102	77	179	139	224	363
VIC	51	14	65	76	39	115	95	140	235
QLD	50	3	53	60	17	77	66	23	23
WA	33	19	52	42	21	63	61	38	99
SA	19	5	24	18	12	30	32	22	54
ACT	6	5	11	6	1)	7	11	5	16
TAS	3	1	4	3	0	3	2	1	3
NT	0	0	0	1	2	3	2	0	2
Total	226	99	325	308	169	477	408	453	861

(*) Explanatory memorandum for litigants in person data:

Reporting scope:

- Includes:
 - Allocations of proceedings to judges where the applicant/appellant was a LIP at the time of allocation.
 - Other NPAs (*): due to smaller numbers, the allocations in the following NPAs have been grouped together: Intellectual Property, Native Title, Other Federal Jurisdiction (including Defamation), Taxation and Crime and other Federal Statutes
- Excludes:
 - Full Court LIP allocations
 - Reallocations of LIP proceedings: Reallocations are excluded to avoid proceedings being counted more than once.
 - Respondent LIP allocations: At the allocation stage, it is uncommon for the Court to have reliable information about whether a respondent is legally represented.
- Reporting period: The reporting period is determined by the date of allocation, not the filing date of the proceeding.
- LIP status: A party's representation status may change during the life of a proceeding. For consistency, the data in this report reflects LIP status at the time of allocation only. The report does not track changes in representation after allocation.

Litigants in Person and Pro Bono Project

The increasing volume of unrepresented litigants in the Court has major implications for litigants, the legal assistance sector and the Federal Court itself. To address these challenges and adopt a more coordinated approach to litigant in person proceedings, the Court established the 'Litigants in Person and Pro Bono Project' (the 'Project') in August 2024.

The Project is one of the most significant institutional access to justice initiatives undertaken by the Federal Court in recent years. It recognises that the ability of an unrepresented litigant to understand and participate in proceedings is closely connected to the fair, efficient and orderly administration of justice.

The work carries particular importance because litigants in person form a substantial and growing part of the Federal Court's workload. Proceedings with litigants in person often involve more correspondence, greater procedural guidance, closer case management and careful balancing of the needs of all parties. This places considerable demands on judges, judicial registrars and registry staff, while also reinforcing the Federal Court's responsibility to ensure that its processes remain accessible and fair.

The Project responds to these demands through a multifaceted approach including improving information available to litigants in person, strengthening early intervention and judicial registrar-led case management, developing clearer expectations about participation in proceedings, improving data collection and analysis, and refining pathways to legal assistance and pro bono referral. This work is practical, as well as principled. It assists individual litigants to better understand what is required of them and helps represented parties and the Federal Court manage proceedings more efficiently. It also supports the Federal Court's broader commitment to access to justice within the confines of its limited judicial and administrative resources.

A significant achievement during the reporting year was the publication of the **Litigants in Person Practice Note (GPN-LIP)**. The Practice Note was developed following extensive consultation. It sets out, in plain language, information about the role of the Federal Court, the responsibilities of litigants in person, expected standards of conduct, and options for obtaining legal assistance. To support accessibility for a broader range of court users, translations were made available in eight commonly used languages.

The size and importance of this work should not be underestimated. The Project has required sustained commitment from judges, judicial registrars and staff

across the Federal Court. This includes staff involved in project leadership, case management, registry operations, data analysis and communications. Their work is often detailed, practical and not always visible to the public. However, it is central to the Federal Court's ability to respond to a changing litigation environment. The dedication of all those involved has enabled the Federal Court to take a more structured, evidence-based and human-centred approach to the challenges presented by unrepresented litigants, while maintaining the independence and impartiality required of a Chapter III court.

Continuing support for litigants in person through the Litigants in Person and Pro Bono Project

Looking ahead, the Federal Court's focus will be on embedding the Litigants in Person and Pro Bono Project as a sustained part of its access to justice work. The Federal Court's data and experience from the reporting period shows that unrepresented litigants are not a short-term pressure, but an ongoing feature of the Federal Court's operating environment requiring consistent national attention.

The next phase of work will continue to strengthen early identification of litigants in person, clearer information about Federal Court processes and responsibilities, judicial registrar-led conferencing and case management where appropriate, and targeted referral pathways for legal assistance. These measures are important because they support fair participation by unrepresented parties while helping proceedings progress in a way that is orderly, efficient and fair to all.

This work will also depend on continued engagement with the legal profession, community legal organisations and legal assistance providers. Those relationships are essential to understanding the practical barriers faced by litigants in person and to ensuring that pro bono referrals and other support mechanisms are appropriately directed to where they can make the greatest difference.

Pro bono legal assistance

Pro bono legal assistance has long been an important part of supporting access to justice in Federal Court proceedings. The recent growth in litigant in person proceedings has underscored the continuing importance of this work. While the Federal Court cannot provide legal advice or representation, it maintains referral arrangements that enable certain litigants to be referred for pro bono assistance in appropriate proceedings.

The Federal Court Rules establish a procedure for pro bono referrals and make it clear that it is a decision for judges and judicial registrars as to whether a pro bono referral is appropriate in the circumstances.

Whether assistance is ultimately available depends on factors including practitioner availability and relevant expertise. Where pro bono assistance is provided, it can help a party understand the issues in dispute, prepare documents and evidence, comply with procedural requirements and participate more effectively in hearings, mediations and case management processes.

The Federal Court's pro bono referral arrangements operate across all areas of its jurisdiction. As litigant in person proceedings continue to increase, these arrangements provide an important mechanism for directing limited pro bono capacity to proceedings where assistance may make a practical difference.

During the reporting year, the Federal Court continued to review and strengthen its approach to pro bono referrals as part of the Litigants in Person and Pro Bono Project. This included widespread consultations with the community legal sector, legal practitioners and others. This work reflects the Federal Court's commitment to supporting access to justice while ensuring that referral pathways are clear, targeted and capable of operating effectively across all areas of jurisdiction.

In March 2026, the Federal Court and the Victorian Bar launched a 12-month pilot protocol to streamline referrals for pro bono legal assistance and amicus curiae appointments in the Victorian Registry. The pilot enables the Federal Court to use the Victorian Bar's online portal as a central mechanism for identifying barristers willing to accept pro bono referrals made by judges and judicial registrars.

Gratitude for pro bono support

The Federal Court is grateful to the members of the legal profession, community legal organisations and other legal assistance providers who contribute to pro bono legal assistance for parties in the Federal Court. Their contribution is generous, skilled and makes a significant difference to people who would otherwise have to navigate complex proceedings without representation. It can also assist the Federal Court and other parties by helping clarify issues, improve the preparation of material, support meaningful participation in mediation and hearings, and reduce avoidable delay. In this way, pro bono assistance supports not only individual litigants but also the broader operation of the Federal Court and the administration of justice.

Independent referrals

In some cases, the Federal Court may also appoint an independent lawyer as an 'amicus curiae' or 'contradictor'. Amicus curiae means 'friend of the Court', their role is to provide the Federal Court with impartial assistance, a broader perspective or legal expertise on a complex issue. Similarly, a contradictor can be appointed to provide the Federal Court with a balanced view on an issue on which there is no party to oppose the applicant's arguments.

Both these mechanisms support accessible justice by bringing into focus the broader implications of the legal issue for all affected parts of the community.

Interpreter services

Proceedings must be accessible to all participants, including those where English is not their primary language. Interpreter services play an important role in ensuring parties can participate effectively in hearings.

While parties must usually make their own arrangements for interpreters when required, the Federal Court arranges interpreter services where they require them for a hearing for litigants in person and for parties who qualify for fee exemptions. The Federal Court also provides accessible information on its website for parties who face language barriers when speaking to the Federal Court.

The Federal Court has developed a '**Working with Interpreters (GPN-INTERP)**' Practice Note to ensure that the use of interpreters (whether for spoken or signed language) promotes fair and efficient hearings.

The Federal Court does not have the resources to provide for translation of documents written in languages other than English. Parties are responsible for arranging the translation of documents for the Federal Court into English and the translation of Federal Court issued English documents into their own language to ensure understanding.

Community engagement and education

The Federal Court engages with the legal profession and the broader community to promote understanding of its role and to support developments within the legal system, while maintaining its impartiality as an institution.

Legal education and outreach

Judges contribute to legal education through lectures, conferences and professional events across Australia and internationally. These activities support legal education and promote engagement between the Federal Court, the profession and the community.

Supporting legal education

Judges often volunteer their time to preside over law-related competitions, such as 'moots' where law students and lawyers build their skills advocating for clients at mock hearings.

For example, over a three-week period from 4 September 2025 the African Australian Legal Network Mooting Competition was held in partnership with the Federal Court. Fourteen judges of the Federal Court participated in adjudicating the competition.

This provided competitors with an invaluable opportunity to receive feedback and develop advocacy skills in a true-to-life courtroom experience.

The Federal Court's facilitation of this event and others which strengthen diversity within the legal profession is grounded in a recognition of the importance of the profession reflecting the community it serves.

Clerkships and practical work experience

Throughout the reporting period, judges of the Federal Court continued to support programs coordinated by state Bar associations that provide opportunities for law students from diverse backgrounds who have limited connections within the legal profession or face financial barriers to entry.

Through the Victorian Indigenous Clerkship, New South Wales Indigenous Clerkship and Victorian Bar Diversity Clerkship programs, university students were welcomed into judges' chambers to gain first-hand insight into the work of the Federal Court, observe the day-to-day operation of chambers, and develop a greater understanding of the judicial system and the legal profession.

Student engagement

The Federal Court actively encourages its judges to engage with, and present classes to, young people from both high school and university.

This year Justice Collier coordinated the continuation of a recent initiative held at each of the Court's national registries, 'Inside the Courtroom: A Student's Guide to the Federal Court'. The sessions exposed law students to the court environment and facilitated open discussions with judges, judicial registrars, court officers, associates, and registry staff on the role of the Federal Court and its staff. This program provides young people with unique insights into the Federal Court's work, its role in society, and the varied career opportunities available.



Inside the Courtroom, hosted by Justice Collier held in Brisbane 2026

Next Generation Initiative

Since October 2024, the **Next Generation Initiative Practice Note (GPN-NGI)** has encouraged opportunities for junior counsel (early career barristers) to present substantive arguments in court hearings. While it is ultimately a matter for the parties to decide how their proceedings are presented, the Federal Court's objective is to foster the development of junior counsels' advocacy skills and court craft, contributing to the long-term strength of the legal profession.

The profession continues to engage with and actively discuss the initiative. On 15 April 2026, the ChIPs Australia and New Zealand (ANZ) Chapter, a professional organisation seeking to advance and connect women in technology, law and policy, hosted an event highlighting the initiative.

To assess the impact of the practice note, since its publication the Federal Court has been collecting high-level, de-identified data on counsel appearances during the three yearly Full Court and appellate sitting periods. Data so far collected from the November 2024, March, August and November 2025 sitting periods indicates a slight increase in appearances of junior counsel with substantial speaking roles. However, a larger dataset is required to more meaningfully assess trends and identify how the Federal Court can optimise this initiative.

Professional contribution and judicial learning

Judges contribute to legal research and law reform through publications, advisory roles and engagement with academic and professional bodies.

Simultaneously judges are themselves continually learning from the profession, community, and their peers from other judicial bodies to maintain the quality and consistency of their decision-making. Formal judicial education takes place through:

- courses offered by the National Judicial College of Australia which are an invaluable resource in refining judges' abilities to hear and determine proceedings fairly and efficiently,
- judges' conferences (refer to **Part 3** of this Report) often involve judicial education sessions. These often concern specific areas of law, practice and procedure relevant to the Federal Court, and may be delivered by current judges, retired judges, members of the academy or senior members of the legal profession,
- private seminars and conferences in Australia and internationally provide a further means for judges to stay informed on contemporary issues both across Australia and around the world.

Work with international jurisdictions

The Federal Court continued to play a significant role in strengthening judicial cooperation, professional exchange and institutional capability across the Asia-Pacific region during the reporting period. Through regional partnerships, bilateral court-to-court arrangements and judicial exchanges, the Federal Court worked with partner judiciaries to address common challenges relating to judicial leadership, case management, court administration, digitisation and access to justice. These activities aim to contribute to stronger justice institutions, enhanced regional cooperation and the promotion of judicial independence and the rule of law throughout the region.

Australia-Pacific Judicial Partnership

A significant development during the reporting period was the commencement of the Australia-Pacific Judicial Partnership (APJP), a major four-year, regional initiative funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), and implemented by the Federal Court of Australia. Commencing in December 2025, the APJP supports judicial cooperation and capacity development across fifteen Pacific partner courts spanning Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia. The Partnership focuses on judicial leadership, gender equity, case management, court administration and digital readiness, combining regional activities with ongoing technical assistance and locally led reform initiatives.

A key milestone for the Partnership was the Chief Justices' Leadership Forum, held in Nadi, Fiji, in February 2026. Organised jointly by the Federal Court of Australia and the New Zealand-funded Pacific Justice Sector Programme (PJSP), the Forum brought together Chief Justices and senior judicial leaders from 13 Pacific jurisdictions, together with representatives from Australia and New Zealand. The Forum effectively launched the APJP and provided an opportunity for judicial leaders to discuss judicial independence, constitutional governance, emerging regional challenges and the future direction of Pacific judiciaries. It also established the priorities that will guide APJP activities over coming year in supporting judicial leadership, case management, court administration and digitisation.

The Federal Court also launched an innovative judicial leadership initiative for women judicial officers. Delivered in partnership with the Pacific Association of Women Judicial Officers, the pilot program brought judges from the Solomon Islands, Tonga and the Republic of the Marshall Islands to Adelaide in May 2026 to participate in a professional development program. The visiting judges attended the International Association of Women Judges

Asia-Pacific Conference before undertaking individually tailored programs with Australian judicial officers, including judges from the Federal Court of Australia, the Supreme Court of South Australia and the District Court of South Australia. Feedback from the pilot was extremely positive and will inform development of a broader Judicial Collegium model focused on peer learning, professional exchange and leadership development.

The APJP's first major regional technical activity was the Regional Case Management Workshop held in Papua New Guinea in June 2026. The workshop brought together judges, registrars and senior court officials from 13 Pacific jurisdictions to examine practical approaches to reducing delay and improving the timely resolution of proceedings. Facilitated jointly by Justice Vandongen, Director Legal Operations Data & Analytics, Stephanie Sanders and Senior Judicial Registrar Jodie Burns from the Federal Court, together with Deputy Chief Justice Kandakasi, Justice Eliakim, and Registrar Augerea from Papua New Guinea, the workshop used an innovative format centred on panel discussions, peer exchanges and problem-solving sessions rather than traditional lecture-based approaches. Participants developed country-specific action plans to strengthen case management practices, improve registry systems and address common bottlenecks affecting court performance. Feedback indicated satisfaction levels exceeding 80 per cent, while the active participation of smaller jurisdictions including Tuvalu, Tokelau and Niue demonstrated the value of a genuinely regional approach to judicial reform.

The partnership also launched the Mana Grants facility, a small grants program enabling partner courts to address locally identified reform priorities—encouraging innovation and local ownership of reform activities.

Supporting court digitisation remained another important area of focus. During the reporting period, the Federal Court facilitated the delivery of 196 ex-service laptop computers to courts in nine Pacific countries, supporting digital capability, improving access to information and supporting more efficient court administration. Additional shipments are planned as part of a broader target donation of 300 laptops across the region.

APJP also established the foundations for future work through the development of regional strategies on court administration and digitisation. Upcoming regional workshops will focus on budget development and advocacy, staff competency frameworks, standard operating procedures, digital readiness, case management systems and e-filing technologies. These initiatives are intended to support sustainable institutional reform and strengthen long-term judicial capability across Pacific courts.

Papua New Guinea

Papua New Guinea remains one of the Court's closest and longest-standing judicial partners. During the reporting period, cooperation deepened through both regional activities under APJP and a new bilateral initiative supported by DFAT. Developed jointly by the Federal Court and the Papua New Guinea Centre for Judicial Excellence, the initiative focuses on peer-to-peer exchange to maximise the efficient resolution of proceedings, strengthening decision-making and judgment-writing skills and supporting institutional efforts to minimise delay. Activities include judicial fellowships in Australia, specialist workshops on decision-making and judgment writing, a train-the-trainer program and a series of technical webinars addressing contemporary topics such as artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, intellectual property, judicial ethics and leadership.

The Federal Court also participated in activities marking significant milestones for Papua New Guinea's judiciary. The opening of the new National Court complex in Port Moresby in September 2025 was attended by Justice Rofe on behalf of the Chief Justice, together with Justices Collier and Logan in their capacities as part-time judges of Papua New Guinea, and Justices Longbottom and Wheatley. The Federal Court marked the occasion through the presentation of a ceremonial lectern to the National and Supreme Courts of Papua New Guinea. The Chief Justice subsequently attended celebrations marking the 50th anniversary of Papua New Guinea's independence, reflecting the enduring relationship between the two judiciaries.

Solomon Islands

Judicial engagement between the Federal Court and the High Court of the Solomon Islands continued during the year. Two judges of the Solomons Islands High Court participated in a judicial fellowship in Adelaide in November 2025 and were hosted by both the Federal Court and Supreme Court of South Australia, as well participating in National College of Judicial Administration (NJCA) judicial orientation courses.

In February 2026, Justices Rangiah and Charlesworth together with Design Lead Digital Court Program, David Sweeting, visited the Solomons Islands as part of a judicial development program. The visit included interactive workshops on court craft for judges of the High Court and Magistrates Courts, as well as a Digitisation Workshop to enhance the technological capacity of court staff.



Solomon Islands Digitisation Workshop

Indonesia

The Federal Court continued its longstanding relationship with the Supreme Court of Indonesia, one of the Federal Court's most significant judicial partnerships in the region. During the reporting period, a senior delegation led by Chief Justice Mortimer visited Indonesia to further strengthen bilateral judicial cooperation and discuss future areas of collaboration. The delegation included Justice Burley, Justice O'Bryan, Justice Button, District Registrar VIC Tim Luxton and International Programs Manager, Martin Clutterbuck, and was supported by both the Indonesian Supreme Court and the DFAT.

Discussions focused on strengthening institutional cooperation and identifying opportunities for future collaboration under the Memorandum of Understanding between the two courts. Particular attention was given to commercial law, including cross-border insolvency, competition law and intellectual property law, judicial reform and specialist areas of jurisdiction, reflecting Indonesia's interest in strengthening judicial capability in areas relevant to economic development and investment. The Chief Justice gave keynote presentations to Indonesian judges on climate change related litigation.

The partnership also continued to support Judicial Fellowships and professional exchanges. During 2026, preparations were completed for four Indonesian judges to undertake Judicial Fellowships in Australia focusing on competition law, intellectual property, enforcement of foreign judgments and court operations. Each Fellowship is linked to the development of practical law reform initiatives for implementation within Indonesian courts.



Indonesian delegation

Philippines

The Federal Court also continued to strengthen its relationship with the Supreme Court of the Philippines. During the reporting period, Chief Justice Mortimer led a senior delegation comprising Justice Burley, Justice Sarah C Derrington, Justice Thawley and senior Federal Court officials District Registrar NSW & ACT, Paul Farrell, Nathan Price (Acting Chief Information Officer), Jimmy Mastorakos (Executive Director Corporate Strategy & Programs) and Martin Clutterbuck on an official visit hosted by the Supreme Court of the Philippines. The visit formed part of an expanding program of cooperation between the two institutions and built on ongoing dialogue concerning judicial reform, court administration and specialist areas of legal practice. It complemented broader collaboration under a developing bilateral program through which the Federal Court has contributed expertise to discussions concerning new court rules and procedural reforms being considered by the Philippine judiciary.

The relationship was further strengthened through regional cooperation activities. The Supreme Court of the Philippines contributed expertise at the Chief Justices' Leadership Forum, including discussions on court communications and the challenges posed by misinformation, demonstrating the growing role of the Philippines judiciary as a regional source of expertise and innovation.



Delegation visit to Australian Embassy

International judicial visits and eExchanges

The Federal Court continued to host judicial exchanges and study visits throughout the reporting period, providing opportunities for mutual learning and professional collaboration.

In April 2026, the Federal Court hosted a delegation from the High Court of Zimbabwe undertaking a study tour on court-assisted mediation. The delegation met with the Chief Justice and Federal Court judges and received briefings on the Court's mediation framework and dispute resolution practices from senior court personnel.

The Federal Court also welcomed visiting judges from Papua New Guinea under a judicial exchange program conducted in cooperation with the Queensland Supreme Court. Participants observed Australian court processes and engaged with judges on issues relating to court administration and judicial practice. The exchange was regarded as highly successful and further strengthened professional links between the two jurisdictions.

Other exchanges included a visit by 15 Pacific lawyers from Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Solomon Islands and Tonga participating in a regional advocacy training program and the continuation of a longstanding exchange arrangement with Japan under which a visiting judge examined the Federal Court's approach to expert evidence.

Through these activities, the Federal Court continued to contribute to stronger judicial institutions, deeper professional relationships and greater cooperation among courts throughout the Asia-Pacific region and beyond.



Visit by Zimbabwe High Court to Federal Court

Contributing to regional court development

Laptop donation program

Over the past 12 months, the Federal Court has established an innovative project to donate its ex-service laptops to Pacific partner courts to assist in boosting their digital capacity and develop e-services. Many of these courts have insufficient laptops to meet their needs and some island courts have currently no access to computers.

In line with regular equipment upgrades, the Federal Court replaces its laptops with new models every 3 years. While older laptops are typically sent to e-waste for recycling, they are however still in good condition and represent valuable assets for resource-strapped Pacific courts.

As of 30 June, laptop donations thus far have included the provision of 45 laptops to Vanuatu, 40 laptops each to Solomon Islands and Kiribati, 20 laptops each to Tonga and Naoero, 10 laptops to Federated States of Micronesia, 5 laptops to Marshall Islands, and 8 laptops each to Tuvalu and Tokelau. Courts have reported on the effective use of the laptops for Magistrates Courts on outer islands, to support mobile hotlines for Family Protection Orders, to facilitate improved data entry on court databases and for document preparation. Over coming months, laptop distribution will be expanded to Samoa, Niue, Fiji and Cook Islands.

Feedback by courts on the laptop donations has been extremely positive. In his opening for the 2026 Legal Year, Chief Justice Palmer of the Solomons Island High Court expressed his great appreciation to the Federal Court for the donation of the laptops, to be used by the court in their e-filing, electronic case management, and broader digital transformation efforts. The High Court of Kiribati advised that the laptops would be used to improve efficiency in remote island locations as well as in the Family Court, whilst the Magistrates

Court of Tonga noted the 'remarkable generosity' of the Federal Court and noted that the laptops would significantly enhance their operational efficiency, particularly in strengthening electronic case management processes and improving the timely handling of court proceedings.

Whilst the laptops are donated by the Federal Court at no cost, the absence of a shipping budget has required the Federal Court to be creative and rely upon the generosity of other actors to meet these costs. This has included financial support from DFAT, the New Zealand government funded Pacific Justice Sector Program (PJSP), the Australian Federal Police, various embassies and the Federal Court budget.

The Federal Court hopes that the initiative can provide a model for the greater institutionalisation of low-cost, high-impact technical support to Pacific partner countries. As the regular replacement of laptops is a standard practice across most government entities, the Federal Court hopes that such projects might be replicated across other government justice and judicial actors thus allowing Pacific partner communities to benefit from the greater use of technology for improved access to justice.

As at 30 June 2026, a total of 196 laptops has been distributed to 10 jurisdictions (Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Naoero, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu), with more to follow in coming months. A total of 300 laptops have been set aside by the Federal Court for donation.

Under its 4-year DFAT-funded APJP, the International Program Unit within the Federal Court works to promote digital tools, services and readiness for 15 Pacific courts through technical support, regional workshops and training opportunities. The donation of laptops provides a practical complement to the soft skills digital agenda, providing courts with the hardware necessary to increase efficiency and promote greater access to justice for their communities.



Laptop donation to Pacific courts