

PART 2



Year in review and looking ahead





Chief Justice's year in review

Chief Justice Debra Mortimer

The reporting period has been one of sustained activity and significant institutional development across all aspects of the work of the Federal Court of Australia. The work of the Federal Court has continued to demand adaptability, careful stewardship of resources, and a strong collective commitment from Judges, Judicial Registrars and staff to ensure that the Federal Court discharges its functions effectively as a contemporary national court.

The Federal Court has operated in an environment marked by substantial and evolving pressures, including higher demand on its resources, changing expectations of court users, increasing complexity of proceedings in the Federal Court's original jurisdiction, an exponential rise in the numbers of litigants in person and continuing transformation in the technological and broader context in which justice is administered. In response, the Federal Court has developed new practice notes in a number of areas, refined our Rules, continued to work on Judge-led projects directed to the efficient and effective management of our work, encouraged all Judges and Judicial Registrars to participate in judicial education and professional development, ensured there are opportunities throughout the year to engage with the profession, the community and each other about our work, and sought new funding from government for new advancements and initiatives.

At the same time, the Federal Court is preparing for a defining institutional milestone—the forthcoming 50th Anniversary of its establishment in December 1976 and its first sitting in February 1977. Planning for this anniversary has provided an opportunity to involve retired and current Judges, and the legal profession. Most of the planned events will be available to all members of the Australian community. The 50th anniversary, spanning 2026 and 2027, will give us all a chance to reflect on the Federal Court's contribution to law and the Australian community over the past five decades, and also to articulate its future direction as a modern, nationally integrated judicial institution.

Judicial appointments

During the reporting period, the Federal Court welcomed the appointment of Justice Craig Lenehan, who commenced as a Judge of the Court in February 2026.

The Federal Court has, in recent years, experienced a significant degree of renewal in its composition. The Federal Court offers a peer group induction program to all newly appointed Judges to support their transition to judicial office, and in the reporting period conducted some specific judicial education for more recently appointed judges. The 'Recently Appointed Judges' Workshop' took place in November 2025. The workshop brought together more than 30 Judges who had been appointed within the last three years or so, representing almost half the Federal Court. The program was designed to provide an opportunity for participants to reflect on their experience, engage with senior colleagues, and share practical approaches to managing workload, conducting hearings and delivering judgments.

The workshop was delivered in a peer-to-peer format, encouraging open discussion and the exchange of perspectives. It also provided an opportunity to build collegial relationships across registries, which is particularly significant for a national court operating across multiple jurisdictions.

I am grateful to those judges who contributed to the program, including senior members of the Federal Court who shared their experience and insights. Initiatives of this kind play an important role in supporting judicial capability and promoting a cohesive and effective bench.

During the reporting period, the Commonwealth Attorney-General announced the commencement of a Panel process to fill upcoming vacancies in the Federal Court. Expressions of interest were invited as part of that process. That appointment process continues as at the date of this report.

Discharge of the Court's judicial caseload

The Federal Court continues to manage a substantial and complex caseload across its jurisdictions.

The Federal Court remains focused on ensuring that its caseload is managed effectively and efficiently, while retaining a focus on fair processes, opportunities for negotiated outcomes, and careful deliberation on disputes that must be resolved by judicial decision.

Part 3 addresses the Federal Court's work in 2025–26 and explains how caseload data were collected.

The reporting period again demonstrated the scale and breadth of the Federal Court's national caseload. In 2025–26, 6,010 proceedings were filed in the Federal Court. Under the National Court Framework (NCF), which provides an overarching structure for the Federal Court's caseload, 37 per cent were original jurisdiction proceedings allocated to Judges, 14 per cent were appellate proceedings allocated to Judges, and 49 per cent were proceedings allocated directly to Judicial Registrars.

Overall filings increased by 9 per cent compared with 2024–25. The increase was not uniform across the Federal Court's work, with the most pronounced growth recorded in appellate filings, which increased by 22 per cent. This continued growth is consistent with the broader pressures described in this review and reinforces the importance of active case management, careful allocation of judicial and Judicial Registrar resources, and ongoing refinement of the Court's practices and procedures.

Of the proceedings allocated to Judges, 3,100 proceedings were filed, representing a year-on-year increase of 12 per cent. During the same period, 2,686 proceedings were finalised, representing a year-on-year increase of 4 per cent.

The finalisation rate for Judge-allocated proceedings was 87 per cent. Although this was higher than the previous reporting period, it remained below the rates recorded in 2022–23 and 2023–24, when finalisation rates were 103 per cent and 101 per cent respectively. That result principally reflects the continuing growth in filings. Since 2022–23, filings have increased by 42 per cent, with annual increases of between 8 per cent and 18 per cent. Finalisations have also increased overall, by 21 per cent since 2022–23, but not at a rate sufficient to maintain the earlier finalisation rates.

The Federal Court published 2,016 judgments during the 2025–26 period. Of those judgments, 81 per cent were delivered within three months of being reserved and 91 per cent within six months. These results were broadly consistent with 2024–25, when 83 per cent of judgments were delivered within three months and 91 per cent within six months.

On average, there were 2.3 months between the date a judgment was reserved and the date it was delivered, comprising an average of 1.6 months for single judge judgments and 3.1 months for Full Court judgments. This was longer than the average of 1.6 months recorded in the 2024–25 reporting period, and should be understood in the context of the continuing increase in judgment output. In 2024–25, 1,720 judgments were delivered; by comparison, the Federal Court delivered 2,016 judgments in 2025–26, an increase of approximately 17 per cent.

New funding: Australian Competition Tribunal

During the 2025–26 reporting period, the Federal Court received an additional allocation of funding through the Federal Budget to support the work of Judges of the Federal Court on the Australian Competition Tribunal.

In late 2024, Parliament enacted substantial reforms to Australian merger and acquisition laws through the *Treasury Laws Amendment (Mergers and Acquisitions Reform) Act 2024* (Cth). The reforms came into full effect on 1 January 2026. They introduce a mandatory notification requirement for acquisitions which apply when certain thresholds set by regulation are met. The prohibition on anti-competitive mergers in s 50 of the *Competition and Consumer Act 2010* (Cth) no longer applies to notifiable acquisitions. Rather, under the new regime, parties to a notifiable acquisition are prohibited from putting the acquisition into effect until the acquisition has been considered and approved by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission. Parties to the transaction and other interested persons may seek review of the Commission's merger decisions in the Australian Competition Tribunal. The amendments are expected to increase substantially the number of applications for review made to the Tribunal.

Although the Tribunal is independent of the Federal Court, its presidential members are required to be Judges of the Federal Court. Justice Michael O'Bryan is the President of the Tribunal. The Deputy Presidents of the Tribunal are Justices Mark Moshinsky, Sarah C Derrington, John Halley, Kylie Downes, Jonathan Beach, Catherine Button, Penelope Neskovicin and Cameron Moore. The Registrars of the Tribunal are all Judicial Registrars of the Federal Court, and administrative support is provided by Court staff. The Federal Court administers the Tribunal's funding.

Significant efforts have gone into preparing the Tribunal for its expected caseload under the reforms. Part of this work has involved ongoing engagement with government to ensure that the Tribunal is resourced sufficiently for it to perform its existing and expanded functions.

The Federal Government has committed \$16.049 million to the Federal Court over the forward estimates for the measure, of which \$1.396 million was received in 2025–26 reporting period. Separate funding has also been provided for necessary corporate services to support this additional work. I take the opportunity to say more about the provision of corporate services below.

The Competition Tribunal reforms will provide funding for two additional Judges, Tribunal members, and other support staff, including necessary IT staff. The appointment of two additional Judges to the Federal Court recognises that the work of the Tribunal will divert some of the capacity of existing Judges away from Federal Court work. The funding also provides for the development of a case management system and other digital infrastructure to support the Tribunal's work. These are exciting developments for the Tribunal and, by extension, the Federal Court.

Litigants in Person and Pro Bono Project

The Litigants in Person and Pro Bono Project has been a central focus of the Federal Court's work during the reporting period, reflecting the increasing prevalence and impact of unrepresented litigants on the Federal Court's operations.

As outlined in my address to the Commonwealth Law Conference in February 2026, and also in my address at the Council of Australasian Tribunals Whitmore Lecture in June 2026, matters involving litigants in person now comprise a significant proportion of the Federal Court's workload. Data collected by the Federal Court indicates that, as at December 2025 approximately 19 per cent of proceedings in Judges' dockets involve at least one litigant in person, being 552 proceedings out of the 2,850 proceedings before the Federal Court in total. Across these proceedings, a substantial majority involved unrepresented applicants, with a smaller but notable proportion involving unrepresented respondents.

The data also indicates that litigants in person are concentrated within several of the Federal Court's National Practice Areas (NPAs), including the Commercial and Corporations NPA, the Administrative and Constitutional Law and Human Rights NPA, which includes migration, and the Employment and Industrial Relations NPA.

Proceedings involving litigants in person have a disproportionate impact on the Federal Court's resources. These proceedings typically involve substantially higher levels of correspondence, more frequent interlocutory applications, and more intensive case management. Comparative sampling undertaken by the Federal Court indicates that such proceedings may involve two to three times

the number of listings, orders and communications compared to proceedings where all parties are represented.

These developments have informed a coordinated and structured response through the Litigants in Person and Pro Bono Project, which represents one of the most significant institutional initiatives undertaken by the Federal Court in recent years. I am grateful to my colleagues Justice Craig Colvin and Senior Judicial Registrar Claire Hammerton Cole for leading this project. Working with them have been a number of other staff members: I also thank Olivia Duce, Justin Ramsay and Tameea Lock.

The Project adopts a multi-faceted approach, including:

- enhanced early intervention through Judicial Registrar-led case management
- improved access to information and guidance for litigants
- strengthened and more targeted pro bono referral pathways
- development of clearer expectations through a practice note
- improved data collection and analysis to inform ongoing reform.

A key initiative during the reporting period was the promulgation of the Litigants in Person Practice Note (GPN-LIP) in March 2026. The practice note sets out, in plain English, information about how the Federal Court operates and what a person must do if they choose to represent themselves, including expected standards of behaviour. Judges have begun to apply the practice note to proceedings involving litigants in person. The Practice Note has been translated into the eight most frequently used languages other than English in the Federal Court.

Other initiatives include changes to the way that litigant in person proceedings are allocated to Judges and Judicial Registrars, improved linking of litigants in person with 'relevant' advice services, new procedures to deal with the filing of documents, targeted pro bono referrals for mediation, and improved consultation with the community legal sector.

The Project recognises that supporting litigants in person is resource-intensive and requires coordinated engagement across Judges, judicial registrars and staff. It also requires person-to-person contact: website resources and links are not enough. The Project also recognises that, just as legal representatives have a suite of obligations that govern how they engage with the Federal Court, so too it is reasonable to expect certain standards of behaviour and engagement from litigants in person, with consequences if those standards are not met.

The Federal Court's 50th Anniversary

Planning for the Federal Court of Australia's 50th Anniversary in 2027 has been a major and unifying focus during the reporting period, providing an opportunity to reflect on the Federal Court's contribution to law over the past five decades and to consider its future as a contemporary national court.

The Anniversary is being approached not as a single event, but as a coordinated national program of initiatives designed to reflect the Federal Court's unique structure and presence. Planning is now well advanced, with a series of interconnected activities be delivered across 2026 and 2027.

A central element of the program is the 12-part National Practice Area Seminar Series, which commenced in July 2026. Delivered across each of the Federal Court's NPAs and livestreamed nationally, the series will provide an opportunity to reflect on the evolution of the Federal Court's jurisprudence, to engage with contemporary issues in each area of practice, and to facilitate dialogue with the profession about the future direction of federal litigation.

I encourage any readers of this Report who are interested in the Federal Court's past work and future directions to register to attend a seminar where they live. The seminars are each also livestreamed, including to a courtroom in every registry. The presentations will be preserved and remain available on the Federal Court's 50th Anniversary website.

The dedicated 50th Anniversary website is in development and will serve as a central platform for Anniversary activities. The website will include an interactive timeline drawing on archival material, documenting key moments in the Federal Court's history and the development of its work. It will also include forward-looking content reflecting the Federal Court's current priorities and areas of reform. In parallel, digital displays will be installed across all registries, incorporating material from the Federal Court's art collection and archival holdings to ensure that the anniversary is visible and accessible across the Federal Court's national footprint.

Another focal point of the Anniversary will be a national ceremonial sitting, to be held on 8 February 2027, marking, as close as practicable, 50 years since the Federal Court first sat on 7 February 1977. Reflecting the Federal Court's identity as a national institution, the sitting will be conducted simultaneously across all registries and livestreamed nationally, enabling participation by the profession and the broader community.



The Federal Court has approached its planning with a strong emphasis on creativity, collaboration and the effective use of existing resources. The initiatives being developed draw on the Federal Court's institutional strengths, including its people, its collections and its relationships with the profession and external partners.

Taken together, these activities are designed to ensure that the 50th Anniversary is both reflective and forward-looking. They provide an opportunity to acknowledge the Federal Court's history and the contribution of those who have shaped it, while also articulating a clear and confident vision for its future.

Preserving institutional history—Archives Alive

The unveiling of a permanent display honouring the late Professor Paul Finn represents a significant milestone in the Federal Court's Archives Alive initiative and is an expression of the Federal Court's commitment to preserving and actively engaging with its institutional history.

Paul Finn's contribution to Australian law was profound and enduring. As both a pre-eminent legal scholar and a judge of this Federal Court from 1995 to 2012, his work—particularly in the field of fiduciary obligations—has had a lasting influence on the development of Australian jurisprudence. His intellectual legacy continues to inform contemporary legal thought, and his contribution to the Federal Court's work is widely recognised.

The display brings together a collection of artefacts reflecting both his academic and judicial life. The establishment of the display has been made possible through the generous contribution of materials by Professor Suzanne Corcoran, and reflects a strong sense of custodianship shared by those connected with the Federal Court. The display is located outside the Federal Court Registry on Level 5 of the Commonwealth Law Court building in Adelaide.

This work is of particular significance as the Federal Court approaches its 50th Anniversary. By preserving and sharing the contributions of those who have shaped the Federal Court, initiatives such as Archives Alive provide an important foundation for reflection, while also informing the Federal Court's ongoing development as a national institution.



The late Hon Paul Finn 'Archives Alive' display in the Commonwealth Law Court building, South Australia

Practice and procedure

The reporting period has involved a substantial program of work directed towards the review and refinement of the Federal Court's practices and procedures, reflecting both changing expectations of court users and the increasing complexity of the environment in which the Federal Court operates.

Federal Court Amendment (2026 Measures No 1) Rules 2026

Amendments to the Federal Court Rules 2011 were made during the reporting period through the Federal Court Amendment (2026 Measures No 1) Rules 2026, which commenced on 11 June 2026.

These amendments form part of the Federal Court's ongoing program of procedural refinement and respond to issues identified through practice, consultation and the Federal Court's broader reform work, including those arising from increasing levels of litigants in person, and the evolving use of technology in proceedings.

As outlined in the Federal Court's notice to the profession dated 11 June 2026, the amendments include measures directed to improving the clarity, efficiency and operation of the Federal Court's procedures. These measures address procedural aspects of case management and the conduct of original jurisdiction and appellate proceedings, including matters associated with filing, interlocutory processes and the management of documents.

The amendments also operate in conjunction with broader reforms to practice notes and procedural guidance, forming part of a coordinated approach to ensuring that the Federal Court's procedural framework remains fit for purpose in a changing litigation environment.

New appeal rules and case management of Full Court and appellate proceedings

Among the amendments introduced by the Federal Court Amendment (2026 Measures No 1) Rules 2026 were changes to how parties must prepare appeal books and other materials in advance of appeals. The new rules are designed to streamline the process, such as by dispensing with the need for parties to prepare what was known as 'Part B' of an appeal book.

These amendments complement the revised appeals practice note (**Case Management of Full Court and Appellate Matters (APP-1)**), published on 21 July 2025, which provides updated guidance on the conduct and management of appellate proceedings.

Together, these changes are intended to support consistency in appellate practice and provide clear guidance for parties and practitioners on the preparation and conduct of appeals. It also reflects the Federal Court's ongoing focus on ensuring that appellate work is managed efficiently, taking into account the complexity and importance of proceedings determined at that level.

Use of generative artificial intelligence

Developments in generative artificial intelligence have been a significant focus for the Federal Court during the reporting period.

The increasing availability and use of these tools by litigants and practitioners presents both opportunities and risks for the administration of justice. While such technologies have the capacity to assist in the preparation of documents and the presentation of arguments, they also raise concerns about accuracy, reliability and accountability.

On 16 April 2026, the Federal Court issued practice note guidance on the use of generative artificial intelligence in proceedings (**Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence Practice Note (GPN-AI)**). This guidance emphasises that, regardless of the tools used, parties remain responsible for the content of material presented to the Federal Court. The use of artificial intelligence does not displace the obligations of practitioners or litigants to ensure the accuracy and propriety of submissions.

The Federal Court's approach to this issue has been informed by consultation and careful consideration. As with other areas of technological change, the challenge lies not in the existence of the technology, but in how it is used and the extent to which it can be relied upon.

The Federal Court recognises that developments in this area are occurring rapidly. The Judges have endorsed an approach that is measured and adaptable. Work will continue to monitor developments, consider feedback from the profession and court users, and determine whether further guidance or procedural changes are required.

National General Protections List

A significant development during the reporting period has been the permanent adoption of the National General Protections List following the successful completion of its pilot phase.

The List was established as a pilot program on 1 September 2024 to support the initial case management of proceedings filed under the general protections provisions of the *Fair Work Act 2009* (Cth). It was designed to provide a more structured and nationally consistent approach to the early stages of these proceedings, which often involve unrepresented parties and require careful and active case management.

During the pilot phase, the List was overseen by Justices Darryl Rangiah and Elizabeth Raper, with Judicial Registrar-led case management playing a central role in its operation. The model emphasised early intervention, including initial triaging, targeted directions hearings and timely referral to mediation.

The outcomes of the pilot demonstrate the effectiveness of this approach. As at 30 September 2025, after the end of the pilot phase, 125 proceedings had been case managed within the List. A high proportion of these proceedings were referred to mediation at an early stage, and a substantial number were resolved without the need for allocation to a docket judge for final hearing.

These results highlight the capacity of structured, Judicial Registrar-led case management to improve the efficiency and timeliness of proceedings, particularly in jurisdictions where litigants may be unrepresented and where early resolution is often achievable.

The permanent adoption of the List promotes consistency in the management of general protections proceedings across all registries and supports more effective use of judicial resources. It also reflects the Federal Court's broader focus on early intervention and active case management as key components of an efficient and accessible system of civil justice.

I acknowledge the significant contribution of Justices Rangiah and Raper, and the work of National Judicial Registrar Amelia Edwards (now a Judge of the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia (Division 2)) and Judicial Registrar Helen Donovan, whose leadership and commitment were central to the success of the pilot and its transition to a permanent List.

Registry leadership and organisational reform

The reporting period has seen developments in the governance and organisational capability of the Federal Court, reflecting both the scale of its workload and the increasing complexity of its operations.

A key development has been the appointment of Nicola Colbran as Deputy Principal Registrar, effective from 17 November 2025. The establishment and filling of this role represents an important strengthening of leadership within the Federal Court.



Deputy Principal Registrar Nicola Colbran

The Deputy Principal Registrar has responsibility for the management and coordination of the Federal Court's Registrar cohort and the legal staff who support them nationally. The role also supports the Chief Justice and the Chief Executive Officer and Principal Registrar in the development and implementation of strategic initiatives and in the management of the Federal Court's operational and resourcing priorities. The creation of this position reflects the growing scale of Judicial Registrar-led work and the need for greater coordination across jurisdictions and registries.

During the reporting period, the Federal Court also introduced a simplified and more consistent suite of Judicial Registrar titles. There was a comprehensive consultation process with Registrars before the Chief Justice confirmed the adoption of the revised titles. While these changes do not alter the substantive functions performed by Judicial Registrars, they provide greater clarity about roles and responsibilities of Judicial Registrars and improve understanding of the Judicial Registrar function both within the Court and externally.

A further and more substantial reform has been the realignment of Judicial Registrar work between the Federal Court of Australia and the general federal law area of the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia (FCFCOA) (Division 2). Following a formal agreement between myself and Chief Justice William Alstergren, responsibility for general federal law work undertaken by Judicial Registrars within the FCFCOA (Division 2) has been transferred to that Court. From 1 July 2026, Federal Court Judicial Registrars will now only perform work in Federal Court proceedings.

This reform has required a staged transition of functions and personnel, including the movement of a number of Judicial Registrars and staff to new reporting arrangements within the FCFCOA (Division 2). The transition was implemented progressively and was completed on 1 July 2026.

The reform represents a significant organisational change. It provides clearer delineation of responsibilities between the two courts, reduces duplication of functions, and supports more effective and autonomous operation of each institution. For the Federal Court, it ensures that Judicial Registrars are dedicated exclusively to the work of the Federal Court, strengthening its capacity to manage its caseload and support judicial functions in a more focused and efficient way.

These developments form part of a broader program of organisational refinement, ensuring that the Federal Court's structures, leadership and resources are aligned with the demands of its jurisdiction and the needs of those who engage with it.

Registry visits and stakeholder engagement

As I do each year, this year I undertook visits to each of the Federal Court's eight registries, continuing a program of regular engagement with Judges, Judicial Registrars, staff, the legal profession and the wider legal community.

These visits provide an important opportunity to meet directly with members of the Court in each registry, including individual meetings with Judges, meetings with Registrars and engagement with registry teams, chambers staff and those working in corporate and administrative roles. They also include discussions with representatives of the independent Bar and law societies in each jurisdiction, where I receive direct feedback on the operation of the Federal Court and its processes and provide important updates and reminders to the profession.

In addition to these established engagements, each year the visits incorporate a particular focus area. In 2026, that focus has been engagement with the community legal sector. Meetings with community legal organisations in each jurisdiction have been well attended and have provided valuable insight into the experience of litigants, particularly those who are vulnerable or unrepresented. We have had the opportunity to listen to the perspectives and suggestions of the community justice sector about the practical operation of Court processes, and what we might do differently.

These discussions have been informed by, and in turn have informed, the Federal Court's broader reform work, including initiatives under the Litigants in Person and Pro Bono Project. They have provided practical feedback about areas where processes are working effectively, as well as identifying opportunities for improvement.

The Federal Court has also continued its 'Inside the Courtroom' initiative, which has now been established as a national program. Coordinated this year by Justice Berna Collier, the initiative provides law students with an opportunity to attend the Federal Court, engage directly with Judges and staff, and gain insight into the work of the Federal Court and potential career pathways. The continued success of this program reflects the importance of structured engagement in building understanding of the Federal Court's role and operations.

Strengthening access and participation

In February 2026, the Federal Court formalised its participation in the Indigenous Clerkship Program through a Memorandum of Understanding with the Victorian Bar.

The program provides structured opportunities for Indigenous law students to engage with the Federal Court and the profession, supporting pathways into legal careers and contributing to greater diversity within the legal system.

The Federal Court is actively looking for further contributions it can make towards a future where the legal profession, the Federal Court itself and its Judicial Registrars and staff are appropriately representative of the communities that they serve.

International and regional engagement

The Court has maintained a significant and active program of international and regional judicial engagement during the reporting period, reflecting its ongoing commitment to judicial cooperation and support for the rule of law across the region.

In September 2025, I led a delegation to the Supreme Court of the Philippines, accompanied by Justices Stephen Burley, Sarah Derrington and Thomas Thawley, together with senior court staff providing expertise in registry operations, corporate strategy and information technology. The program included judicial exchanges, seminars and visits to regional courts, providing opportunities for the sharing of expertise across both substantive law and court administration.

This was followed by a visit to Indonesia with Justice Burley, Justice Michael O'Bryan, Justice Catherine Button and District Registrar Tim Luxton, undertaken pursuant to the Federal Court's longstanding Memorandum of Understanding with the Supreme Court of Indonesia. This partnership, now spanning more than two decades, is the Federal Court's longest standing formal international relationship and underpins engagement on issues including judicial leadership, commercial dispute resolution and institutional development.

Continuing another longstanding relationship, the Federal Court engaged with Papua New Guinea during the reporting period, including participation in the opening of the Waigani Courts Complex and events marking the 50th Anniversary of Papua New Guinea's independence. These engagements reflect the Federal Court's broader commitment to strengthening judicial relationships across the region.

A major strategic development has been the commencement of the Australia–Pacific Judicial Partnership (APJP), a four-year initiative funded by the

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). The program supports judicial systems across 15 Pacific Island countries and focuses on judicial leadership, court administration, case management, digital capability and pathways for women in the judiciary.

The APJP is delivered through a combination of regional and bilateral activities, mentoring programs and targeted initiatives, and operates within a collaborative governance framework involving partner courts and key stakeholders. As part of this work, the Court partnered with the New Zealand Pacific Justice Sector Programme to co-facilitate the Chief Justices' Leadership Forum in Fiji in February, bringing together judicial leaders from across the region to consider shared challenges and opportunities. In May 2026, the Court convened a regional workshop in Papua New Guinea with judicial officers and court officials from 13 Pacific partner Courts to discuss comparative case management approaches across jurisdictions.

The Federal Court has also supported the development of the Pacific Association of Women Judicial Officers, including its inaugural Annual General Meeting and planning workshop in Fiji in February 2026. This initiative represents an important step in strengthening networks, and career and leadership opportunities for women across Pacific judiciaries.

A practical component of the Federal Court's regional work has been its commitment to supporting the digitisation of partner Pacific courts through the donation of up to 300 ex-service laptops. This initiative provides tangible assistance to courts where technological infrastructure can be a limiting factor and supports more efficient court administration and improved access to justice. It reflects the Federal Court's focus on delivering practical, outcomes-oriented support alongside broader institutional engagement.

Taken together, these initiatives demonstrate the breadth and depth of the Federal Court's international programs. They reflect a sustained commitment to engagement within the region, to the sharing of expertise and experiences, and to supporting the development of effective, independent and accessible judicial systems.



Indonesian delegation meeting



Chief Justices Leadership Forum supported by the Australia Pacific Judicial Partnership and co-facilitated by the New Zealand Pacific Justice Sector Programme. Held in Nadi, Fiji

The distinction between the Federal Court and the 'Federal Court Listed Entity'

There is a common conflation, in media and community discussion, between the Federal Court itself, as a Court created under Chapter III of the *Constitution*, and the separate federal 'agency' created to support the Federal Court, the two Courts now comprising the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia (Divisions 1 and 2) and the National Native Title Tribunal (NNTT).

In 2016, the *Federal Court of Australia Act 1976* (Cth) was amended to provide for a level of common operational services between the three existing federal courts (aside from the High Court), and the NNTT. The Parliament did so by identifying a group of persons—who work for or across each Court and the Tribunal—as being a single 'listed entity' (for the purposes of Commonwealth finance laws) and a single 'statutory agency' (for the purposes of the *Public Service Act 1999* (Cth)). The Commonwealth exercises control over the 'agency', which to some extent reflects its control over other Commonwealth statutory agencies, but there are express and implied limits and differences arising from constitutional principles. It is through this structure that a range of services needed by the Courts

and the Tribunal are provided. Together these services are described as 'corporate services' and they include services such as human resources services, finance, communications, library services, information technology services, procurement, security, property and building services and risk management.

In the *Federal Court Act* (section 18ZB) the Parliament deemed that this entity should be known as 'the Federal Court of Australia'. This is where the confusion sometimes arises.

The CEO of the agency is also the CEO and Principal Registrar of the Federal Court, reflecting a closer alignment in the legislative scheme between this position and the Federal Court of Australia. Nevertheless, the CEO and Principal Registrar is responsible and accountable for the performance of all corporate services functions and is the key decision-maker for the provision of corporate services across the Courts and the Tribunal.

In contrast, the Chief Justices of the Federal Court and the FCFCOA (Division 1), the Chief Judge of the FCFCOA (Division 2) and the President of NNTT are each responsible and accountable for the administration of and the business of each of their Courts and the Tribunal. In this way, judicial independence from the other branches of government is maintained in accordance with constitutional principles.

Looking ahead

The Federal Court enters the next reporting period with a strong foundation, but also with a clear appreciation of the challenges that lie ahead.

The increasing size of the Federal Court's litigant in person cohort, the complexity of its jurisdictions, and the continuing impact of technological change will remain key features of the Federal Court's operating environment in the immediate future. Addressing these challenges will require sustained focus, careful use of resources and continued innovation in the way proceedings are managed and supported.

The work undertaken during this reporting period, particularly through the Litigants in Person and Pro Bono Project, represents a significant step towards a more structured and evidence-based approach to these issues. That work will continue to evolve, supported by improved data collection, strengthened partnerships with the profession and legal assistance sector, and the further development of early intervention and case management practices.

At the same time, the Federal Court will continue to build its institutional capability. The strengthening of registry leadership, the refinement of case management frameworks, and the continued development of judicial capability all contribute to ensuring that the Federal Court remains well positioned to meet the demands of its jurisdiction.

The Federal Court's engagement beyond its own proceedings will also remain important. Through its international and regional programs, including the APJP, the Federal Court will continue to contribute to the development of effective and accessible judicial systems and to share its experience as a national court.

Acknowledgment

I acknowledge the dedication, collegiality and professionalism of my judicial colleagues, whose commitment to the discharge of their responsibilities is fundamental to the administration of justice by our Court. I also acknowledge and thank those judicial colleagues who give so much of their time and energy, over and above their ordinary judicial workload, to the project and committee work that is essential for the Federal Court to operate, and to meet new challenges as they arise. Much of that work is invisible to those outside the Court, but it is a significant commitment which should be recognised.

I also acknowledge the Judicial Registrars of the Federal Court, whose work in case management, mediation and in the exercise of delegated judicial powers is essential to the effective operation of the Federal Court. I particularly acknowledge the wide and demanding responsibilities of the District Registrars in each of the Federal Court's registries, and those who lead the Federal Court's specialised teams in Native Title, Migration and Crime and Related Proceedings. I also acknowledge the important work done by the Judicial Registrars and staff in the National Operations Team.

The staff who serve the Federal Court—across chambers, registries, corporate services and specialist functions—play a critical role in supporting the Federal Court's work each day. Their professionalism and commitment ensures we do our best to conduct our proceedings fairly and effectively, and that the Federal Court operates as best it can under often challenging circumstances, including challenging fiscal circumstances.

I also acknowledge and recognise the ongoing dedication of the CEO and Principal Registrar of the Federal Court, Sia Lagos, to the discharge of her responsibilities to this Court, and to the corporate services agency she leads, the Federal Court of Australia Listed Entity.

I thank the legal profession, the Law Council of Australia and the Australian Bar Association, together with all the state and territory law societies and Bar associations, for their ongoing engagement and support. My thanks also to all our colleagues in the legal academy around Australia, with whom we work in many different ways.

The Federal Court benefits from a close and cooperative working relationship with government, in particular with the Attorney-General and her Office, the Attorney-General's Department, and the Pacific Regional Branch within the Pacific Strategy Division of DFAT. I am grateful to all those in government with whom we engage.



Report from the Chief Executive Officer and Principal Registrar

Sia Lagos



The 2025–26 year was another significant one for the Federal Court, marked by the continued dedication of its judges, judicial registrars and staff in supporting the administration of justice across Australia.

The Federal Court continues to operate in an increasingly complex environment, with both the volume and complexity of its work growing. Despite these demands, the judges of the Federal Court remain committed to the timely and effective progression of proceedings. Throughout the year, the Federal Court's judicial registrars made a significant contribution through the performance of their delegated judicial functions and conducting mediations and case management work to support the efficient and timely resolution of proceedings across a broad range of proceedings. Their contribution extended beyond these responsibilities through leadership of initiatives that strengthened the Federal Court's operations and service delivery, including support for the development of practice and procedure in specialised areas of jurisdiction.

Judges and judicial registrars are supported by dedicated and exceptional Federal Court staff who contribute significantly to every aspect of the Federal Court's work and operations. During the year, I again participated in the Chief Justice's registry visits, meeting staff across the country and recognising their service through the Court's Length of Service Program. Whether supporting Judges, assisting litigants or enabling national operations, their professionalism, care and commitment remain central to the achievement of the Federal Court's objectives.

The Federal Court and the Federal Court of Australia Listed Entity continue to perform distinct but complementary functions. While the Federal Court independently exercises judicial power, the Listed Entity provides the corporate, registry and judicial support services that enable its work. As the demands on the Federal Court continue to grow, so too must the capability, systems and leadership that support it.

In this context, the Federal Court welcomed the appointment of Nicola Colbran as Deputy Principal Registrar. The creation of this role reflects the increasing scale and complexity of the Federal Court's administrative responsibilities and strengthens executive leadership to support the Chief Justice in the management of the Federal Court's affairs. Since her appointment, Ms Colbran has led important

initiatives focused on professional development for Judicial Registrars and legal support staff, enhanced knowledge sharing, and the development and refinement of Judicial Registrar practice.

The benefits of the strategic work undertaken by our Corporate Services and Court & Tribunal Services divisions in recent years became increasingly evident during 2025–26. The implementation of that foundational work has sharpened organisational focus and strengthened their capacity to respond to changing demands while maintaining the high-quality delivery of core services that support the Federal Court's work.

The strength of the partnership between the Federal Court, Corporate Services and Court & Tribunal Services was perhaps most evident in the response to the administration of the Federal Court's recording and transcription provider. Through the leadership and collective efforts of Judges, Judicial Registrars and staff, continuity of service was maintained while arrangements for a long-term solution were developed. This coordinated response not only ensured the uninterrupted delivery of a critical service but also created an opportunity to establish a more sustainable and resilient model for the future.

This collaborative approach was also reflected in a range of other initiatives during the year, including the securing of additional funding to support the Australian Competition Tribunal. Together, these efforts demonstrate the importance of the partnership between the Federal Court and the Listed Entity in enabling the Federal Court to respond to emerging challenges while continuing to deliver on its core functions. Further detail on these activities is provided in the Listed Entity's Annual Report for 2025–26.

My term as CEO and Principal Registrar will conclude next year. It has been a profound privilege to serve the Federal Court and the Australian community through such an important national institution. I have been fortunate to work alongside an exceptional judiciary, judicial registrars and staff whose professionalism, dedication and commitment to public service underpin the Federal Court's success each day.

I am sincerely grateful to the Chief Justice, the Judges of the Federal Court, Judicial Registrars and staff for their collaboration, support and shared commitment throughout the year, which have been fundamental to the progress and achievements of 2025–26.