



The New South Wales Bar Association

**COURT STRUCTURE,  
JUDGES' TITLES  
AND  
ORDER OF SENIORITY**

**SEPTEMBER 2008**

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**NOTE:**

The information contained in this booklet is current as at September 2008. The Association does not accept responsibility if any information contained herein is relied on and happens to be incorrect or out of date. We welcome any feedback on this booklet. If you would like to make comments on the booklet, please contact:

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## **INTRODUCTION**

- i) In Australia courts cases are conducted under the adversarial system in which the court is asked to adjudicate upon 'issues' put forward by the parties upon evidence adduced by the parties. The presiding judge has no power of inquiry (the 'inquisitorial system'), unlike courts in parts of Europe.
- ii) Courts in Australia can only be created by the Constitution, an Act of Parliament or by letters patent. The Commonwealth Constitution provides that the judicial power of the Australian Government be vested in the High Court of Australia and other courts created by the federal parliament. The High Court may deal with federal and state/territory matters and has original jurisdiction in interpreting the Constitution and determining legal disputes between the federal and state/territory courts. It is the final court of appeal in Australia from federal and state/territory courts. It is a 'superior court.'
- iii) A 'superior court' is a court of high authority. Other 'superior courts' in Australia are the Federal Court of Australia and the Family Court of Australia. In NSW the 'superior courts' are the Supreme Court of NSW, the Industrial Relations Commission of NSW and the Land and Environment Court.
- iv) In addition to federal and state/territory courts, there are a number of tribunals. Tribunals are bodies created to deal with specific areas of the law. They aim to deal with legal disputes in a cheap and speedy manner and keep cases from going to the higher courts. Often the procedures used are very informal and barristers and solicitors do not always appear.
- v) Generally speaking, courts are structured according to the limits of their 'jurisdiction'. This governs the types of legal disputes each court is empowered to deal with. Most commonly, jurisdiction is divided into civil and criminal. Civil jurisdiction is usually (but not always) determined on the basis of the

amount of money at stake in the case. In criminal matters, jurisdiction is determined by the seriousness of the offence the accused is charged with, and consequently the penalty that may be imposed.

- vi) Because Australia has a federal system of government, some legal matters fall outside state/territory control. Common examples of this are family law (except Western Australia and the Northern Territory), customs, income tax and controlling the importation of drugs. These matters are thus usually heard in federal courts, not state/territory courts; however, in some circumstances state/territory courts may be given federal jurisdiction.
- vii) In addition to the federal and NSW court structures, this paper also deals with addressing judges and magistrates, the use of post-nominals, the order of seniority for barristers and admission to the roll of lawyers.

## **THE HIGH COURT OF AUSTRALIA**

- 1.1 The High Court of Australia was created in 1901 pursuant to s71 of the *Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act* (Constitution) and came into existence in 1903. The High Court is the highest court in Australia and is the final court of Appeal in Australia. Access to the High Court is very limited.
- 1.2 The jurisdiction of the High Court is derived from s75 and s76 of the Constitution. Section 75 of the Constitution expressly confers on the Court original jurisdiction (i.e. the relevant case starts in that court) in all matters:
- (a) arising under any treaty;
  - (b) affecting consuls or other representatives of other countries;
  - (c) in which the Commonwealth, or a person being sued or being sued on behalf of the Commonwealth is a party;
  - (d) between states, or between residents of different states, or between a state and a resident of another state;
  - (e) in which a writ or mandamus or prohibition or an injunction is sought against an officer of the Commonwealth.

Under s76, Parliament may make laws conferring original jurisdiction on the High Court in any matter:

- (a) arising under the Constitution, or involving its interpretation;
  - (b) arising under any laws made by Parliament;
  - (c) of Admiralty or maritime jurisdiction; or
  - (d) relating to the same subject-matter claimed under the laws of different States.
- 1.3 The appellate jurisdiction of the High Court is conferred by s73 of the Constitution. Section 73 provides that the High Court can hear and determine appeals from decisions of the High Court itself in its original jurisdiction, Federal courts, other courts exercising federal jurisdiction, and State Supreme Courts.

- 1.4 Cases which involve interpretation of the Constitution, or where the Court may be invited to depart from one of its previous decisions, or where the Court considers the principle of law involved to be one of major public importance, are normally determined by a full bench comprising all seven Justices if they are available to sit. Other cases which come to the High Court for final determination involve appeals against the decisions of the Supreme Courts of the states and territories, of the Federal Court of Australia and of the Family Court of Australia. These cases are usually determined by a bench of five justices. In addition, there are certain matters which can be heard and determined by a single Justice.
- 1.5 Generally speaking, the first step in getting an appeal to the High Court is for all appeal rights in the lower courts to have been exhausted. There then needs to be a 'special leave' application to the High Court. The 'special leave' application is a short preliminary hearing before one or more judges (usually two) of the High Court. The criteria for granting 'special leave' is set out in s35A of the *Judiciary Act 1903*.
- 1.6 In a special leave application the applicant must convince the judge(s) that their case involves an important point of law which the Australian public would benefit from having decided with some finality or certainty.
- 1.7 The High Court is based in Canberra, but travels to Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth annually, and Hobart less frequently, for circuitry sittings. As well, it regularly sits in both Sydney and Melbourne to hear 'special leave' applications. The Court is comprised of the Chief Justice and six other justices. The Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia is the Honourable Chief Justice French. The other current members of the Court are the Hon Justice William Gummow AC, the Hon Justice Michael Kirby AC, the Hon Justice Kenneth Hayne AC, the Hon Justice Dyson Heydon AC, the Hon Justice Susan Crennan and the Hon Justice Susan Kiefel.

- 1.8 For further information about the High Court see <http://www.hcourt.gov.au> and the *Oxford Companion to the High Court*, available in the Association's Library.

## **FEDERAL COURTS AND TRIBUNALS**

### **2. The Federal Court of Australia**

- 2.1 The Federal Court of Australia, created by the *Federal Court of Australia Act 1976*, began to exercise its jurisdiction on 1 February 1977. It assumed jurisdiction formerly exercised in part by the High Court of Australia and the whole of the jurisdiction of the Australian Industrial Court and of the Federal Court of Bankruptcy.
- 2.2 The Federal Court's jurisdiction covers almost all civil matters originating under federal law, including matters arising under the Constitution. The Court most commonly deals with industrial disputes, corporations, trade practices, judicial review and federal tax matters. The Federal Court also sits as an appeal court with three judges to hear appeals from decisions of single judges of the Court, decisions of the Supreme Court of Norfolk Island, decisions of the Federal Magistrates Court in non-family law matters and certain decisions of the Supreme Courts of the states and territories exercising federal jurisdiction.
- 2.3 The Federal Court sits in each capital city in Australia.
- 2.4 The Chief Justice of the Federal Court is the Honourable Michael Black AC, who is based in Melbourne. The Chief Justice manages the administrative affairs of the Court.

- 2.5 Some judges of the Federal Court of Australia are also Presidents or Deputy Presidents of the Administrative Appeals Tribunal, Australian Competition Tribunal, the Copyright Tribunal and the Defence Force Discipline Appeal Tribunal.
- 2.6 For further information about the Federal Court of Australia see:  
<http://www.fedcourt.gov.au>

### **3. The Family Court of Australia**

- 3.1 The Family Court works within the powers given to it under the *Family Law Act 1975*. Prior to this Act, state courts heard and determined divorce and associated matters such as residence and maintenance of children.
- 3.2 Although the NSW courts can deal with children appearing in court, for example on a shoplifting offence, it is the Family Court which deals with issues such as residency and welfare of children (previously referred to as ‘custody’) following divorce or separation of the parents, access to children by the other parent, or grandparent, maintenance payments for children and spouses (where appropriate), division of property (usually) following divorce, etc. The Court also covers specialist areas such as applications pursuant to the Hague Convention on International Child Abduction, special medical procedures, and international relocation.
- 3.3 The Family Court exercises original and appellate jurisdiction throughout Australia except in Western Australia. In Western Australia, original jurisdiction under the Act is exercised by the Family Court of Western Australia (a state court funded by the Commonwealth Government). Since 1987 the judges of the Family Court of Western Australia have also held commissions of the Federal Court of Australia.

- 3.4 The Family Court can sit as the Full Family Court in order to hear appeals from single judge decisions of the Family Court. Generally the Full Court consists of three judges. The Family Court also provides mediation services to help resolve disputes.
- 3.5 The commencement of the *Family Law Amendment (Shared Parental Responsibility) Act 2006* (Shared Parental Responsibility Act) on 1 July 2006 made important changes to the operation of the family law system and to the substantive law applied by courts exercising jurisdiction under the Family Law Act, particularly with the establishment of Family Relationship Centres. The main aim of the new system is to encourage shared parental responsibility after separation, promote solving of disputes outside court and to enable parenting disputes to be conducted using a less adversarial and more child focussed approach.
- 3.6 The Family Court sits in each capital city in Australia.
- 3.7 The Chief Justice of the Family Court of Australia is the Honourable Justice Diana Bryant.
- 3.8 For further information about the Family Court of Australia see:  
<http://www.familycourt.gov.au>

#### **4. The Federal Magistrates Court**

- 4.1 The Federal Magistrates Court commenced operation in July 2000. It was established in 1999 by the *Federal Magistrates Act 1999* to deal with a range of less complex federal disputes previously heard in the Federal Court. The Federal Magistrates Court was established to provide a simple and accessible service for

litigants and to ease the workload of both the Family Court of Australia and the Federal Court of Australia. The Court's rules and procedures are simpler and less formal than the Federal Court. The use of conciliation, counselling and mediation is strongly encouraged in appropriate cases.

- 4.2 The jurisdiction of the Federal Magistrates Court includes family law and child support, admiralty, administrative law, bankruptcy, copyright, consumer protection law and trade practices, privacy law; migration, unlawful discrimination and industrial law. The Federal Magistrates Court has jurisdiction to hear any matters transferred to it by the Federal Court or the Family Court. Family law comprises approximately 80% of the court's workload. It does not deal with criminal matters.
- 4.3 With the commencement of the *Workplace Relations Amendment (WorkChoices) Act 2005*, since March 2006 the Federal Magistrates Court had a workplace relations jurisdiction. Prior to the WorkChoices amendments, the Federal Court of Australia was the only court with jurisdiction to hear proceedings commenced under the *Workplace Relations Act 1996*, except for underpayment claims, in which it had shared jurisdiction with state courts. The Federal Magistrates Court now has concurrent jurisdiction with the Federal Court in respect of most matters under the Workplace Relations Act.
- 4.4 The Court shares its jurisdiction with the Federal Court of Australia and the Family Court of Australia, other than in migration where the Federal Magistrates Court has the same jurisdiction in relation to application for judicial review as possessed by the High Court. Appeals from a Federal Magistrate on such a review of a migration decision is, however, to a single judge of the Federal Court. There are arrangements in the legislation for the transfer of matters between the courts.

- 4.5 Appeals from final decisions of Federal Magistrates in general federal law (other than migration) are to the Full Court of the Federal Court. The Chief Justice of the Federal Court does however have the power to direct an appeal to be heard by a single judge. Appeals from judicial review decisions of Federal Magistrates in migration must be heard by a single judge. Appeals from final decisions of Federal magistrates in family law are to the Full Court of the Family Court. The Chief Justice of the Family Court, again, has the power to direct an appeal be heard by a single judge. Leave is required to appeal from interlocutory decisions of Federal Magistrates as well as any child support decisions.
- 4.6 The Federal Magistrates Court is based in the same premises as the Federal Court and Family Court throughout Australia as well as in some other locations. The court does not have its own registries, but relies on arrangements with the Federal and Family Courts to service its clients through their registries. The Court also conducts regular circuits to regional and metropolitan locations.
- 4.7 The Chief Federal Magistrate is Mr John Pascoe AO.
- 4.8 For further information about the Federal Magistrates Court of Australia see:  
<http://www.fmc.gov.au>

## **5. The Australian Industrial Relations Commission**

- 5.1 The Australian Industrial Relations Commission is an independent national tribunal dealing with employment issues under the *Workplace Relations Act 1996*. Significant changes to the workplace relations system in Australia were brought about with the enactment of the *Workplace Relations Amendment (Work Choices) Act 2005* which came into effect on 27 March 2006.

- 5.2 The role of the Commission changed under the Workplace Relations Amendment (Work Choices) Act.
- 5.3 The work of the Commission now includes:
- assisting employers and employees in resolving industrial disputes;
  - handling certain termination of employment claims;
  - modernising and maintaining awards; and
  - dealing with applications about industrial action.
- 5.4 The Commission is no longer responsible for certifying collective agreements. Increases in minimum rates and a number of other key conditions is now the responsibility of a new body, the Australian Fair Pay Commission.
- 5.5 For further information about the Australian Industrial Relations Commission see: <http://www.airc.gov.au>

## **6. The Australian Fair Pay Commission**

- 6.1 The Australian Fair Pay Commission was established under the *Workplace Relations Amendment (WorkChoices) Act 2005* to set and adjust the federal minimum wage. It is a statutory body independent from the Australian Government.
- 6.2 The Commission replaced the wage-setting and adjusting functions of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission.
- 6.3 The *Workplace Relations Act 1996* sets out the following two primary functions for the Commission:
1. wage setting; and

2. promoting public understanding of matters relevant to the Commission's functions.

- 6.4 The work of the Commission includes setting and adjusting:
- standard federal minimum wage;
  - special Federal Minimum Wages for employees with a disability;
  - minimum classification rates of pay in Australian Pay and Classification Scales; and
  - casual loadings.

- 6.5 For further information about the Australian Fair Pay Commission see:  
[www.fairpay.gov.au](http://www.fairpay.gov.au).

## **7. The National Native Title Tribunal**

- 7.1 The National Native Title Tribunal was set up under the *Native Title Act 1993* to assist people to resolve native title issues.
- 7.2 The Tribunal facilitates the making of agreements among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, governments, industry and others whose rights or interests may co-exist with native title rights and interests in respect of land and water. The Tribunal mediates native title claims under the direction of the Federal Court of Australia. It is not a court and does not decide whether or not native title exists.
- 7.3 On request, the Tribunal assists people in negotiations about proposed developments e.g. mining. The Tribunal acts as an arbitrator or umpire in some situations where the people involved cannot reach agreement about proposed developments. It also assists people who want to negotiate other sorts of

agreements, such as indigenous land use agreements. Hundreds of agreements have been documented throughout Australia since the Tribunal was established in 1994.

- 7.4 The Tribunal maintains a principal registry in Perth, other registries in Sydney, Adelaide, Darwin, Melbourne, Brisbane and a regional office in Cairns. In Hobart and Canberra, where the Tribunal does not have a separate registry, administrative assistance, public information, Tribunal materials and client services are provided by the Administrative Appeals Tribunal.
- 7.5 Members of the Tribunal are appointed by the Governor General under the Native Title Act. The President of the Tribunal is Mr Graeme Neate.
- 7.6 For further information about the National Native Title Tribunal see <http://www.nntt.gov.au>

## **8. The Australian Competition Tribunal**

- 8.1 The Australian Competition Tribunal was established under the *Trade Practices Act 1965* and continues under the *Trade Practices Act 1974* (the Act). Prior to 6 November 1995, the Tribunal was known as the Trade Practices Tribunal.
- 8.2 The Tribunal hears applications for review of determinations of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission ('the Commission') granting or revoking authorisations. Authorisations are granted by the Commission permitting conduct and arrangements (including company mergers and acquisitions) to be carried on that would otherwise be prohibited under the Act because of their anti-competitive effect.
- 8.3 The Tribunal hears applications for review of certain decisions of the Minister or the Commission in access matters. The Act establishes a legislative regime to

facilitate third party access to the services of certain essential facilities of national significance such as electricity grids or natural gas pipelines. The Tribunal also hears applications for review of certain determinations of the Commission in relation to notices given by the Commission under s93 of the Act regarding exclusive dealing.

8.4 The Tribunal consists of a President and such number of Deputy Presidents and other members as are appointed by the Governor-General. A presidential member must be a judge of a federal court. Other members must have knowledge of or experience in industry, commerce, economics, law or public administration. For the purpose of hearing and determining proceedings, the Tribunal is constituted by a presidential member and two non-presidential members. Currently, all presidential members are judges of the Federal Court of Australia.

8.5 For further information about the Australian Competition Tribunal see:

<http://www.competitiontribunal.gov.au>

## **9. The Copyright Tribunal**

9.1 The Copyright Tribunal was established under Part VI of the *Copyright Act 1968*.

9.2 The Tribunal has the power to inquire into the amount of royalty payable in respect of the recording of musical works; fix royalties or equitable remuneration in respect of compulsory licences; arbitrate disputes in relation to the terms of existing and proposed licensing schemes; and deal with applications for the granting of licences.

9.3 For further information about the Copyright Tribunal see:

[http://www.fedcourt.gov.au/aboutct/aboutct\\_admin\\_other\\_ct.html](http://www.fedcourt.gov.au/aboutct/aboutct_admin_other_ct.html)

## **10. The Defence Force Discipline Appeal Tribunal**

- 10.1 The Defence Force Discipline Appeal Tribunal was established under the *Defence Force Discipline Appeals Act 1955*. The Tribunal is empowered to hear and determine appeals from Courts Martial and Defence Force magistrates in respect of service offences by Australian Defence Force personnel, as well as by persons who have been convicted or who have been acquitted of a Service offence on the ground of unsoundness of mind by a court martial or a Defence Force magistrate under the *Defence Force Discipline Act 1982*.
- 10.2 The Tribunal may determine an appeal in one of the following ways: it may allow an appeal and quash the conviction, substitute for the conviction so quashed an acquittal on the ground of unsoundness of mind and direct that the appellant be kept in strict custody until the pleasure of the Governor-General is known; if it finds that the appellant was unfit to stand trial, it may allow the appeal, quash the conviction or prescribed acquittal and direct that the appellant be kept in strict custody until the pleasure of the Governor-General is known. Subject to the reference of questions of law and appeals on questions of law to the Federal Court of Australia, the Tribunal's determination is final.
- 10.3 The Tribunal consists of a President, Justice Peter Heerey, a Deputy President and such other persons as are appointed to be members. There is a Registrar of the Tribunal and such deputies of the Registrar as are required.
- 10.4 The principal office (registry) of the Tribunal is located in Melbourne.
- 10.5 For further information about the Defence Force Discipline Appeal Tribunal see:  
<http://defenceappeals.gov.au>

Ombudsman also has a revised role in relation to professional standards.

## **11. The Social Security Appeals Tribunal**

- 11.1 The Social Security Appeals Tribunal is a statutory body established under the *Social Security (Administration) Act 1999* to review administrative decisions made under the Social Security law, Family Assistance law, child support law, and various other pieces of legislation. The Tribunal is the first level of external review of decisions made by Centrelink and the Child Support Agency about social security, family assistance, education or training and child support payments.
- 11.2 The Tribunal can hear appeals against decisions by Centrelink, the agency that delivers social security and student assistance services on behalf of the Department of Family and Community Services (formerly the Department of Social Security) and the Department of Education, Science and Training. The Tribunal is also able to review some decisions made by officers of the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA).
- 11.3 The Tribunal is completely independent of Centrelink and the departments. It has the power to affirm, vary or set aside Centrelink and DVA decisions.
- 11.4 A decision *must* be reviewed by a Centrelink Authorised Review Officer or DVA Service Pension Review Officer (SPRO), or Child Support Agency Objections Officer *before* an appeal can be made to the Tribunal.
- 11.5 The objective of the Tribunal is to provide a mechanism of review that is fair, just, economical, informal and quick.
- 11.6 For further information about the Social Security Appeals Tribunal see: <http://www.ssat.gov.au>

## **12. The Migration Review Tribunal and Refugee Review Tribunal**

- 12.1 The Migration Review Tribunal (MRT) and Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) provide an independent and final review of decisions made in relation to visas to travel to, enter or stay in Australia. The Tribunals' objective is to provide fair, just, economical, informal and quick reviews.
- 12.2 The MRT reviews decisions made by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIC) in respect of general visas, e.g. visitor, student, partner, family, business and skilled.
- 12.3 The RRT reviews decisions made by the DIC to refuse or cancel protection visas to non-citizens in Australia. A criterion for the grant of a protection visa is the person is a non-citizen in Australia to whom Australia has protection obligations under the *1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* ('Refugees Convention') as amended by the *1967 UN Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees* ('the Protocol').
- 12.4 In addition to its function of reviewing DIC decisions relating to protection visas, the RRT also has the power, in respect of certain 'transitory persons', to conduct an assessment of whether a person is covered by the definition of a 'refugee' in Article 1A of the Refugee Convention as amended by the Protocol. A 'transitory person' (as defined by the Act) who has been in Australia for 6 months or more may apply directly to the RRT for an assessment.
- 12.5 The Tribunals' jurisdiction, powers and procedures are set out in the *Migration Act 1958* and the *Migration Regulations 1994*.
- 12.6 In conducting a review of a decision, the MRT and RRT look at the issues and evidence afresh. The Tribunals' have the power to affirm the DIC's decision,

vary the decision, set the decision aside and substitute a new decision, or remit the matter to the DIC for reconsideration.

- 12.7 Unlike a court, the MRT and RRT are not adversarial. The DIC is not usually represented at Tribunal hearings. The Tribunals' are inquisitorial in nature and can obtain whatever information they consider necessary to conduct the review.
- 12.8 The MRT and RRT are headed by the Principal Member, Mr Denis O'Brien. Tribunal members are appointed by the Governor-General for a fixed term. The Tribunals' principal registry is located in Sydney.
- 12.9 For further information about the MRT and RRT see: <http://www.mrt-rrt.gov.au>

### **13. The Administrative Appeals Tribunal**

- 13.1 The Administrative Appeals Tribunal was established by the *Administrative Appeals Tribunal Act 1975*. The Act and the *Administrative Appeals Tribunal Regulations 1976* set out the Tribunal's powers, functions and procedures. The Tribunal aims to provide a mechanism of review which is fair, just economical, informal and quick.
- 13.2 The Tribunal is an independent body that reviews, on the merits, a broad range of administrative decisions made by Commonwealth (and, in limited circumstances, State) Government ministers and officials, authorities and other tribunals. The Tribunal also reviews administrative decisions made by some non-government bodies. The Tribunal decides whether, on the facts before it, the correct or, in a discretionary area, the preferable decision has been made in accordance with the applicable law. The Tribunal will affirm, vary, or set aside the original decision.
- 13.3 The Tribunal can only review a decision if an Act, regulation or other legislative instrument provides specifically that the decision is subject to review by the

Tribunal. The Tribunal's jurisdiction is contained in over 400 separate Acts and legislative instruments, covering areas such as taxation, social security, veterans' affairs, workers' compensation, bankruptcy, civil aviation, corporations law, customs, freedom of information, immigration and citizenship, industry assistance and security assessments undertaken by the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation.

13.4 The Tribunal is not always the first avenue of review of an administrative decision. In some cases, it will not review a decision until after an internal review has been undertaken by the department or agency that made the primary decision. In other cases the Tribunal cannot review a decision until after an immediate review by a specialist tribunal e.g. in the area of social security, an application may be made to the Tribunal only after it has been reviewed by the Social Security Appeals Tribunal.

13.5 The Tribunal's membership consists of a President, Presidential Members (including Judges and Deputy Presidents), Senior Members and Members. The Tribunal's President, the Hon Justice Gary Downes AM, is a Judge of the Federal Court of Australia.

13.6 For further information about the Administrative Appeals Tribunal see: <http://www.aat.gov.au>

#### **14. The Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission**

14.1 The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission is an independent statutory government body, established in December 1986 by the *Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act 1986*. The Federal Attorney-General is the Minister responsible in Parliament for the Commission.

- 14.2 The Commission Administers the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*, the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*, the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*, the *Age Discrimination Act 2004*, as well as inquiring into alleged infringements of human rights under the *Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act 1986*.
- 14.3 The Commission also has specific responsibilities under the *Native Title Act 1993*, to report on the exercise and enjoyment of the human rights of Indigenous people with regards to native title, and the *Workplace Relations Act 1996*, in relation to federal awards and equal pay.
- 14.4 The Commission has additional responsibility in relation to the following international human rights instruments ratified by Australia: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; Convention Concerning Discrimination in Respect of Employment and Occupation; Convention on the Rights of the Child; Declaration of the Rights of the Child; Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons; Declaration on the Rights of Mentally Retarded Persons; and Declaration on the Elimination of all Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief.
- 14.5 Matters which can be investigated by the Commission include discrimination on the grounds of age, race, colour or ethnic origin, racial vilification, sex, sexual harassment, marital status, pregnancy, or disability. Human rights education is one of the core responsibilities of the Commission along with the investigation and attempted resolution of complaints about breaches of human rights and anti-discrimination legislation.
- 14.6 On receipt of a complaint, the Commission must make sure it can be investigated under the laws for which it has responsibility, if so, the complaint is reviewed to see whether it is suitable for conciliation whereby the Commission brings the parties together to try and resolve the matter, or whether it should be terminated. Many complaints are successfully conciliated. If a complaint is terminated, the

complainant can apply to the Federal Court of Australia or the Federal Magistrates Services for determination.

- 14.7 The Commission also plays an important educative role in society in raising awareness of people's rights and responsibilities under anti-discrimination laws through schools, community groups, business and industry and government. It also provides specialist, independent advice to a wide range of groups, including state and federal government, parliament and the courts.
- 14.8 The Commission is administered by the President, the Honourable John von Doussa QC.
- 14.9 For further information about the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission see <http://www.hreoc.gov.au>

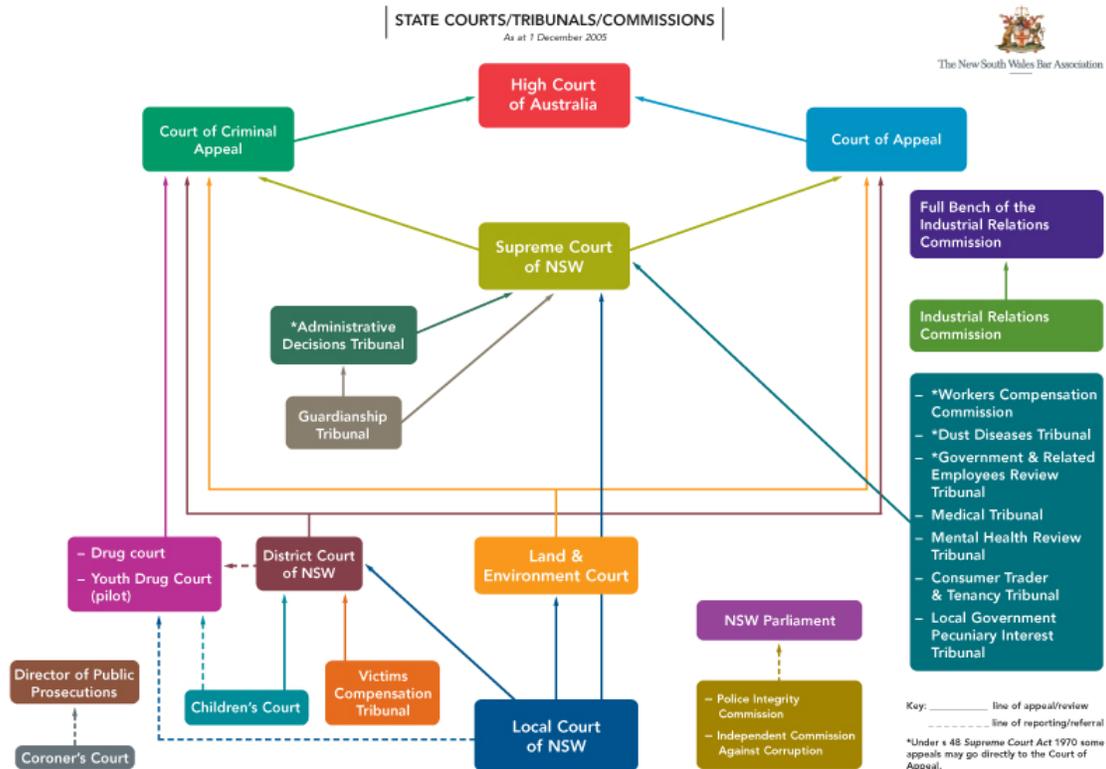
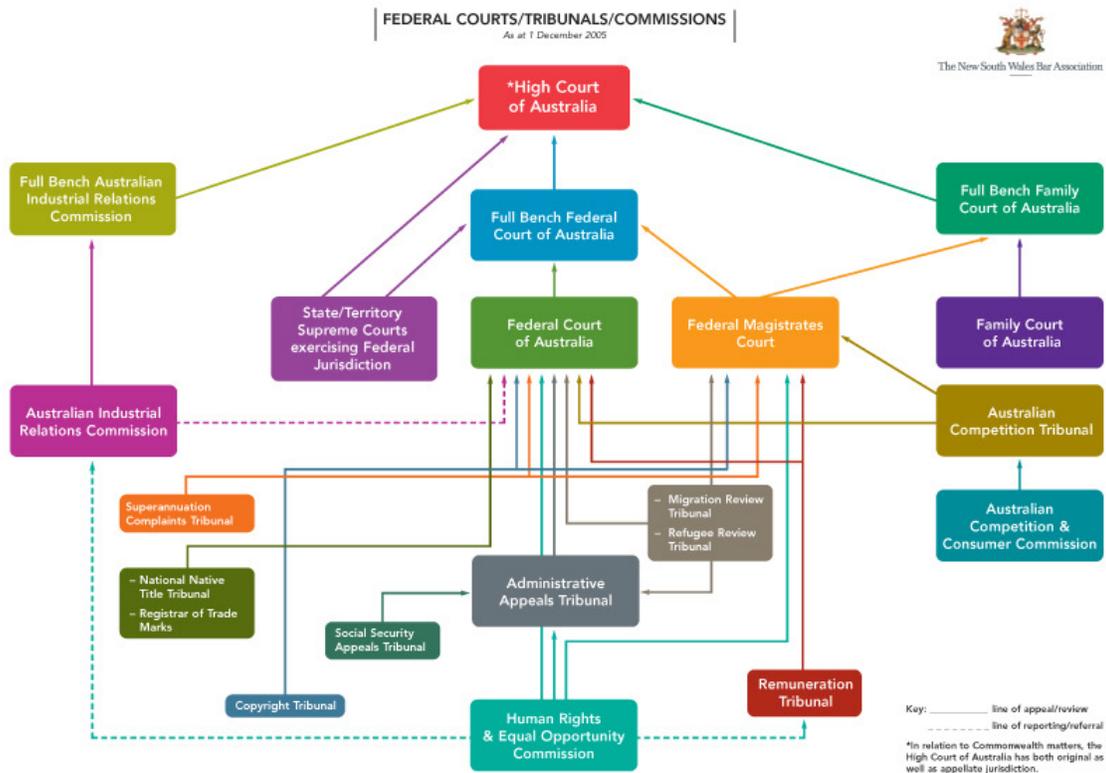
## **15. Australian Competition and Consumer Commission**

- 15.1 The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission was formed on 6 November 1995 by the merger of the Trade Practices Commission and the Prices Surveillance Authority. The Commission administers the *Trade Practices Act 1974*. It also has responsibilities under other legislation.
- 15.2 The Trade Practices Act covers anti-competitive and unfair market practices, mergers or acquisitions of companies, product safety/labelling, price monitoring and the regulation of industries such as telecommunications, gas, electricity and airports. The Commission is the only national agency dealing generally with competition matters.
- 15.3 The Commission promotes competition and fair trade to benefit consumers, business and the community. It also regulates national infrastructure services. The Commission's primary responsibility is to ensure that individuals and

businesses comply with the Commonwealth competition, fair trading and consumer protection laws. The role of the Commission compliments that of state and territory consumer affairs agencies which administer their respective legislation.

- 15.4 The Commission has a network of offices in all capital cities as well as Townsville to handle public complaints and inquiries. The National Office is located in Canberra. An information line is available to business and consumers to explain rights and obligations under the legislation, and how the commission is likely to react to particular business practices. Staff can provide guidance to business and consumers on their rights and obligations under the law, but not legal advice.
- 15.5 Appeals against some of the Commission's decisions, e.g. relating to grants of immunity from the Trade Practices Act can be made to the Australian Competition Tribunal.
- 15.6 The Chairman of the Commission is Graeme Samuel AO.
- 15.7 For further information about the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission see: <http://www.accc.gov.au>

# STRUCTURE OF THE AUSTRALIAN COURTS SYSTEM



## NEW SOUTH WALES COURTS AND TRIBUNALS

### **16. The Supreme Court of New South Wales**

- 16.1 The Supreme Court of New South Wales, established by the 1823 Charter of Justice, is the highest State court in New South Wales. The Court now operates under the *Supreme Court Act 1970* and the *Civil Procedure Act 2005*. The Court has unlimited civil jurisdiction and handles the most serious criminal matters. It has the ability to deal with all matters that are not within the exclusive jurisdiction of the federal courts.
- 16.2 The Court is divided into the Common Law Division and the Equity Division. Matters are heard before a Judge or an Associate Judge<sup>1</sup>. The Common Law Division deals with civil, criminal and administrative law matters. The Equity Division hears equity, probate, Commercial, admiralty and protective matters.
- 16.3 The Supreme Court also encompasses a Court of Appeal and a Court of Criminal Appeal to hear cases where one party believes an earlier decision of the Supreme Court or a lower court is incorrect.
- 16.4 The Supreme Court of NSW is based in Sydney (Law Courts Building, Queen's Square); however, the judges occasionally hear both civil and criminal cases in regional courts. Most criminal trials in the Supreme Court are heard at King Street or Darlinghurst.
- 16.5 The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of NSW is the Honourable JJ Spigelman AC. The President of the Court of Appeal is the Honourable Justice James Allsop. The Chief Judge at Common Law is the Honourable Justice Peter

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<sup>1</sup> Associate Judges deal with the less complex matters and trials not involving a jury.

McClellan. The Chief Judge in Equity is the Honourable Mr Justice Peter Young AO.

16.6 For further information about the Supreme Court of NSW see:

<http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/sc>

## **17. The Court of Appeal and Court of Criminal Appeal**

17.1 The Court of Appeal hears appeals arising from civil matters from the Supreme Court, District Court, Land and Environment Court, and some tribunals. In some cases the right of appeal is not automatic and a grant of leave may be required.

17.2 The Court of Appeal normally sits as a full court of three judges. In cases dealing with very important principles of law, a full bench of five or more judges will sit.

17.3 The Court of Criminal Appeal is the State's highest court for criminal matters. It deals exclusively with appeals arising from criminal trials. Appeals are normally heard by three judges or, in some sentence appeals where there is no issue of principle, two judges. In some cases dealing with very important principles of law, a full bench of five judges will sit.

17.4 The Court of Appeal and the Court of Criminal Appeal can review questions of law and may overturn findings of fact. They can also reduce or increase penalties or awards of damages or gaol sentences.

17.5 The President of the Court of Appeal is the Honourable Justice James Allsop. There is no President of the Court of Criminal Appeal, but the Chief Justice oversees its operations.

## **18. The Industrial Relations Commission and the Industrial Court of New South Wales**

- 18.1 The Industrial Relations Commission of New South Wales was established under the *Industrial Relations Act 1996*. The Commission may be constituted as the Industrial Court of New South Wales, and in such circumstances is a court of equivalent status to the Supreme Court.
- 18.2 The Commission deals with most aspects of employment law and industrial relations. It conciliates and arbitrates to resolve industrial disputes, sets conditions of employment, fixes wages and salaries by making industrial awards, approves enterprise agreements and decides claims of unfair dismissal.
- 18.3 When not sitting as the Industrial Court, the Commission is not bound to act in a formal manner, nor is it bound by the rules of evidence. It may inform itself on any matter in any way it considers just and it is to act according to equity, good conscience and the substantial merits of the case without regard to technicalities or legal forms. The rules of evidence and other formal procedures of a superior court do, however, apply to the Industrial Court.
- 18.4 The Commission has an appellate jurisdiction which considers appeals from single members of the Commission. Appeals are to a Full Bench of the Commission and proceed by way of application for leave to appeal. A Full Bench usually consists of at least three Members of the Commission (judges, Deputy Presidents and Commissioners) and usually includes at least one Presidential Member (that is, a Judge or a Deputy President) and one Commissioner. A Full Bench of the Industrial Court of New South Wales must include only judicial members.

- 18.5 The Industrial Court has a civil jurisdiction and a criminal jurisdiction where it hears serious breaches of the State's occupational health and safety laws.
- 18.6 Section 179 of the Industrial Relations Act provides that where an appeal to the Full Bench of the Commission has been exercised, the decision of the Commission is final and may not be appealed against, reviewed, quashed or called into question by any court, tribunal, whether on an issue of fact, law jurisdiction or otherwise.
- 18.7 The judicial members of the Commission are the judges of the Industrial Court. They have power to deal with criminal matters brought before the Commission, matters involving harsh and unfair contracts and certain matters relating to trade unions.
- 18.8 All Members of the Commission have power to deal with industrial disputes, conditions of employment, the making of awards and industrial agreements and claims for unfair dismissal.
- 18.9 The Industrial Court in its appellate jurisdiction hears appeals from decisions of judges in occupational health and safety prosecutions and unfair contract cases, appeals from Industrial Magistrates (who are Magistrates in Local Courts who most commonly deal with underpayment of wages claims and prosecutions for breaches of various industrial and occupational health and safety laws) and from the Industrial Registrar.
- 18.10 The Commission's and the Court's principal premises are in the Chief Secretary's Building at 47 Bridge Street, Sydney. Other Commission sites in NSW include 237 Wharf Road, Newcastle; and at the AMP Centre, 90 Crown Street, Wollongong.

18.11 The head of the jurisdiction is the President of the Commission. The President is the Honourable Justice R P Boland.

18.12 For further information about the Industrial Relations Commission and the Industrial Court see: <http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/irc>

## **19. The Land and Environment Court of New South Wales**

19.1 The Land and Environment Court of New South Wales was established in 1980, replacing the Local Government Appeals Tribunal, the Land and Valuation Court, the Clean Waters Appeal Board and the Valuation Boards of Review. Certain jurisdictions formerly exercised by the District Court were also transferred to the Land and Environment Court.

19.2 The jurisdiction of the Court is governed by the *Land and Environment Court Act 1979*. In a broad sense, the Court is vested with the power to determine environmental, development, building and planning disputes. The Court is highly specialised and has the same status as the Supreme Court of NSW.

19.3 The jurisdiction of the Court is divided into seven classes of proceedings:

1. Environmental planning and protection appeals;
2. Local government and miscellaneous appeals and applications;
3. Land tenure, valuation, rating and compensation matters;
4. Environmental planning protection and development contract (civil enforcement);
5. Environmental planning and protection (criminal enforcement);
6. Appeals by defendants from convictions relating to environmental offences imposed by magistrates in the Local Court; and
7. Other appeals by defendants relating to environmental offences.

A Commissioner or a Judge can hear proceedings in classes 1, 2 and 3 matters. For more complicated matters in these classes, two Commissioners or a Commissioner with a Judge may hear the appeal. Proceedings in classes 4, 5, 6 and 7 are always heard by a judge.

19.4 The Court cannot award damages. Damages can be sought in the Supreme Court. The Land and Environment Court can, however, order an injunction to restrain or stop someone from doing something, or order a declaration, which is a statement by the Court setting out what the law is or whether the law has been broken in a particular case.

19.5 The Chief Judge of the Land and Environment Court is the Honourable Justice B J Preston. The Court Registry is located at level 4, 225 Macquarie Street, Sydney.

19.6 For further information about the Land and Environment Court see:

<http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/lec>

## **20. The District Court of New South Wales**

20.1 The District Court is the ‘intermediate court’ in NSW. The District Court has jurisdiction in both civil and criminal matters.

20.2 The criminal jurisdiction of the District Court (as set out in the *Criminal Procedure Act 1986*) is concerned with indictable matters, that is, serious criminal offences which are normally heard by a judge and jury but on occasions by a judge alone. The Court does not, however, deal with treason or murder, which are dealt with by the Supreme Court. The Court can hear appeals from the Local Court.

20.3 In 1997 the civil jurisdiction of the District Court was increased to \$750,000. The Court can deal with cases where larger amounts are involved if the parties to the

- case agree. The Court's jurisdiction in equity proceedings is generally limited to claims up to \$20,000, although some for \$750,000. The District Court has an unlimited jurisdiction in claims for damages for personal injuries arising out of a motor vehicle accident.
- 20.4 Some former Compensation Court matters were transferred to the District Court, rather than the Workers Compensation Commission, when the Compensation Court was abolished after the enactment of the *Compensation Court Repeal Act 2002*. These matters include:
1. The *Police Act 1990* – concerning police officers hurt whilst on duty;
  2. The *Police Regulation (Superannuation) Act 1906* – concerning the payment of superannuation benefits to police officers;
  3. The *Workers' Compensation Act 1987* – concerning workers in or about a coal mine;
  4. The *Workers' Compensation (Dust Diseases) Act 1942*;
  5. The sporting injuries insurance scheme; and
  6. The *Workers' Compensation (Bush Fire, Emergency and Rescue Services) Act 1987*.
- 20.5 The Court's judges hear appeals in criminal matters from the Local Court and also preside over a range of administrative and disciplinary tribunals.
- 20.6 The District Court is based in Sydney in the John Maddison Tower (next door to the Downing Centre) on the corner of Elizabeth and Goulburn Streets. The District Court also sits permanently in some major centres, e.g. Parramatta, Wollongong and Newcastle. Judges travel on 'circuit' to hear cases in the main towns in NSW.
- 20.7 The Chief Judge of the District Court is the Honourable Justice R.O. Blanch AM who has the status of a Supreme Court judge.

20.8 For further information about the District Court see:

<http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/dc>

## **21. The Workers' Compensation Commission**

21.1 The Workers' Compensation Commission, which in part replaced the Compensation Court of NSW (which ceased to operate on 31 December 2003), determines disputes on workers' compensation claims made on an employer/insurer from 1 January 2002 (with the exception of claims by coal miners and claims lodged prior to 1 January 2002).

21.2 The Commission is an independent statutory tribunal for disputed workers' compensation claims in NSW and was established by the *Workplace Injury Management and Workers Compensation Act 1998*.

21.3 The Commission deals with interim payment directions (the Commission can order interim weekly compensation payments for limited periods and payment of medical and related expenses up to \$5,000); weekly benefits paid as compensation for loss of earnings; medical and related expenses; permanent impairment/pain and suffering; payment for damages to personal property; compensation for the death of a worker and management of a worker's injury/illness in the workplace (suitable duties).

21.4 The Commission consists of the President, two Deputy Presidents, a Registrar and Arbitrators, supported by Approved Medical Specialists and other staff. The President is the judicial head of the Commission. The President hears appeals from Arbitrators' decisions, determines points of law and appoints the Commission's Arbitrators and Approved Medical Specialists. The two Deputy Presidents also hear appeals from Arbitrators' decisions.

21.5 The President of the Commission is the Hon. Judge Greg Keating.

21.6 The Commission is located at 1 Oxford Street, Darlinghurst.

21.7 For further information about the Workers' Compensation Commission see <http://www.wcc.nsw.gov.au>

## **22. The Local Court of New South Wales**

22.1 The Local Court (previously the 'Magistrates Court') has jurisdiction to deal with the vast majority of criminal and summary prosecutions, committal hearings, civil matters with a monetary value of up to \$60,000, mental health issues, family law matters, child care proceedings and children's criminal proceedings (the Children's Court), juvenile prosecutions and care matters, licensing issues (the Licensing Court), industrial matters, mining matters, and coronial matters (Coronial Court). Single Magistrates sitting without a jury hear cases in the Local Court. It has no jurisdiction for claims in equity.

22.2 In criminal matters magistrates hear criminal cases which do not need a judge and jury. These are called summary offences and include traffic matters, minor stealing, offensive behaviour, and some types of assault. Magistrates also hear applications for apprehended violence orders where one person is seeking a restraining order against another. In more serious matters such as armed robbery or attempted murder, a magistrate conducts 'committal proceedings' to decide if there is enough evidence to go before the District or Supreme Court.

22.3 The Downing Centre (old Mark Foys Building) on the corner of Elizabeth and Liverpool Street is the main local court in Sydney. In addition to the Downing Centre branches of the Local Court are found in a large number of suburbs in Sydney and both large and small country towns. These courts, usually attached to

the local police station, hear matters that have occurred in the surrounding areas.

For a detailed description of the location of all Local Courts see:

[http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/lawlink/local\\_courts/ll\\_localcourts.nsf/pages/lc\\_location](http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/lawlink/local_courts/ll_localcourts.nsf/pages/lc_location)

22.4 The Chief Magistrate of the Local Court is His Honour Chief Magistrate Graeme Henson.

22.5 For further information about the Local Court see:

<http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/lc>

### **23. Coroners Court**

23.1 Coroners Courts are situated around NSW in Local Courts. Coroners inquire into circumstances surrounding deaths that are reported to them. The role of the coroner is outlined in the *NSW Coroner's Act 1980*.

23.2 A death must be reported to a Coroner in a large number of circumstances. The most common is where a person has died a violent or unnatural death, died suddenly and the cause is unknown, or died while in police custody or during a Police operation.

23.3 As part of the inquiry, the coroner will determine the identity of the deceased person, inquire into the time, place, cause and manner of death; refer the matter to the Director of Public Prosecutions if the inquest reveals that a known person has committed a serious criminal offence in connection with the death; protect lives and well being by bringing to the notice of relevant authorities any practices; policies or laws which could be changed to prevent similar deaths in the future; and expose other matters of public importance.

23.4 The coroner also has jurisdiction to inquire into fires and explosions etc where property has been destroyed or damaged or where people have been injured, e.g. the Thredbo Inquiry.

23.5 The State Coroner is Magistrate Mary Jerram.

23.6 For further information about the Coroners Court see:  
<http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/CORONERS>

## **24. The Drug Court of NSW**

24.1 The Drug Court is a special court with the responsibility for dealing with non-violent criminal matters committed by drug dependent offenders. The Court emerged as a result of the inability of the traditional criminal justice approaches to provide long-term solutions to the cycle of drug use and crime and aims to assist drug-dependent offenders to overcome their dependence and criminal offending. The Court provides intensive judicial supervision, treatment provision and individual case management for eligible offenders in a Drug Court program.

24.2 The aim of the Court is to reduce the level of criminal activity that results from drug dependency. The Court achieves that object by establishing a scheme under which drug dependent persons who are charged with criminal offences can be diverted into programs designed to eliminate, or at least reduce, their dependency on drugs.

24.3 The Court has Local Court and District Court jurisdiction and operates from the Parramatta Court complex.

- 24.4 To be eligible for the Drug Court a person must be highly likely to be sentenced to full-time imprisonment if convicted; have indicated that he or she will plead guilty to the offence; be dependent on the use of prohibited drugs; reside within the catchment area (specified areas of Western Sydney); be referred from a court in the catchment area; be 18 years of age or over and be willing to participate. A person is not eligible if he or she is charged with an offence involving violent conduct, is charged with a sexual offence or an offence punishable under Division 2 Part 2 of *the Drug Misuse and Trafficking Act (1985)*, or is suffering from a mental condition that could prevent or restrict participation in the program. There is no appeal against a decision taken by the Drug Court to refuse entry to a program.
- 24.5 Part of the role of the Drug Court Team is to oversee the progress of participants through the program, and formulate strategies to assist in the participant's rehabilitation. The Drug Team consists of the DPP solicitor, a police representative, Clinical Nurse Consultant, Legal Aid solicitors, Probation and Parole Coordinator, the Court Registrar and the Judge.
- 24.6 The Drug Court program is individually tailored to address each participant's specific needs and will last for at least 12 months unless it is terminated sooner. The treatment options include abstinence, methadone and buprenorphine programs conducted in either the community or residential rehabilitation settings. Ongoing psychiatric treatment is also provided. Participants are also regularly tested for drug use. Participants are closely monitored by the Court.
- 24.7 The Senior Judge of the Drug Court is his Honour Judge R Dive.
- 24.8 For further information about the Drug Court of NSW see:

<http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/drugcrt>

## **25. Children's Court**

- 25.1 In all States and Territories, there are specialised children's courts that have jurisdiction over offences committed by young people (under 18 years: Section 8, *Children and Young People Act 1999*). The courts may be constituted by a specialised children's court magistrate or judge, or by a magistrate constituting a children's court and exercising the powers under the relevant legislation. In most jurisdictions, they are modified courts of summary jurisdiction with enlarged powers to deal with matters summarily.
- 25.2 The Children's Court deals with matters related to the care and protection of children and young people, and also criminal cases concerning children and young people.
- 25.3 Proceedings relating to care and protection are conducted under the *Children's Court Act 1987* and the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*.
- 25.4 Juveniles in NSW charged with serious offences such as murder, rape and armed robbery are tried in a higher court: Section 28 of the *Children (Criminal Proceedings) Act 1987*.
- 25.5 Proceedings in the Children's Court are conducted with as little formality and legal technicality as the case permits. They are also not conducted in an adversarial manner. The Court tries to ensure that a child or young person has every opportunity to be heard and participate in the proceedings and that the proceedings and decisions are understood by the child or young person.

25.6 The Court can make a variety of orders with respect to the care and protection of a child or young person, including:

1. interim care orders;
2. orders for supervision; orders allocating parental responsibility for a child or young person;
3. orders prohibiting an act by a person with parental responsibility;
4. contact orders;
5. orders for the provision of support services; and
6. orders to attend therapeutic or treatment program.

25.7 The Children's Court in NSW is not open to the public when it is hearing criminal proceedings to which a child is a party: Section 10 of the *Children (Criminal Proceedings) Act 1987*.

25.8 For further information about the Children's Court of NSW see:

[http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/lawlink/childrens\\_court/ll\\_cc.nsf/pages/CC\\_index](http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/lawlink/childrens_court/ll_cc.nsf/pages/CC_index)

## **26. Consumer, Trader & Tenancy Tribunal**

26.1 On 25 February 2002 the Fair Trading Tribunal and the Residential Tribunal merged to create the Consumer, Trader & Tenancy Tribunal. The Tribunal was established as the specialist dispute resolution forum for some consumer, trader and tenancy based matters.

26.2 The Tribunal deals with the following disputes: rental bond and residential tenancy issues, purchase and supply of goods and services, motor vehicle repairs and purchase of new cars, finance and credit, owning property in a strata or community scheme, building or renovating, and retirement villages.

- 26.3 The role of the Tribunal is to provide an independent, low cost and accessible dispute resolution forum to the people of NSW who are parties in consumer or tenancy disputes. In most practical aspects, it acts like a court.
- 26.4 The Tribunal conducts hearings at over 95 locations throughout NSW including designated hearing rooms and registries at Hurstville, Penrith, Liverpool, Sydney CBD, Newcastle, Parramatta, Tamworth and Wollongong.
- 26.5 Hearings are conducted by Tribunal Members who are independent statutory officers. The Chairperson of the Tribunal is Ms K Ransome.
- 26.6 For further information on the Consumer, Trader & Tenancy Tribunal see:  
<http://www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au/cttt.html>

## **27. Guardianship Tribunal**

- 27.1 The Tribunal operates under the *Guardianship Act 1987*. The Act sets out the orders that can be made by the Tribunal, the principles to be applied when making decisions and the limits of its responsibilities and functions.
- 27.2 The primary role of the Guardianship Tribunal is to make guardianship and financial management orders for people aged 16 years and over who do not have the capacity to make their own decisions. It may also make a range of other orders.
- 27.3 The Tribunal can:
1. make guardianship orders to appoint a private guardian (family member or friend) and/or the Public Guardian;
  2. make financial management orders to appoint a private financial manager and/or the Protective Commissioner;
  3. provide consent for treatment by a doctor or dentist;

4. review enduring powers of attorney;
  5. review an enduring guardianship appointment; and
  6. approve a clinical trial so that people with decision-making disabilities can take part.
- 27.4 For further information on the Guardianship Tribunal see:  
<http://www.gt.nsw.gov.au/>

## **28. Independent Commission Against Corruption**

- 28.1 Independent Commission Against Corruption was created by the *Independent Commission Against Corruption Act 1988*. The Commission has the authority to investigate any matter involving public sector corruption in NSW. It is a public authority, but is independent of the Government.
- 28.2 The Commission is a public authority, but is independent of the Government and is accountable to the people of NSW through the NSW Parliament. Its aims are to protect the public interest, prevent breaches of public trust and guide the conduct of public officials.
- 28.3 The Commission has three main functions:
1. Investigating and publicly exposing corrupt conduct so lessons may be learned and its recurrence minimised – this can include public hearings;
  2. Actively preventing corruption by giving advice and assistance; and
  3. Educating the community and public sector about corruption and its effects.
- 28.4 Amongst other things, the Commission is required to investigate any matter referred to it by both houses of Parliament, produce reports on any matter the

subject of a public inquiry, or matters referred by both houses of Parliament, and furnish the reports for tabling in Parliament.

28.5 The Commissioner of the Commission is The Hon. Jerrold Cripps QC.

28.6 For further information about the Independent Commission Against Corruption see: <http://www.icac.nsw.gov.au/>

## **29. Judicial Commission**

29.1 The Judicial Commission of NSW was established by the *Judicial Officers Act 1986*.

29.2 The Commission's principal functions are to assist the courts to achieve consistency in sentencing, organise and supervise an appropriate scheme of continuing education and training of judicial officers, and examine complaints against judicial officers.

29.3 The Commission consists of six official members, being the heads of jurisdiction in the State's six courts (Supreme Court, Court of Appeal, Industrial Relations Commission, Land and Environment Court, District Court and Local Court), together with four appointed members by the Governor of NSW. The President of the Commission is the Honourable Chief Justice Spigelman AC.

29.4 For further information on the Commission see: <http://www.judcom.nsw.gov.au>

## **30. The Dust Diseases Tribunal**

30.1 The Dust Diseases Tribunal, established by the *Dust Diseases Tribunal Act 1989*, is a specialist Court dealing with claims in tort for negligence relating to death or

personal injury resulting from exposure to asbestos and other dusts resulting in dust diseases and other dust-related conditions. The Tribunal also hears ancillary matters relating to actions for nervous shock, claims under *the Compensation to Relatives Act 1897*, claims for product liability based on exposure to dust, claims for contribution or indemnity between tortfeasors, and claims for indemnity arising under insurance policies.

30.2 The Tribunal was established to fast-track claims related to dust-related conditions so that plaintiffs could give evidence whilst they were still able.

30.3 Proceedings are brought before the Tribunal by filing a Statement of Claim in the Tribunal's Registry. The practice and procedure which applies in the Tribunal is determined by the *Supreme Court Rules* (which have now been overtaken, in large part, by the *Uniform Civil Procedure Rules*).

30.4 The Tribunal is a court of record and has the same powers that the Supreme Court used to have in relation to dust diseases cases, including the ability to award damages against a defendant who negligently exposed an injured plaintiff to dust.

30.5 The President of the Tribunal is the Hon Judge John O'Meally RFD AM.

30.6 For further information on the Dust Diseases Tribunal see:

[http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/lawlink/ddt/ll\\_ddt.nsf/pages/DDT\\_index](http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/lawlink/ddt/ll_ddt.nsf/pages/DDT_index)

### **31. The Mental Health Review Tribunal**

31.1 The Mental Health Review Tribunal is an independent body established by the *Mental Health Act 2007* which upholds the civil and legal rights of people with mental illness and ensures that they receive the best possible care in the least restrictive environment.

- 31.2 The Tribunal reviews case management plans proposed by psychiatric case managers and hospital staff. It does not prescribe drugs or treatments. The Tribunal conducts hearings and collects evidence from consumers, mental health workers and other interested people. The Tribunal can consider reports from the patient or mental health consumer, their relatives and friends, treating doctors, social workers, nurses, case workers and other hospital or community centre staff. The Tribunal is not bound by the formal rules of evidence and is able to ask questions and gather whatever information it deems relevant during a hearing.
- 31.3 After considering this information, the Tribunal members decide whether or not the treatment and care suggested by the hospital or community health centre staff is appropriate and in line with the Mental Health Act. If they agree, the Tribunal makes an order which sets out its decision. If the Tribunal does not agree with the treatment plan suggested by the health care team, they may discharge the patient, adjourn the review to get more information or vary the proposed plan.
- 31.4 In civil hearings, the Tribunal may:
1. make Temporary Patient Orders and Continued Treatment Patient Orders, authorising the continued involuntary detention of a person made an involuntary patient by a Magistrate's Order;
  2. review continued treatment patients (usually every 6 months);
  3. review informal (voluntary) patients (usually every 12 months);
  4. hear appeals against a medical superintendent's refusal to discharge an involuntary patient;
  5. make, vary and revoke Community Treatment Orders and Community Counselling orders;
  6. hear appeals against a Magistrate's decision to make a Community Order;
  7. approve the use of electro-convulsive therapy for involuntary patients;
  8. approve surgery on a patient detained in hospital;
  9. approve special medical treatment (sterilisation); and

10. make orders under the *Protected Estates Act 1983* for a person's financial affairs to be managed by the Protective Commissioner.
- 31.5 The Tribunal also reviews the cases of all forensic patients (at least every 6 months) who have been found not guilty by reason of mental illness, found unfit to be tried, or transferred from prison to hospital because of mental illness. The Tribunal makes recommendations to the NSW Minister for Health about their care and treatment and can also make a determination about whether a person is fit to stand trial.
- 31.6 Appeals against the decision of the Tribunal must be made to the Supreme Court of NSW.
- 31.7 The President of the Tribunal is the Hon Greg James QC.
- 31.8 For further information on the Mental Health Review Tribunal see:  
<http://www.mhrt.nsw.gov.au>

## **32. The Administrative Decisions Tribunal**

- 32.1 The Administrative Decisions Tribunal, established on 6 October 1998, is responsible for reviewing administrative decisions made by government agencies, including freedom of information decisions; reviewing certain decisions regarding adoption, community and disability services; hearing complaints of discrimination, vilification, harassment and victimisation referred by the President of the Anti-Discrimination Board; hearing certain types of professional misconduct cases (for example, matters referred to the Tribunal by the Legal Services Commissioner, the Bar Council or the Law Society Council against a solicitor or barrister), and hearing retail lease disputes.

32.2 The Tribunal is made up of six Divisions and an Appeal Panel. Each Division is responsible for particular areas. They are the General Division including the Guardianship and Protected Estates List, and the following five specialist Divisions:

1. Community Services Division
2. Revenue Division
3. Equal Opportunity Division
4. Retail Leases Division
5. Legal Services Division.

32.3 The Legal Services Division of the Tribunal deals with complaints about the professional conduct of barristers, solicitors and licensed conveyers referred to it by the Office of the Legal Services Commissioner, the Bar Council or the Law Society Council.

32.4 The right to request a review of a decision by the Tribunal is set out in the legislation under which the government agency made the decision. In some cases you are required to ask for an internal review of a decision by the government agency concerned before you can apply to the Tribunal for a review.

32.5 The Tribunal cannot deal with some cases involving administrative decisions, these are decisions made by Local Councils about development or building applications, and land valuation made by the Office of the Valuer General, both of which are dealt with by the Land and Environment Court. There are also claims for review of state administrative decisions of government departments, such as in relation to public transport licenses.

32.6 The President of the Administrative Decisions Tribunal is his Hon Judge Kevin O'Connor AM. The Deputy President and Divisional Head of the Legal Services Division of the Tribunal is The Hon Acting Judge Angela Karpin.

32.7 For further information about the Administrative Decisions Tribunal see:  
<http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/adt>

### **33. The Victims Compensation Tribunal**

33.1 The Victims Compensation Tribunal was established under the *Victims Support and Rehabilitation Act 1996*. The Tribunal consists of:

- Magistrates who determine appeals against determinations and make orders for the recovery of money from convicted offenders;
- Compensation Assessors who make determinations in compensation claims and approve counselling applications; and
- Administrative staff.

33.2 The Tribunal provides a mechanism whereby persons can apply for compensation if they are the victim of an act of violence and are injured as a result or if they are injured as a result of witnessing an act of violence. Victims can also claim compensation if they are the member of the immediate family of a homicide victim; if they are the parent or guardian of a primary victim of a sexual assault and the primary victim was under the age of 18 years at the time of the act, and if they are injured whilst trying to prevent someone from committing an act of violence.

33.3 For further information about the Victims Compensation Tribunal see:  
<http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/vct>

### **34. Community Justice Centres**

34.1 Community Justice Centres are not courts but operate a free, impartial and confidential mediation and conflict management services to assist people resolve disputes. The Centres operate under the *Community Justice Centres Act 1983*.

- 34.2 The types of matters dealt with by the Centres include family disputes and youth conflict, workplace grievances, neighbourhood and community disputes.
- 34.3 The services provided by the Centres are mediation, conflict management, dispute counselling, facilitation, technology assisted mediation and community education. Mediation is the preferred method of dispute resolution. Mediations are conducted by mediators who are selected, trained and supervised by the Centres. The Centres use a co-mediation approach in which two mediators conduct each session.
- 34.4 The Centres are funded by the NSW Government and forms part of the Attorney General's Department. The Centre Directorate is the office of the Director and Administration for Community Justice Centres which is situated in the Parramatta Justice Precinct, Parramatta.
- 34.5 For further information about Community Justice Centres see:  
<http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/cjc>

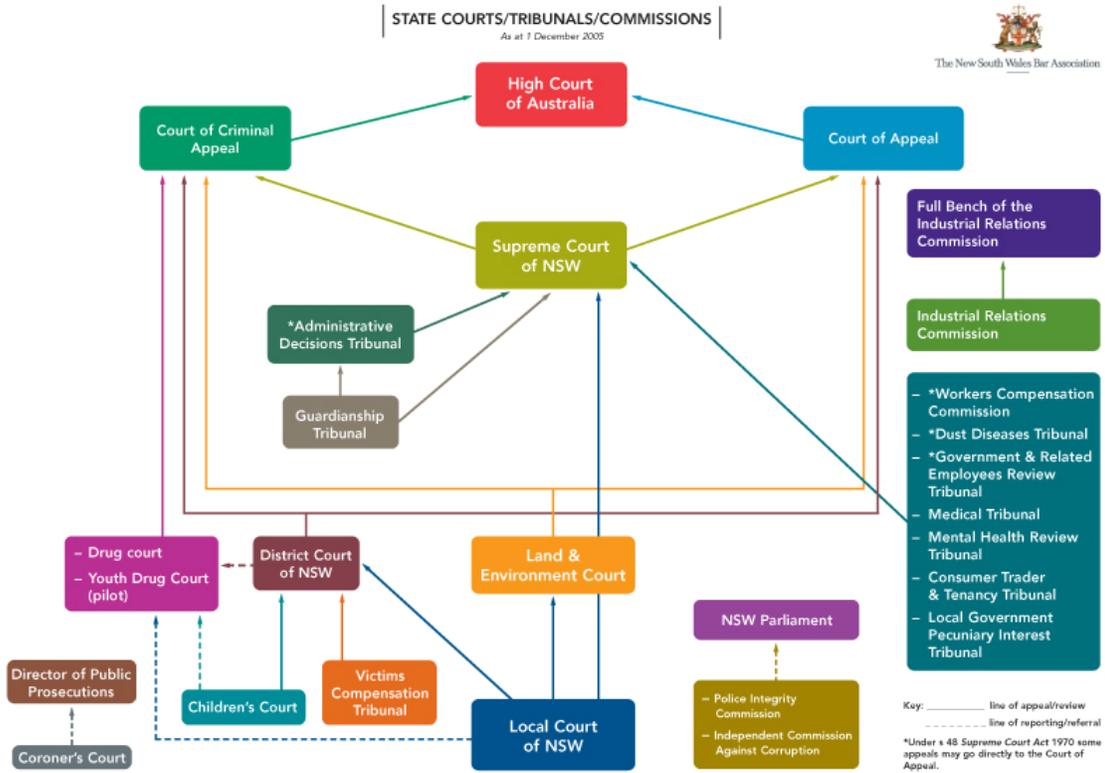
### **35. The Government and Related Employees Appeal Tribunal**

- 35.1 The Government and Related Employees Appeal Tribunal is an independent body established under the *Government and Related Employees Appeal Tribunal Act 1980*. The Tribunal hears and determines appeals against decisions relating to the discipline and promotion of NSW public sector employees. Members of the NSW Police Service also have appeal rights in respect of promotions, refusals to have injury or illness classified as work related and disciplinary sanctions other than dismissal.
- 35.2 For further information on the Government and Related Employees Appeal Tribunal see: <http://www.industrialrelations.nsw.gov.au/great>

### **36. LawAccess NSW**

- 36.1 LawAccess NSW is a free Legal Helpline service designed to provide people of NSW with a telephone service where they can be referred to appropriate legal and related assistance services in NSW. LawAccess NSW was launched by the then Attorney General of NSW, the Hon Bob Debus MP, on 17 June 2002.
- 36.2 LawAccess provides legal information, referral and advice; develops and distributes legal information resources, and works with other legal assistance services in NSW to streamline the provision of legal services.
- 36.3 The Bar Association was one of the founding partners in the initiative, together with the NSW Attorney General's Department, the NSW Legal Aid Commission and the Law Society of NSW. In addition to the founding partners, the Combined Community Legal Centres and Public Interest Advocacy Centre are on the LawAccess NSW board.
- 36.4 The service helps customers to find the information and services that are best able to assist with legal problems and questions. LawAccess NSW is available to all NSW residents but is particularly aimed at people who have difficulty accessing traditional community and government legal services such as people in regional and isolated areas and people with disabilities
- 36.5 For further information see: <http://www.lawaccess.nsw.gov.au>

# STRUCTURE OF NEW SOUTH WALES COURTS AND TRIBUNALS



## **TITLES**

### **37. Superior court judges**

37.1 'Superior court' judges are judges of the following courts:

- the High Court of Australia
- the Federal Court of Australia
- the Family Court of Australia
- the Supreme Court of NSW (including Court of Appeal and Court of Criminal Appeal)
- the Industrial Relations Commission of NSW
- the Land & Environment Court

37.2 In conversation in court, superior court judges should be addressed as 'Your Honour', the exception being the Chief Justice of the High Court and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court (of NSW or any other State) who should be referred to in conversation and in writing as '*Chief Justice*' (refer to 1.6 regarding how to address the President).

37.3 Out of court you introduce a superior court judge as 'Justice/Associate Justice.....'. So for example, if you were introducing someone to The Honourable Justice Virginia Bell you would introduce her as '...this is Justice Bell'. However, in conversation with a judge you refer to him/her as 'judge'.

37.4 All superior court judges are referred to in written form as '*The Honourable Justice/Associate Justice.....*'. This may be shortened to '*The Hon. Justice/Associate Justice.....*'. In correspondence, they should thereafter be addressed as '*Dear Judge/Associate Judge.*' However, in the case of the Chief Justice, he should be referred to as The Hon JJ Spigelman AC, it is incorrect to refer to him as the Hon Justice because Chief Justices do not hold that particular commission, only Chief Justice. The Chief Justice should be referred to in written

form as *'The Honourable JJ Spigelman AC.....'* and in correspondence as *'Dear Chief Justice.'*

- 37.5 When writing to a superior court judge address the letter as follows:

*The Honourable/Hon. Justice/Associate Justice \_\_\_\_\_*

*Judges' Chambers*

*Supreme Court of NSW*

*Dear Judge/Associate Judge*

- 37.6 The President of the Court of Appeal and the President of the Industrial Relations Commission of NSW should be addressed as *'President'*, both in writing and in conversation (in the case of the *'President'*, if you forget and call him/her *'Judge'* that would not be a monumental faux pas).

- 37.7 When writing to the current President address the letter as follows:

*'The Hon. Justice James Allsop*

*President*

*Judges' Chambers*

*Supreme Court of NSW'*

- 37.8 It should be noted that judges of the superior courts may choose to be known as *'The Honourable Mr Justice/Associate Justice...'* or *'The Honourable Justice/Associate Justice...'*. The Supreme Court website has a list of Judges and Associate Judges who use the title The Honourable Mr Justice/Associate Justice. Please note that female judges of superior courts are referred to as *'The Honourable Justice/Associate Justice...'*.

- 37.9 Many superior court judges were QCs or SCs prior to their appointment. However, you do not include the post nominals QC or SC.

## **38. Federal Court Magistrates**

- 38.1 In court, Federal Court Magistrates are referred to as *'Your Honour'* or *'Chief Federal Magistrate'* or *'Federal Magistrate'*, but not *'Your Worship'*.
- 38.2 Outside court, the correct form of address is *'Chief Federal Magistrate'* (in the case of Mr John Pascoe AO), or *'Federal Magistrate'*, *'Mr'*, *'Ms'*, *'Sir'* or *'Madam'*.
- 38.3 Correspondence should be addressed:

*'Mr/Ms (surname)*

*Federal Magistrate (or Chief Federal Magistrate in the case of Mr Pascoe AO)*

*Federal Magistrates' Chambers*

*Federal Magistrates Service'*

## **39. District Court Judges**

- 39.1 In court, judges of the District Court of NSW (other than the Chief Judge – see paragraph 3.3) are referred to as *'His Honour Judge...'*. Female judges of the District Court are referred to as *'Her Honour Judge...'*.
- 39.2 Outside court, the correct way to introduce a District Court judge is *'Judge .....*' So, for example, Judge Penny Hock would be introduced as *'...this is Judge Hock.'* In conversation with a District Court judge, you refer to them as *'Judge'*.
- 39.3 Sometimes a District Court judge may have been a superior court judge, in Australia or overseas. In such cases, the judge retains the title *'The Honourable Justice...'* and you do not include the post nominals QC or SC, e.g. the

Honourable Justice R.O. Blanch AM (Chief Judge of District Court of NSW) has retained '*The Honourable Justice*' title as he was a judge of the Supreme Court of NSW prior to his appointment as a Chief Judge of the District Court. But if a judge has never been a superior court judge, you do include the post nominals QC or SC, e.g. the Honourable Judge Peter Berman SC.

39.4 When writing to a District Court Judge address the letter as follows:

*His Honour Judge Peter Berman SC*  
*Judges' Chambers*  
*District Court of New South Wales*

*Dear Judge*

#### **40. Local Court Magistrates**

40.1 In court, Magistrates are addressed as '*Your Honour*'.

40.2 Outside of court, Magistrates are addressed as '*Magistrate \_\_\_\_\_*'.

40.3 When writing to Magistrates write to them as '*Dear Magistrate*'. When writing to the Chief Magistrate, write to him as '*Dear Chief Magistrate*'.

#### **41. Acting Judges**

41.1 In conversation, refer to them as '*Judge*' for the period they are an Acting Judge. When writing to Acting Judges, use the same mode as referred to in previous paragraphs of this memo but insert the word '*Acting*' before the word Justice or Judge (i.e. Superior Court: '*The Honourable Acting Justice \_\_\_\_\_*' /District Court: '*His (or Her) Honour Acting Judge \_\_\_\_\_*').

## **42. Retired judges and members of the Executive Council**

- 42.1 Retired Judges of ‘superior courts’ retain for their life the title ‘*The Honourable*’ and the post nominals QC/SC. Therefore, when writing to a retired Supreme Court judge you write to ‘*The Honourable \_\_\_\_\_ (name)*’ and insert the nominals QC/SC as appropriate. Of course, you drop the use of the word Justice.
- 42.2 You may feel comfortable still calling a retired judge ‘*Judge*’ in conversation. Most will not object to that. However, when a judge retires, there is no entitlement to the title. It should **not** be used in any formal dealings, correspondence or publications etc.
- 42.3 In addition, all members of the Executive Council (both current and past) are referred to as ‘*The Honourable \_\_\_\_\_ (name)*’ and are entitled to retain that title for life (i.e. normally an appointment to the Executive Council is for life, although in practice only currently serving Ministers of State or Parliamentary Secretaries are summoned to Executive Council meetings).

## **43. Federal and State Attorneys General**

- 43.1 The NSW Attorney General is currently The Honourable John Hatzistergos MP. He is the highest law officer in this State, but is also a Minister of Government in State Parliament. Mr Hatzistergos holds a NSW barrister’s practising certificate. He is also a member of the New South Wales Bar Association. For further information about the NSW Attorney General and his Department see: [http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/LawLink/Corporate/ll\\_corporate.nsf/pages/attorney\\_generals\\_department\\_index](http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/LawLink/Corporate/ll_corporate.nsf/pages/attorney_generals_department_index)
- 43.2 The Commonwealth Attorney-General (note hyphen here) is The Honourable Robert McClelland MP. He is the highest Commonwealth law officer and is also

a Minister of Government in the Federal Parliament. For further information about the Commonwealth Attorney-General and his Department see <http://www.ag.gov.au>

#### **44. Barristers**

44.1 Barristers customarily omit 'Mr', 'Mrs' etc when speaking about each other to other barristers. (For example, a conversation may go as follows: 'Lydiard will speak to Bathurst about making arrangements for her and Slattery to attend the High Court ceremony.'). The same omission is customary when barristers speak to each other, if they are not on first name terms.

44.2 Similarly, if writing to a barrister who they do not know personally, some barristers address the letter 'Dear Walker,' (i.e. using the surname only).

44.3 The practice of omitting 'Mr', 'Mrs' etc is not usually followed when non-barristers are involved in the conversation or being written to (in other words, we write to and refer to barristers as 'Mr', 'Mrs', etc).

#### **45. Queen's Counsel (QC) and Senior Counsel (SC)**

45.1 Only 'silk' or 'senior counsel' can use the post nominals QC or SC (as appropriate – i.e., to whichever they were appointed).

45.2 You will hear the expressions 'the taking of silk', 'taking silk' or 'took silk'. In fact, one doesn't 'take it' as such; rather one is appointed silk. Application for appointment as SC is to the President of the Bar Association. For information about the appointment of Senior Counsel see the Association's website.

- 45.3 Being appointed a silk is an acknowledgment by a person's peers that his or her advocacy skills and knowledge of the law are such that they are able to take on cases involving complex law. In other words, their skills are being recognised by their peers.
- 45.4 When a barrister 'takes silk' he/she changes the robes they wear (i.e., from robes worn by a junior to robes worn by a silk) and use a red brocade bag instead of the blue brocade bag used by juniors. The gown worn by a 'silk' is made of silk, and from a visual point of view is easily distinguishable because both arms have a 'tail'.
- 45.5 There is no difference in status between a QC and an SC – only the title has changed. Queen's Counsel were appointed by the State Attorney General up to 1992 and are therefore referred to as 'one of Her Majesty's Counsel'.
- 45.6 The title 'Senior Counsel' (SC) was introduced with the first set of appointments of Senior Counsel by the NSW Bar Association on 1 December 1993 after the NSW Government announced it would no longer appoint Queen's Counsel.
- 45.7 Both QCs and SCs are known as 'senior counsel'. They commonly (but not always) appear with a junior barrister, not surprisingly referred to as 'the junior'. QCs and SCs, when leading a junior, are known as 'the leader', or 'leading counsel'.

#### **46. Other Post-Nominals**

- 46.1 If any member of the Bar has other post nominals (e.g., Australian and Military Honours), these all need to go after their names, for example CBE, AO, AE, RFD. Those honours are listed before the post nominals QC or SC. For example, Maurice Neil RFD QC.

## **ORDER OF SENIORITY**

### **47. Seniority of Senior Counsel**

47.1 Seniority of senior counsel is determined by their date of appointment as senior counsel, not their date of admission to the Supreme Court or date of commencing practice at the Bar.

47.2 A silk appointed in, say, 1980 will rank far in front in the seniority stakes to a silk appointed in 1995. As all QC appointments predate the SC appointment system, it follows that all QCs are senior (though equal in status) to all SCs.

47.3 On 1 January 2000 the New South Wales Bar Association Constitution took effect, replacing the previous Articles. The Constitution provides a definition of Practice Date in Clause 1.1, namely:

**Practice Date** means in relation to a Local Practising Barrister the date of the most recent practising certificate granted by the Bar Council under the Act (not being an annual renewal of that certificate) unless otherwise determined by the Bar Council.

47.4 Therefore a barrister who began practice at the Bar, say, 12 years ago and who became senior counsel in 1995 will have precedence (i.e., seniority) over a barrister who began practice at the Bar, say, 25 years ago but who was appointed senior counsel in 1996. In other words, the 1995 appointment of senior counsel takes precedence over any 1996 appointment of senior counsel, despite the varying number of the years that the individual barristers had been in practice at the Bar. In NSW, all seniority is determined by admission and appointment to silk in NSW. Seniority of barristers practising in other States is irrelevant.

47.5 There are of course a number of silk appointed in any single year (usually 12-20). In those circumstances you may need to go to the actual list of seniority that was

issued in that year, which will give you the seniority of the respective persons appointed as silk in any given year. That seniority is determined by the relative seniority held by the appointees as junior counsel.

**48. Listing junior members of the Bar in order of seniority**

48.1 All senior counsel (whether they be QCs or SCs) are senior to any junior barristers.

48.2 All junior barristers should be listed in order of seniority, by reference to their seniority date in the Bar Association's database (not by reference to their date of admission, which may or may not be their date of seniority).

48.3 The Bar Council endorsed the following policy in relation to seniority at its meeting held on 2 December 2004:

A. The seniority of a barrister who practised at the Bar of New South Wales on or before 30 June 1988, or held a practising certificate on or before 30 June 1992 is the date of his or her most recent admission to the Bar of New South Wales and, in the case of admission upon the same day, then according to the order in which admissions are ordered by the court.

B. The seniority of a barrister who does not come under category 'A' is the commencement date of the first barrister's practising certificate issued to him or her, unless there has been a period of absence from the Bar for more than two years. Where there has been a period of absence from the Bar of more than two years, unless special exemption is granted by the Executive Director in consultation with the Executive\*, the seniority of the barrister is the date of the first practising certificate issued to him or her after his or her return to the Bar.

C. The seniority of Queen's Counsel/Senior Counsel is determined in accordance with the terms of the Queen's Commission or the statement issued by the President of The New South Wales Bar Association announcing the appointments of Senior Counsel. All Queen's Counsel/Senior Counsel shall be deemed to be senior to all other barristers except law officers.

\*If special exemption is granted and the barrister retains their original seniority date, the applicable practising certificate fee (and membership fee) is to be determined by that earlier date.

48.4 As a general rule, documents, including letters and memos etc addressed to more than one barrister should set out names in accordance with seniority. Failure to set out a barrister's seniority correctly may cause offence to the barrister 'downgraded'. Sometimes the Chair of one of the Association's committees may be 'junior' to other members of the committee. In such cases, the Chair will be listed ahead of more senior members, but of course for all other purposes the normal seniority rules apply.

**Note: Whilst it is important that the order of seniority be correct in correspondence, today, for many, the significance of seniority exists primarily as a matter of courtesy e.g. the order of barristers sitting at the Bar Table in a ceremonial sitting of a court.**

## **ADMISSION TO THE ROLL OF LAWYERS**

- 49.1 In New South Wales, since October 2005 legally qualified persons are admitted by the Supreme Court as a *lawyer* but cannot practise as solicitors or barristers unless they are the holders of a practising certificate issued by the Council of the Law Society of New South Wales in the case of those choosing to practise as solicitors, or by the Bar Council of New South Wales in the case of those choosing to practise as barristers.
- 49.2 The newly admitted lawyer is entitled, subject to the legislation, at his or her election, to be issued with a solicitor's practising certificate or a barrister's practising certificate, but the respective Councils are empowered to impose conditions with respect to certain matters on those certificates. Prior to July 1994 a legally qualified person was admitted to the Supreme Court as either a *barrister* or as a *solicitor*. After July 1994 and prior to October 2005, a legally qualified person was admitted to the Supreme Court as a *legal practitioner*.
- 49.3 The New South Wales Bar Association requires lawyers commencing practice as barristers to undertake the Reading Program. The Reading Program consists of: examinations in ethics, evidence, and practice and procedure; a Bar Practice Course, which is a full time course of practical advocacy instruction; and reading with a practising barrister of not less than seven years standing for a period of twelve months.
- 49.4 For further information on practising certificates see the Bar Association's web site at [http://www.nswbar.asn.au/docs/professional/practice\\_nsw/pc\\_app.php](http://www.nswbar.asn.au/docs/professional/practice_nsw/pc_app.php)