

Media Release

STATEMENT FROM THE CHIEF JUSTICE OF VICTORIA

Friday, 20 March, 2020

The following statement is from the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Victoria and Chair of the Courts Council, Anne Ferguson.

e-Court pilots

The Victorian courts and Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) are now actively changing the way they operate in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In both the criminal and civil courts, we are rapidly moving to a position where appearances will be managed through the electronic and digital environment.

Not all courts have the technical capability yet, but considerable work is underway to build that as soon as possible.

Pilots will start immediately across the courts to test the technology. Once realised it will be scaled up to meet the changing needs of the sector. This is in addition to the work that has started to change the way we list matters to provide time certainty for appearances.

We are not there yet. Nor do we have all the answers. The situation is fluid and moving fast and while we cannot predict what may happen with COVID-19 in the immediate future we will continue to move to a more agile and flexible environment.

As Courts Council Chair, I have asked my fellow Council member, State Coroner, His Honour Judge Cain, to act as the coordination point between all Victorian criminal courts, the legal profession and criminal justice stakeholders.

As Chief Justice, I will act as the coordination point in relation to civil justice in Victoria, liaising with the legal profession and civil justice stakeholders.

The Courts and VCAT will continue to closely follow State and Commonwealth government health advice. I would like to thank all involved for their patience and understanding at this unprecedented time.

Contested Committals in the Magistrates' Court

Contested Committal hearings listed in the week commencing 23 March across the State and for the following seven weeks are to be adjourned.

Matters listed in the week commencing 23 March will be listed for mention on Monday 23 March for the purposes of being adjourned and thereafter, matters for the following seven weeks will be the subject of a further communication. Straight hand-up brief matters will continue to be heard.

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Cross-jurisdictional information

A considerable amount of work is underway across all Victorian courts and VCAT to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

Each jurisdiction will update the profession and community as any changes or decisions are made. Information will be included on their websites as it becomes available.

Those links are:

- <https://www.supremecourt.vic.gov.au/>
- <https://www.countycourt.vic.gov.au/>
- <https://www.vcat.vic.gov.au/>
- <https://www.mcv.vic.gov.au/>
- <https://www.childrenscourt.vic.gov.au/>
- <https://www.coronerscourt.vic.gov.au/>

Courts Council

The Honourable Chief Justice Anne Ferguson, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court (Chair)

The Honourable Chief Judge Peter Kidd, Chief Judge of the County Court

The Honourable Justice Michelle Quigley, President of VCAT

Her Honour Judge Lisa Hannan, Chief Magistrate

Her Honour Judge Amanda Chambers, President of the Children's Court

His Honour Judge John Cain, State Coroner

Dr Philip Williams, Non-Judicial Member

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