



## Family Court of Australia and Federal Circuit Court of Australia extend gratitude to the health, community and legal sectors

As 2020 draws to a close, on behalf of the judges and staff of the Family Court of Australia and the Federal Circuit Court of Australia, I wish to extend a message of gratitude to those who have served the Australian community during this extraordinarily difficult year. A year that has presented seemingly endless challenges for the Australian community broadly, and for those working within the health, community and legal professions.

In terms of the work achieved by the Judges and staff of the Courts, I wish to publicly acknowledge their professionalism, perseverance and dedication to ensuring access to justice was maintained with as minimal disruption as possible during the pandemic.

The Family Court has maintained a clearance rate of 98% since March and the Federal Circuit Court has maintained a clearance rate of 92% in family law since March. In general federal law, excluding migration, the Federal Circuit Court has sustained a clearance rate above 100%. These are truly astonishing figures considering the circumstances.

This year, we saw the appointment of highly skilled and respected Senior Registrars and Registrars to support the judiciary. They have conducted more than 3000 conciliations electronically this year, and have undertaken a heavy load of consent orders and divorces, and engagement in important projects.

Family Consultants have completed hundreds of family reports and 11F memos, with interviews and observations often taking place electronically or over the phone.

National Enquiry and Registry staff around the country have processed tens of thousands of documents and assisted the public with thousands of enquiries, and chambers staff have borne the responsibility of organising and facilitating electronic hearings and supporting Judges.

Whilst the pandemic could have prevented us from being able to focus on reform initiatives, this has not been the case. A number of important projects have been implemented or continued during this time, including; the launch of the Digital Court File; the COVID-19 List; the Discrete Property List; the Priority Property Pool 500; Rules Harmonisation and harmonisation of registrar delegations and the *Notice of Child Abuse, Family Violence or Risk*; the National Arbitration List; Registrar run Small Claims Lists; and the Central Migration Docket. Critically, the Lighthouse Project recently commenced which will help litigants navigate the process, assist in safety planning and refer families to appropriate health and other services. A Judicial Conduct Committee was also established to review current policies and judicial complaints procedures.

Throughout 2021 the Courts will continue to strive towards reducing waiting times and improving access to justice for litigants through these existing and new initiatives.

In conclusion, I wish to again acknowledge the tremendous work undertaken by everyone in the community, especially those working at the coalface. Whilst we undoubtedly will continue to be faced with ongoing challenges, I wish you all the very best for a safe and restful holiday season.

**The Hon. Justice William Alstergren**

Chief Justice - Family Court of Australia

Chief Judge - Federal Circuit Court of Australia