

HIGH COURT OF AUSTRALIA

PUBLIC INFORMATION AND VISITOR PROGRAMS

The High Court considers that it is important for members of the public to understand why the independent exercise of judicial power is essential to the maintenance of the rule of law in Australia's constitutional democracy. The Court's administration, under broad directions set by the Court's Public Information Committee, contributes to public education by:

- the provision of information on its website;
- maintaining appropriate communications with the media; and
- offering educational programs and activities in the High Court building in Canberra.

The Court's public information programs were developed under a Committee chaired by Justice Susan Kiefel AC. The Committee is currently chaired by Chief Justice Robert French AC, and includes Justice Virginia Bell AC, Justice Patrick Keane AC and the Chief Executive and Principal Registrar, Mr Andrew Phelan.

Website

The Court provides via its website very comprehensive information relating to the conduct of hearings – including case management timelines, written submissions, transcripts and audio visual recordings of oral arguments, judgments and judgment summaries (see <http://www.hcourt.gov.au/cases/current-cases-submissions> and <http://www.hcourt.gov.au/cases/cases-heard>). This resource has proved popular, with a total of 148,614 hits on the case information pages in the year to 30 June 2015.

The Court took the step from October 2013 of making available shortly after each Full Court hearing (other than hearings of applications for special leave), an audio-visual recording of the hearing. This initiative, a first for an Australian court, has been well-received, with 27,639 hits on the audio-visual page in the year to 30 June 2015.

The Court also publishes two regular bulletins: the High Court Bulletin (providing a comprehensive record of recent High Court of Australia cases: decided, reserved for judgment, awaiting hearing in the Court's original jurisdiction, granted special leave to appeal, refused special leave to appeal and not proceeding or vacated) – see <http://www.hcourt.gov.au/publications/high-court-bulletin>; and the Overseas Decisions Bulletin (providing information on decisions of the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom, the Supreme Court of Canada, the Supreme Court of the United States, the Constitutional Court of South Africa, the Supreme Court of New Zealand, and admiralty, arbitration and constitutional decisions of the Court of Appeal of Singapore) – see <http://www.hcourt.gov.au/library/overseas-decisions-bulletin>.

Included on the Court's website are information about the role, history and operation of the Court, as well as the building and its artworks. There is a comprehensive brochure on the Court - see <http://www.hcourt.gov.au/publications/annual-reports/brochures>. This is available in Bahasa Indonesian, Mandarin, Spanish and

Standard Arabic, as well as in English. Printed copies are available to visitors to the Court. Speeches by current and retired Justices of the Court are also published – for example, see <http://www.hcourt.gov.au/publications/speeches/speeches-by-current-justices>.

There is a dedicated part of the website with resources for students (<http://www.hcourt.gov.au/education/student-resources/resources-for-primary-secondary-and-tertiary-students>). This includes a Court-commissioned documentary, which can be viewed at <http://www.hcourt.gov.au/about/high-court-documentary>, and an activity booklet for primary school students (<http://www.hcourt.gov.au/assets/education/Student-Activity-Book.pdf>).

Maintaining appropriate communications with the media

The Court publishes online ‘short particulars’ of all matters to be heard before the Full Court, summarising the facts and legal issues to be decided by the Court (for example, see <http://www.hcourt.gov.au/registry/case-summaries-2015>). Copies are also available to visitors attending hearings.

When the Court hands down a judgment, in addition to publishing the judgment online the Court publishes a ‘judgment summary’ (for example, see <http://www.hcourt.gov.au/publications/judgment-summaries/2015-judgment-summaries>). This does not form part of the judgment and is not a substitute for the Court’s reasons in a judgment, but provides a convenient summary for the media and others of what was decided.

One of the Court’s Registrars performs a public information function, inclusive of dealing with media and public enquiries. This role does not include providing elaboration on decisions of the Court.

The Court’s ‘alert’ systems covering judgments, case summaries, judgment summaries and publications, now has 24,488 subscribers.

Educational programs and activities in the High Court building

The Court’s guides provide guided tours and presentations to school groups, other groups and visitors to the High Court building in Canberra. This function is additional to the functions of the guides in managing public access to courtrooms during hearings.

Schools must, and other groups may, book tours of the High Court building online (see <http://www.hcourt.gov.au/about/tour-bookings>). Appropriate public liability and risk assessments are also located there.

In the year to 30 June 2015, 730 school groups (with a total of 32,418 school students) received guided tours of the Court and presentations from guides on its constitutional and appellate role. There were approximately 41,000 additional visitors to the High Court’s Canberra building during the year. When the Court is sitting, courtrooms are open to the public. School groups and other visitors are welcome to sit in a courtroom and observe hearings.

The Court and individual Justices regularly engage in a number of civic and/or educational programs and activities. In the year to 30 June 2015:

- the Court hosted a session of the United Nations Model Assembly, attended by students from around the country.
- Chief Justice French presided over the Jessup Moot Grand Final in Courtroom One, and the Court hosted the official dinner for competitors.
- Justice Gageler spoke at the official dinner for the National Schools Constitutional Convention, held in the Public Hall of the High Court building.
- The Court hosted the announcement and reception of the Governor-General's Prize, an annual essay competition open to all Australian citizens and permanent residents enrolled in an undergraduate degree at an Australian university. Justice Kiefel chaired the judging panel.
- Two lectures were held in the High Court Public Lecture series. On 10 September 2014, Dr Philip Ayres delivered an address "The High Court's Ambassadors: Latham, Dixon and Stephen Compared", chaired by Justice Crennan. On 13 May 2015, Professor Paul Brand from All Souls College, Oxford, gave a lecture in connection with the 800th anniversary of the signing of the Magna Carta, entitled "Magna Carta and the Development of the Common Law", chaired by Justice Hayne. This lecture was followed by the opening of the Rule of Law Institute's Magna Carta exhibition. These lectures are open to all members of the public and are followed by a reception hosted by the Justices (see <http://www.hcourt.gov.au/publications/speeches/high-court-lecture-series>).

The Court and senior staff regularly host visiting delegations of Justices and court officials from overseas jurisdictions. During the year to 30 June 2015, the Court welcomed delegations of judges, senior lawyers, court administrators, parliamentarians, government officials, lawyers and law students from the Philippines, India, Thailand, Nepal, New Zealand, Belarus, the People's Republic of China, Japan, Indonesia, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Bangladesh, the United Kingdom, the United States, Kenya and Austria.

The Court supports the utilisation of the Public Hall of the High Court building and its wonderful acoustics for Sunday concerts. These concerts generally take place on the first Sunday of each month, are bookable online and are free of charge. During the year, these concerts attracted over 10,000 visitors to the Court who, in addition to enjoying the performances, are able to take a tour of the Court and learn about its role and history. A particular highlight was the concert jointly sponsored with the Australian War Memorial entitled "Resounding Gallipoli". Based on authentic accounts from the period, this concert featured performances on brass instruments originally played at Gallipoli and now held privately or by the Australian War Memorial. These instruments were restored especially for this event. The Court also continued to host a performance as part of the Canberra International Music Festival. Information on the Court's concerts may be found here: <http://www.hcourt.gov.au/about/concerts>.