

External scrutiny

External relations

The Court continues to foster and develop strategic partnerships in the federal court system, with other courts within Australia and New Zealand, and with the legal profession. The Chief Federal Magistrate, federal magistrates and the Chief Executive Officer participate in a range of consultative and strategic forums including:

Family Law Courts Board

The Chief Federal Magistrate and the Chief Executive Officer are members of the board together with their counterparts in the Family Court. The board meets every six weeks and is the strategic decision making forum that oversees the implementation and management of the Family Law Courts joint registry initiatives.

Chief Executive Officers Meeting

The Chief Executive Officer meets with his counterparts in the Federal Court and the Family Court every month. The Chief Executive Officers Meeting manages those issues that are of relevance to each court; for example, the Commonwealth Courts Portal was an initiative shared by the three courts under the auspices of the Chief Executive Officers.

Australian Courts Administrators' Group

The Chief Executive Officer represents the Court at this forum which brings together all Australian courts and has representation from New Zealand. The group meets on average five times per year.

Family Law Council

The Family Law Council provides advice to the Attorney-General on the working of the *Family Law Act 1975* and other family law legislation, legal aid in family law and other matters relating to family law. Federal Magistrate Hartnett and Federal Magistrate Sexton are members of the council and the Chief Executive Officer is an observer. The council generally meets each quarter.

National Alternative Dispute Resolution Advisory Council

Federal Magistrate Hartnett is a member of the National Alternative Dispute Resolution Advisory Council. The council provides advice on the development of alternative dispute resolution and promoting its use and meets approximately three times a year.

International visitors to the Court

The Court was pleased to host delegates of the Supreme People's Court of China in December 2007 who were on a judicial exchange program arranged by the Federal Court. As part of this program, the Federal Magistrates Court provided delegates with a tour of the Court's general federal law registry in Sydney and arrange for them to observe a Court hearing.

In April 2008 delegates of the Subordinate Court of Singapore visited Australia on a judicial information program conducted by the Family Court. Delegates attended the Court's Parramatta registry, sat in on a family law matter, and observed delivery of an urgent interim matter and a judgment.

Commonwealth Ombudsman

The Commonwealth Ombudsman has jurisdiction only in relation to the administrative affairs of the Court; he does not have jurisdiction over, and cannot investigate complaints about, the judicial process. During 2007–08 the Commonwealth Ombudsman received 12 approaches, two of which were investigated.

See page X for more information on complaints made to the Court.

Privacy

The Court holds no personal information, other than personnel information, in relation to the administrative affairs of the Court.

Statement under Section 8 of the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*

There were no freedom of information applications made to the Federal Magistrates Court in 2007–08.

Section 5 of the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* provides that the Act does not apply to any request for access to a document of the Court unless the document relates to matters of an administrative nature.

Inquiries concerning access to documents or freedom of information matters generally should be directed to:

- The Chief Executive Officer
Federal Magistrates Court of Australia
Level 11 Macquarie House
167–169 Macquarie St Sydney NSW 2000

Access to information outside of Freedom of Information Act

Rule 2.08 of the Federal Magistrates Court Rules provides for searching the records of the Court by the Attorney-General (in family law proceedings), a party, a lawyer for a party, a child representative (in family law proceedings) or a person granted leave by the court or a registrar. Leave may be granted if a proper interest is shown and may be subject to conditions.

Legal Services Directions 2005

Paragraph 11.1 of the *Legal Services Directions 2005* states that the Chief Executive Officer of the Federal Magistrates Court of Australia has the responsibility for ensuring that:

- arrangements for legal services are handled efficiently and effectively
- appropriate systems and procedures are in place to achieve compliance with these directions.

In accordance with paragraph 11.1 (ba) of the Legal Service Directions, the total legal services expenditure incurred by the Court for 2007–08 was as follows:

	Expenditure \$'000
The Court's total legal services expenditure (GST exclusive)	73
The Court's total external legal services expenditure (GST exclusive)	73

Pursuant to paragraph 11.2 of the Legal Services Directions, the CEO has issued a certificate to the Office of Legal Services Co-ordination of the Attorney-General's Department stating that the Federal Magistrates Court:

- has appropriate systems and procedures in place to ensure compliance with the Directions
- has no record of any alleged, possible or determined breach of the Directions during the financial year 2007–08.