



## FEDERAL MAGISTRATES COURT OF AUSTRALIA

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### The Federal Magistrates Court of Australia celebrates 10 years

Since the Federal Magistrates Court of Australia was established ten years ago it has experienced significant growth in workload, judicial numbers and jurisdiction and it is now the nation's largest federal court.

The Court today celebrated its milestone at a function held in Sydney.

Applications were first filed in the Federal Magistrates Court of Australia on 23 June 2000 and the Court's first sittings were conducted on 3 July 2000 in Adelaide, Brisbane, Canberra, Melbourne, Newcastle, Parramatta and Townsville.

The establishment of the Federal Magistrates Court marked a change in direction in the administration of justice at the federal level in Australia as it was the first lower level federal court since the passage of the Judiciary Act in 1903.

Chief Federal Magistrate Pascoe AO CVO said that he was extraordinarily proud of what has been achieved by the Court. "The evident success of the Federal Magistrates Court is measured not just by the volume of work which comes to it but also by the efficiency with which it manages that workload."

As an example of the expanded workload, in the Court's first full year of operation (2000-01) the Court received 36,435 applications but eight years later that figure had more than doubled with 85,984 applications filed in the Court in 2008-09.

The balance of family law work has evolved significantly since the inception of the Federal Magistrates Court and now over 80% of all family law applications (except those filed in WA) are filed in the Federal Magistrates Court with the Family Court now dealing with appeals and the most complex family law matters.

In addition, the Court deals with nearly all bankruptcy applications and approximately 95% of all migration applications filed in the federal courts.

Chief Federal Magistrate Pascoe said that, "While it has been a challenge over the years, the Court continues to meet one of its original objectives of avoiding undue delay for litigants and it has an outstanding reputation for efficiency and hard work."

In its family law jurisdiction in 2008-09, the Court finalised approximately 84% of matters within 6 months and 95% of all matters were settled within 12 months. In the Court's general federal law jurisdiction in 2008-09 the Court finalised approximately 79% of matters within 6 months and 93% within 12 months.

Ten years ago, the Court started with its original Chief Federal Magistrate, the current Chief Justice of the Family Court, The Honourable Diana Bryant and nine other Federal Magistrates. There has been a considerable increase in the membership of the Court which currently consists of 61 Federal Magistrates.

The Court's jurisdiction has broadened over the years, particularly in the areas of general federal law to include bankruptcy, human rights, copyright, migration, industrial law, trade practices, privacy, administrative and admiralty law.

Chief Federal Magistrate Pascoe said, "All members of the Court, their Associates and staff should be very proud of their achievements over the last ten years and look forward to the future with confidence."

The next ten years may bring a range of new challenges and opportunities with the Government's plan to restructure the Federal Magistrates Court through the *Access to Justice (Family Court Restructure and Other Measures) Bill 2010*.

Under the proposed new structure the Federal Magistrates Court will continue to hear general federal law matters but the family law component of the Court is to operate as a general division of the Family Court.

"The Court will continue to work with Government as future plans evolve," the Chief Federal Magistrate said.

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Media enquiries:

Denise Healy, Media and Public Affairs Manager, Federal Magistrates Court of Australia and Family Court of Australia  
(03) 8600 4357 or 0409 743 695  
[www.fmc.gov.au](http://www.fmc.gov.au)