

Federal Court publishes Guide to Virtual Hearings and Microsoft Teams and further Covid-19 updates

Date: 07 April 2020

Abstract:

Since 30 March 2020, the Federal Court has provided several additional responses and links to resources, in further response to the Covid-19 outbreak. Details of these are below.

Guide to Virtual Hearings and Microsoft Teams

On 2 April 2020, the Court published a guide to Virtual Hearings (“VH”), to assist parties to appear before court using remote access technology Microsoft Teams. As well as being a guide on how to use the technology, it also sets out:

- The initial steps that will be taken to arrange a VH. In summary, parties should liaise with the court regarding whether a VH is suitable, after considering appropriate available facilities, the locations and time zones of witnesses and firewall/security issues. Parties are expected to seek orders to facilitate a VH. Sample orders are set out in Annexure B to the guide. However, it may be that a teleconference is suitable;
- How the Court will establish a VH, including that two separate invites will be sent for a morning session and afternoon session in the case of a hearing listed for a full day duration. Invites can be forwarded to witnesses or other practitioners (but admission to the VH is subject to the Court on the day);
- The procedure when joining a VH (noting that participants should join at least 15 minutes before the listing time), including the entering of the names of the participants and the expectations of participants (including muting microphones and keeping cameras off other than for those appearing);
- The procedure for document management, by providing that a ‘Digital Court book’ should be created for a VH. The Court will direct when and how this should be provided, and how parties can ‘hand up’ documents (e.g. by email, a secure online file sharing platform or by sharing screens).

The guide, National practitioners/litigants guide to virtual hearings and Microsoft Teams, is [here](#). Parties should direct any questions regarding a specific matter to the docket judge chambers or relevant registrar. Any general questions regarding the guide can be emailed to Jessica Der Matossian, Registrar, Digital Practice at jessica.dermatossian@fedcourt.gov.au.

Special Measures Information Note (SMIN-1) updated on 31 March 2020

On 31 March 2020, the Court updated its Special Measures Information Note (SMIN-1) (initially issued on 23 March 2020). The note addresses several issues, e.g. electronic filing and signing of documents, the inspection of documents produced under subpoena and court listings. It includes provision for making, where possible, alternative arrangements for listings. The court is endeavouring to contact parties at least 2 weeks before a listing for this purpose. The updated Information Note is published on the Practice Notes page and can be found [here](#).

Contact numbers to request urgent face to face services or additional assistance needed due to the outbreak

On 30 March the Court advised that it can be contacted for assistance as follows:

- to request face to face services: Call 1300 720 980 and the court will assess if the circumstances are urgent; and
- where practitioners need adjournments or timetable variations or other assistance due to being involved in current proceedings that are impacted by Covid-19: contact National Judicial Registrar Tuan Van Le, on (03) 8600 3343.

Links to Government information regarding coronavirus

On 30 March the Court provided a number of useful links to Government information regarding coronavirus, see [here](#).