

COUNTY  
COURT OF  
VICTORIA

**ANNUAL  
REPORT**  
2024-25



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The County Court acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples and Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land and waterways upon which our lives depend. We acknowledge and pay respects to ancestors of this country – Elders, knowledge holders and leaders – past and present. We extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.



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# REPORT OF THE CHIEF JUDGE



Chief Judge Amanda Chambers

Reflected in this report is the skill, dedication to excellence, and commitment to the rule of law demonstrated by the judicial officers and staff of the County Court. It is a privilege to lead a Court that is committed to the community it serves.

It is a pleasure to present the County Court's 2024–25 Annual Report. As the principal trial court in Victoria, the work of the judicial officers and staff of this Court is central to the administration of justice. I was honoured to be appointed Chief Judge of this Court on 27 May 2025.

Since my appointment, I have been delighted to meet with members of the legal profession and their representative bodies, as well as other organisations, community groups, and members of government working across the justice system. I have been impressed by the strength of the collective commitment to improving access to justice.

The County Court faces a challenging fiscal environment, coupled with an increasing workload. We continue to innovate where we can to ensure that every case is dealt with as efficiently and effectively as possible. We work hard to place every resource at our disposal to its best possible use.

The ambitions of the Court are reflected in *Court Directions 2023–26* which has guided our priorities, and I am pleased to report that much has been achieved in those key strategic areas.

The Court as a whole experienced increased case initiations in 2024–25, a trend that has been seen in previous years. This was particularly the case for the Criminal Division which experienced an increase of 13 per cent in trial initiations. Although the Division was able to finalise 71 per cent of all criminal cases within 12 months, it will be challenging to maintain timely outcomes without further resources.

The strong performance of the Common Law Division resulted in the highest number of annual finalisations ever recorded. The Division achieved a 30 per cent increase in the number of trials that proceeded to verdict across a broad and complex caseload. Despite a significant rise in the number of intervention order appeals, the backlog was reduced by 45 per cent, providing a swift and effective justice response for those seeking protection from family violence.

The Commercial Division finalised over 40 per cent more cases, despite a growth of 16 per cent in initiations in 2024–25 compared to the previous year. The Commercial Division is committed to increasing the use of cost-effective dispute resolution processes to promote the early resolution of commercial cases. Recognising the increasing number of self-represented litigants seeking to resolve commercial disputes through the Court, the Division has published a helpful guide for those without legal representation.

This Court's Specialist Courts and programs play a critical role in meeting the broader justice needs of all Victorians, including First Nations peoples.

The County Koori Court welcomed nine new Elders and Respected Persons in 2024–25, adding to the wealth of cultural knowledge the Elders and Respected Persons bring to the sentencing process. There are close to 50 Elders and Respected Persons who sit in the County Koori Court in Melbourne and across seven circuit locations. I thank them for their valued contribution to the work of the Court.

The Drug and Alcohol Treatment Court operated at capacity in 2024–25, with almost double the number of referrals compared to the previous reporting period. This is a clear indication of the success of this multi-disciplinary court process that seeks to address the causes of offending and, in doing so, aims to enhance public safety.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

On behalf of the judicial officers and staff of the Court, I take this opportunity to thank and pay tribute to the outstanding contribution made to the administration of justice by my predecessor, the Honourable Justice Peter Kidd.

As Chief Judge from 2015–2025, Justice Kidd led the County Court with distinction, working tirelessly to ensure that the community better understood the work of the Court and its judicial officers. He consistently dedicated his time and effort to this endeavour and sought to enhance public confidence in the courts as institutions.

Justice Kidd faced the unprecedented challenges posed by the pandemic and oversaw the introduction of wide-ranging initiatives to maintain the operations of the Court during this period. These measures ensured that the County Court continued to serve the community, while protecting the health and wellbeing of its judicial officers and staff, the profession, and court users.

Thanks to Justice Kidd's stewardship, the Court is well-positioned to build on his many achievements. The County Court congratulates and wishes Justice Kidd all the very best in his new role as a judge of the Victorian Court of Appeal.

I am grateful to the judges, reserve judges and judicial registrars who work with commitment and dedication. I also thank all Heads of Divisions, Heads of Specialist Courts and the chairs of the various judicial committees and working groups for their invaluable contributions in 2024–25. I extend my gratitude to the Deputy Chief Judge, Meryl Sexton, for smoothing my transition into this role.

I am indebted to the Court's Chief Executive Officer, Jo Rainford, for her professionalism and expertise. The judicial support staff, executive team and administrative staff bring spirit and passion to all they do, and I thank them for their work.

Reflected in this report is the skill, dedication to excellence, and commitment to the rule of law demonstrated by the judicial officers and staff of the County Court. It is a privilege to lead a Court that is committed to the community it serves.

**Chief Judge Amanda Chambers**

County Court of Victoria

# REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

People are at the heart of everything we do. Whether it is the work we carry out each day in courtrooms or chambers, operations, or in facilities, IT or other support services, our purpose remains constant: to support judicial officers of the Court to determine matters in a fair, timely, efficient and accessible way.

This year has brought both progress and challenges for the Court.

We have achieved much against the re-focussed priorities in the *Court Administration Business Plan 2024–2026* (support the mental health and wellbeing of judicial officers; do core business well; achieve financial sustainability). We continued to deliver on initiatives set out in *Court Directions 2023–26*.

We worked across the justice system to maximise public value. We continued to improve how we work through collaboration and shared knowledge. We implemented a range of initiatives in our staff *Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy* as we continued to support the safety and wellbeing of our people.

At the same time, like other members of the Courts Group, we faced significant financial constraints, which required us to address cost pressures and significantly reduce our FTE. We have had to say goodbye to a number of staff. These decisions have not been made lightly, and I want to acknowledge the impact they had on our people who remain at the Court.

Despite these challenges, I am proud of how we have remained focussed on collaboration and improving the experience of court users.

It has been rewarding to work closely with our frontline staff, whether they be associates, tipstaves, or those working in Registry, to listen to their perspectives on the challenges facing the Court and to ensure their voices and experiences directly shape improvements in their working environment. Their insight is vital to making our workplace more responsive, diverse and inclusive.



Jo Rainford

With 80 per cent of our staff working in frontline roles, the issue of occupational violence remains a critical focus. We are actively working to strengthen prevention strategies and better support those affected, recognising the seriousness of the risks many of our judicial officers and staff face on a daily basis.

The reporting year saw the departure of former Chief Judge, Justice Peter Kidd and the appointment of the first female Chief Judge, Justice Amanda Chambers. I want to acknowledge the significant contribution made by Justice Kidd over 10 years as the leader of the Court and thank him on behalf of the Court's staff. I also want to congratulate Chief Judge Chambers on her appointment.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the judicial officers and staff of the Court. Their skill, dedication and unwavering commitment to the Victorian community fills me with confidence about the Court's bright future.

**Jo Rainford**  
Chief Executive Officer

## ABOUT THE COURT

The County Court is Victoria's principal trial court. In the 2024–25 financial year, the Court was led by former Chief Judge Peter Kidd. Chief Judge Amanda Chambers was appointed to the role on 27 May 2025.

County Court judges deal with more than 10,000 cases a year across three divisions – Criminal, Common Law and Commercial.

County Court judges are also heads of jurisdiction at the Coroners Court and Children's Court, and Vice-Presidents at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal.

The Court has original jurisdiction in all civil and criminal cases, excluding a small number of offences such as treason and murder. The Court hears appeals from the criminal jurisdiction of the Magistrates' Court and the criminal and family divisions of the Children's Court.

Proceedings are open to the public, except when a judge closes a courtroom in the interests of justice.

The Court sits in Melbourne and 11 regional circuit locations across Victoria: Bairnsdale, Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong, Horsham, Latrobe Valley, Mildura, Shepparton, Wangaratta, Warrnambool and Wodonga.

The County Koori Court operates in eight locations across Victoria and ensures greater participation of the Aboriginal community in sentencing processes. The Drug and Alcohol Treatment Court and the Court Integrated Services Program are therapeutic intervention models that promote recovery and rehabilitation and address the underlying causes of offending behaviour. They aim to reduce offending and contribute to improved community safety.

The Chief Judge and the County Court's judges and judicial registrars are supported by approximately 285 staff.

# COURT LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE

AS AT 30 JUNE 2025

Chief Judge of the County Court	Judge Chambers
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## CRIMINAL DIVISION

Head of the Criminal Division	Judge Wraight
Judge in Charge of Melbourne Listings and Allocations	Judge Moglia
Judge in Charge of Melbourne Non-Trial Listings and Allocations	Judge Dawes
Judge in Charge of Circuit Listings and Allocations	Judge Doyle
Judge in Charge of the Long Trials List	Judge O'Connell

## SPECIALIST COURTS

Judge in Charge of the County Koori Court	Judge Johns
Judge in Charge of the Court Integrated Services Program (CISP)	Judge Dawes
Judge in Charge of the Drug and Alcohol Treatment Court (DATC)	Judge D Sexton

## COMMON LAW DIVISION

Head of the Common Law Division	Judge Purcell
Judge in Charge of General, Serious Injury and Applications Lists	Judge Purcell
Judge in Charge of the Adoptions, Surrogacy and Name Changes List	Judge Tsikaris
Judge in Charge of the Appeals and Post Sentence Applications List	Judge Pillay
Judge in Charge of the Confiscation List	Judge Hinchey
Judge in Charge of the Defamation List	Judge Clayton
Judge in Charge of the Family Property List	Judge Fraatz
Judge in Charge of the Medical List	Judge Morrish
Judge in Charge of the Institutional Liability List	Judge K L Bourke
Judge in Charge of the WorkCover List	Judge Sanger
Judge with responsibility for self-represented litigants (General List)	Judge Tran
Judge with responsibility for self-represented litigants (Serious Injury List)	Judge Ginnane
Judge with responsibility for the approval of infant and other compromises	Judge Myers
Judge with responsibility for s 134AB costs applications	Judge Manova

## COMMERCIAL DIVISION

Head of the Commercial Division	Judge Burchell
Judge in Charge of the General List	Judge Burchell
Judge in Charge of the Arbitration List	Judge Brimer
Judge in Charge of the Banking and Finance List	Judge Wise
Judge in Charge of the Building Cases List	Judge Kirton
Judge in Charge of the Complex Cases List	Judge A Ryan

# YEAR AT A GLANCE

TOTAL COUNTY COURT CASES	2023–24	2024–25	% change
Commenced	11,327	11,794	4.1%
Finalised	10,473	11,166	6.6%
Pending	12,486	13,276	6.3%
Overall County Court clearance ratio (%)	92%	95%	
% disposed within 12 months	54%	54%	

## COMMENCED

Number of cases committed or directly indicted during the reporting period.

## FINALISED

Number of cases completed during the reporting period. Cases no longer active.

## PENDING

Number of active/open cases as at the end of the reporting period.

## CLEARANCE RATE

How many cases finalised as a percentage of initiations.

TOTAL CRIMINAL CASES (INCLUDING APPEALS)	2023–24	2024–25	% change
Commenced	3,612	3,670	1.6%
Finalised	3,807	3,357	-11.8%
Pending	3,179	3,407	7.2%
Overall Criminal clearance ratio (%)	105%	91%	
% disposed within 12 months	71%	71%	

CRIMINAL TRIALS AND PLEAS	2023–24	2024–25	% change
Commenced	1,999	2,208	10.5%
Finalised	2,241	1,919	-14.4%
Pending	2,232	2,312	3.6%
Trials and pleas clearance ratio (%)	112%	87%	
% disposed within 12 months	53%	56%	

CRIMINAL APPEALS	2023–24	2024–25	% change
Commenced	1,613	1,460	-9.5%
Finalised	1,566	1,440	-8.0%
Pending	709	753	6.2%
Appeals clearance ratio (%)	97%	99%	
% disposed within 12 months	96%	92%	

TOTAL COMMON LAW DIVISION*	2023–24	2024–25	% change
Commenced	4,934	4,894	-0.8%
Finalised	4,596	4,872	6.0%
Pending	6,189	6,490	4.9%
Clearance ratio (%)	93%	100%	
% disposed within 12 months	40%	41%	

TOTAL COMMERCIAL DIVISION	2023–24	2024–25	% change
Commenced	2,781	3,230	16.1%
Finalised	2,070	2,937	41.9%
Pending	3,118	3,379	8.4%
Clearance ratio (%)	74%	91%	
% disposed within 12 months	56%	52%	

These figures apply statewide.

\*Common Law includes adoptions and matters in the Appeal and Post Sentence Application List effective from 1st August 2019. % disposed within 12 months does not include adoptions data.

## COURT DIRECTIONS 2023–26 AND OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

*Court Directions 2023–26* sets out the Court’s direction, ambitions and desired outcomes. It confirms the Court’s core purpose: to hear and determine matters in a fair, timely, efficient and accessible way.

*Court Directions* identifies five strategic pillars:

- 1. Improve access for Court users and the community**
- 2. Embed and enhance therapeutic justice**
- 3. Uplift our digital capabilities**
- 4. Strengthen our positive working culture**
- 5. Secure the sustainability of the Court**

This roadmap ensures the Court stays on the path to achieving its vision to be a leader in court excellence, and delivers the highest standard of justice to the Victorian community.

Our focus is on growth – growth of the Court’s systems and processes, growth of our people and how we contribute to, and influence, the system to improve justice outcomes.

The following pages list the Court’s key achievements in 2024–25 for each strategic pillar.

PILLAR 1

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS DURING 2024–25

IMPROVE ACCESS FOR COURT USERS AND THE COMMUNITY

DESCRIPTION

We will work to make the Court more accessible by improving administrative processes, resources and infrastructure to support just outcomes.

ON-SITE SELF-REPRESENTED LITIGANT SERVICE

Over the past year, the Self-Represented Litigant Service provided by Justice Connect continued to provide legal assistance to vulnerable self-represented litigants within the Commercial Division. Justice Connect’s work included face-to-face support and referrals to pro bono law firms.

SEPARATE WAITING SPACE

The County Court has a designated Separate Waiting Space (SWS) to provide a safe and supported environment for vulnerable witnesses. In May 2025 the Court commenced a six-month pilot for the use of the SWS. Throughout the pilot, the SWS will be available for the Office of Public Prosecutions’ Victim and Witness Assistance Service to book for vulnerable witnesses with whom they work.

EDUCATION PROGRAM

County Court education sessions provide opportunities for VCE Legal Studies students to interact with judicial officers and associates, ask questions and learn about the Court and its role in the justice system.

From July to December 2024, the Court offered online education sessions for VCE Legal Studies students. This program aimed to enhance understanding of the Court’s work and promote deterrence.

As of 2025, County Court education sessions are facilitated as part of the Court Services Victoria Education Program and delivered in person at the Court. As well as meeting with judicial officers, in-person sessions provide the opportunity to observe court proceedings which contextualises learning and furthers students’ understanding of the justice system.

Over the 2024–25 financial year, 756 VCE Legal Studies students from 29 different schools engaged with the program, with 28 per cent of those schools located in regional areas.

*‘This visit significantly helped improve the students’ understanding of the Court and the justice system. The excursion provided a practical, real-world exploration of the County Court, allowing the students to observe the Court’s structure, the roles of various personnel, and [processes] firsthand.’* – Yea High School

TERTIARY PROGRAM

The Tertiary Program consists of in-person engagement sessions, where Victorian tertiary students meet with a judicial officer and observe matters relevant to their course. In 2024–25, the Court held five tertiary engagement sessions, with approximately 123 students studying law and journalism with five different institutions.

PILLAR 1	KEY ACHIEVEMENTS DURING 2024–25
<p data-bbox="209 640 528 696"><b>IMPROVE ACCESS FOR COURT USERS AND THE COMMUNITY</b></p> <p data-bbox="209 831 357 853"><b>DESCRIPTION</b></p> <p data-bbox="209 871 604 1016">We will work to make the Court more accessible by improving administrative processes, resources and infrastructure to support just outcomes.</p>	<p data-bbox="659 640 941 663"><b>MEDIA AND OPEN JUSTICE</b></p> <p data-bbox="659 678 1382 853">The continued widespread use of online court hearings allowed for significant media and community observation of the Court’s work, safeguarding open and accessible justice for all Victorians. The Court received more than 1,700 media requests to attend online court hearings, including 180 criminal jury trials, across every Circuit Court location and Melbourne.</p> <p data-bbox="659 871 1369 1144">There were 1,552 media applications to access case file material in civil and criminal matters. Most of these applications were granted after review by a judicial officer. The Court published 32 judgments in high-profile cases on its website under the Immediate Publication Protocol, which provides same-day publication of sentencing decisions, enhancing media and community engagement. The Court began publishing select audiovisual recordings of high-profile judgments to its YouTube channel and website, furthering the reach and engagement of court work.</p> <p data-bbox="659 1171 1085 1193"><b>DIVERSITY AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS</b></p> <p data-bbox="659 1205 1094 1227"><i>Victorian Bar Diversity Internship Program</i></p> <p data-bbox="659 1243 1362 1359">The Victorian Bar Diversity Internship Program offers students from culturally and racially marginalised backgrounds the opportunity to gain experience and develop connections with members of the legal profession.</p> <p data-bbox="659 1377 1372 1494">The program expanded in 2024–25 and now offers placements in the Federal Court, Supreme Court, County Court, Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia, Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) and Administrative Review Tribunal.</p> <p data-bbox="659 1512 1382 1628">In 2024–25, the program welcomed six interns, an increase from three interns in 2023–24. Nine internship placements will be offered in the next round. The interns provided feedback that they found their time at the Court interesting and meaningful.</p> <p data-bbox="659 1655 904 1677"><i>Multifaith prayer rooms</i></p> <p data-bbox="659 1693 1366 1868">Planning is under way to construct a new multifaith prayer room in the jury pool area for jury members. The room will be built in the 2025–26 financial year. This builds upon the work of the Court’s Diversity and Community Relations Committee to provide two multifaith prayer rooms on the ground floor of the County Court that are available to all visitors of the Court.</p> <p data-bbox="659 1895 1016 1917"><b>IMPROVED SECURITY SCREENING</b></p> <p data-bbox="659 1933 1382 2020">The foyer entrance to the Court was refurbished and the security equipment upgraded. This has improved the efficiency of the security screening process and flow through of people attending the Court.</p>

PILLAR 2

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS DURING 2024–25

EMBED AND ENHANCE THERAPEUTIC JUSTICE

DESCRIPTION

We will strengthen partnerships to improve access to therapeutic justice and community safety. We will evaluate the success of our programs to identify what works best and support ongoing investment.

COURT INTEGRATED SERVICES PROGRAM (CISP)

*Transitional Housing Management*

The County Court arranged access to five Transitional Housing Management (THM) properties for participants experiencing homelessness and housing instability. In addition to housing case management delivered by The Salvation Army, access to medium-term, transitional housing addresses a critical aspect of participant needs, promoting engagement in therapeutic interventions and enhancing community safety. In recent months, multiple CISP participants secured stable and independent housing (public and transitional), addressing a key therapeutic need.

*Specialist Training Program*

A series of bespoke training sessions were delivered to CISP staff to address identified service gaps and emerging trends in participants' biopsychosocial needs, particularly surrounding acute and chronic mental health presentations, family violence and risk assessment. This enhanced staff capability provides targeted, therapeutic interventions that support improved outcomes and community safety.

*Specialist Family Violence Service*

A specialist family violence practitioner from No To Violence commenced providing a specialist family violence service for CISP. This followed the successful pilot of this service in the Drug and Alcohol Treatment Court (DATC). The specialist role provides risk assessments, referrals and secondary consultations. In the DATC, the role extends to individual counselling to prevent family violence. This partnership with No To Violence embeds expertise in the Specialist Courts Division to address complex risks through targeted assessment and interventions. The integration of evidence-based family violence responses supports therapeutic justice and safer communities. It builds on the Court's commitment to specialisation and reform based on evidence and specialist recommendations.

PILLAR 2	KEY ACHIEVEMENTS DURING 2024–25
<p data-bbox="209 645 454 698"><b>EMBED AND ENHANCE THERAPEUTIC JUSTICE</b></p> <p data-bbox="209 831 357 857"><b>DESCRIPTION</b></p> <p data-bbox="209 875 612 1048">We will strengthen partnerships to improve access to therapeutic justice and community safety. We will evaluate the success of our programs to identify what works best and support ongoing investment.</p>	<p data-bbox="659 645 1161 672"><b>DRUG AND ALCOHOL TREATMENT COURT (DATC)</b></p> <p data-bbox="659 680 1187 707"><i>Maximised program access and community benefit</i></p> <p data-bbox="659 716 1366 898">The DATC successfully implemented a new organisational structure. The change maximised frontline staffing capacity and prioritised access to the program for the greatest number of participants. The new structure reflected the DATC’s transition from establishment to business-as-usual operations and optimised resources for continued strong cost benefits and community safety.</p> <p data-bbox="659 925 979 952"><i>Lived Experience Support Work</i></p> <p data-bbox="659 960 1362 1111">The DATC’s partnership with the Self Help and Addiction Resource Centre (SHARC) increased access to lived experience (peer) support work. Twenty-two participants received individual peer mentoring during 2024–25 with many others receiving the benefits of peer support by attending a weekly Peer Support Group.</p> <p data-bbox="659 1137 1118 1164"><i>Participant Representative Committee (PRC)</i></p> <p data-bbox="659 1173 1331 1292">The DATC established a consumer participation group to elevate participant voices in program and policy development. The PRC aligns with sector best practice by hearing from participants and ensuring services meet their needs.</p>

PILLAR 2

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS DURING 2024–25

EMBED AND ENHANCE THERAPEUTIC JUSTICE

DESCRIPTION

We will strengthen partnerships to improve access to therapeutic justice and community safety. We will evaluate the success of our programs to identify what works best and support ongoing investment.

COUNTY KOORI COURT

*Regional Possum Skin Cloaks project*

Work is under way to create possum skin cloaks for each County Koori Court location. This is part of the County Court’s ongoing commitment to embed cultural safety and visibility within the County Koori Court. These cloaks will serve as a source of comfort during sentencing conversations, grounding our work in community culture and connection.

*Elders and Respected Persons – Mental Health First Aid training*

All County Koori Court Elders and Respected Persons were invited to attend Aboriginal Mental Health First Aid training in June 2025. This evidence-based training program assists professionals working with Aboriginal people who may be experiencing mental health issues. Over 30 Elders and Respected Persons participated in this accredited training program and received certification.

*Material Aid pilot project*

In March 2025 the County Koori Court started a pilot project to provide Melbourne County Koori Court participants with access to transport and material aid vouchers. The vouchers provide practical support for participants to meet their court obligations. By addressing participants’ immediate needs, the pilot project aims to improve engagement, support rehabilitation and signal a strong commitment to wellbeing. This is a small, impactful step towards ensuring that all participants, regardless of their socioeconomic status, can participate in the County Koori Court process. The pilot project will be rolled out to all Koori Court locations in the 2025–26 financial year.

*Self-determination project*

In April 2025, the County Court commenced the design and delivery of a Self-Determination Organisational Cultural Change Plan. The organisation-wide plan will create a shared understanding and vision of self-determination and set out the expectations of the Court to create a culturally safe environment for First Nations court users, staff, agencies and communities.

PILLAR 3	KEY ACHIEVEMENTS DURING 2024–25
<p data-bbox="209 645 424 701"><b>UPLIFT OUR DIGITAL CAPABILITIES</b></p> <p data-bbox="209 831 357 857"><b>DESCRIPTION</b></p> <p data-bbox="209 875 608 1021">We will make court services and processes more accessible using existing digital capabilities, while exploring the technologies needed to support the Court in the future.</p>	<p data-bbox="659 645 946 672"><b>DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION</b></p> <p data-bbox="659 680 1366 828">Work has continued to stabilise and improve ageing platforms that support essential business systems critical to Court operations. We have secured funding to modernise the ageing case management system platform, and to consolidate and upgrade several other legacy systems to better meet business needs in the future.</p> <p data-bbox="659 857 1042 884"><b>E-COURTS TECHNOLOGY UPGRADES</b></p> <p data-bbox="659 893 1326 1008">Four e-courts were constructed and integrated with modern technology. The e-courts enable remote and hybrid hearings to be conducted more efficiently and improve the accessibility and opportunity for people to attend the Court online.</p> <p data-bbox="659 1037 869 1064"><b>REMOTE HEARINGS</b></p> <p data-bbox="659 1072 1366 1187">The Court continued to conduct around one-third of all hearings via videoconference platforms, with 18,100 remote events held this financial year – a seven per cent increase compared to last financial year.</p>

PILLAR 4

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS DURING 2024–25

STRENGTHEN OUR POSITIVE WORKING CULTURE

DESCRIPTION

We will continue to foster an environment where the wellbeing of judicial officers and staff is always prioritised, and everyone is supported to do their best work.

STAFF MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING STRATEGY

The Court continues to prioritise staff health and wellbeing through the provision of targeted initiatives with a focus on managing psychosocial hazards. The initiatives are driven via the staff *Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy*, the Project Control Group and a comprehensive action plan. Initiatives include Group Reflective Practice programs, consistent on-site counselling and access to mental health assistance services for staff. These assist with strategies in managing overall health and wellbeing and will be consistently evaluated.

LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

To strengthen our positive working culture, we are actively supporting the court administration’s emerging leaders to develop their skills and confidence through participation in the Court Services Victoria (CSV) Leadership Program, which commenced in 2024–25. This program provides tailored development opportunities that build leadership capability, foster collaboration across jurisdictions and prepare participants for future leadership roles. By investing in our people, we are cultivating a pipeline of capable leaders who will continue to support staff to deliver excellent services to court users.

PRACTICE EXCELLENCE

Practice Excellence prioritises and drives a stronger learning culture for staff by embedding best practice and continuous improvement. Since January, we have delivered 15 induction programs, with a comprehensive review undertaken to align training with adult learning principles for greater impact. Staff across the Court have also benefited from nine ‘From the Bench’ sessions that leverage judicial expertise to deepen knowledge and capability. The newly created Manager Practice Excellence role has united tipstaves and associates into one integrated team, while new full-time Practice Excellence positions have been established as a dedicated resource for staff. Together, these initiatives strengthen collaboration, build capability, and support excellence, directly advancing our strategic priorities.

**PILLAR 5**

**KEY ACHIEVEMENTS DURING 2024–25**

**SECURE THE SUSTAINABILITY OF THE COURT**

**DESCRIPTION**

We will work to ensure fair and timely justice by deploying our resources efficiently, while advocating for the additional resources needed to address growing demand for our services.

**LAW REFORM**

The Court remains actively engaged with government and law reform organisations on the likely impact of proposed legislative reform. This ensures that reforms can be both effective and efficient, and the Court is prepared for their commencement.

**CONVERSION OF CIVIL COURTS TO MULTI-DIVISION TRIAL COURTS**

To meet the changing demand across the Court we converted four courtrooms to multi-division trial courtrooms. This provides greater flexibility across the Court to meet peaks in demand across the criminal and civil jurisdictions.

**EARLY INTERVENTION INVESTMENT FRAMEWORK**

In 2021, the Department of Treasury and Finance introduced the Early Intervention Investment Framework (EIIIF). EIIIF is a forward-thinking budgeting tool that supports smarter, evidence-based investment in preventative justice programs.

The framework ensures public funds are directed towards programs that achieve measurable long-term outcomes and deliver value for money – by helping reduce future costs across government.

The County Court and Magistrates’ Court have developed Avoided Cost Models for EIIIF-funded Drug Courts and CISP. These are underpinned by a set of clear, quantifiable outcomes. These outcomes are based on robust data and economic modelling, with a focus on reducing demand for acute, high-cost services.

Courts are required to report annually on progress against these outcomes, starting from the first year of funding on 1 July 2024. The Treasurer will publicly publish the EIIIF annual report for all programs and initiatives funded under the framework in December 2025.

The EIIIF ensures greater transparency and accountability, by linking government investment directly to measurable community impact – such as improved health, housing, and reduced reoffending.

# WORK OF THE COURT

The *County Court Act 1958 (Vic)* establishes that the judges of the Court are to report to the Governor on the Court's operations annually. The following reports, prepared by the judges and judicial registrars, detail the Court's work over the 2024–25 reporting period.

# REPORT FROM THE HEAD OF THE CRIMINAL DIVISION JUDGE WRAIGHT

In 2024–25, the Criminal Division (the Division) continued to maintain its hearing and determination of cases, despite the challenges faced by a reduction in funding. The Court’s active case management model was altered to focus on initial triaging of not-guilty matters post-committal, as well as on identifying cases that can be resolved through case assessment hearings. The Division focussed on its core objectives and provided a high level of service delivery during this time. I extend my gratitude to the legal profession, judiciary, Court staff, and key stakeholders for their hard work over the past year. The Division is committed to further refining the management of criminal proceedings, with a focus on changes to committal proceedings in 2026.



Judge Wraight

## OVERVIEW OF STATEWIDE CRIMINAL CASES

### Initiations

During 2024–25 reporting period, 3,670 criminal cases were initiated in the Court across the state. This is an increase of approximately two per cent from 2023–24. Of those cases:

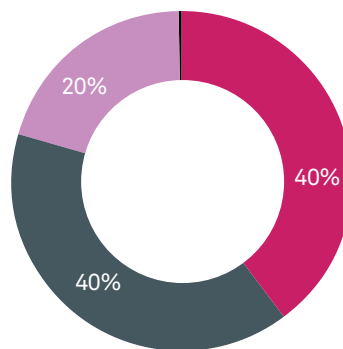
- 1,462 were trial initiations (an increase of approximately 13 per cent from 2023–24)
- 746 were plea initiations (an increase of approximately 7.2 per cent from 2023–24)
- 1,460 were summary appeals (a decrease of approximately 9.5 per cent from 2023–24)
- two were other matters such as direct indictments, severed indictments, archived cases, mental impairment matters, supervision order applications and restricted evidence applications (eight fewer than 2023–24).

The increase in matters being committed on a plea of not guilty continued during 2024–25. In 2022–23, the ratio of not-guilty to guilty initiations was 63 per cent to 37 per cent. In 2023–2024, the ratio was 65 per cent to 35 per cent. In 2024–25, it was 66 per cent to 34 per cent.

During 2024–25, approximately 79 per cent of all initiations were non-sexual offence matters and 21 per cent were sexual offence matters. This represents a decrease in the proportion of sexual offence matters from last year (76 per cent to 24 per cent).

The Court will continue to monitor these trends and their consequences to further refine case management and adapt to the commencement of legislative reform.

### STATEWIDE CRIMINAL CASES COMMENCED IN 2024–25



Summary appeals: 40%      Plea initiations: 20%  
Trial initiations: 40%      Other matters: < 1%

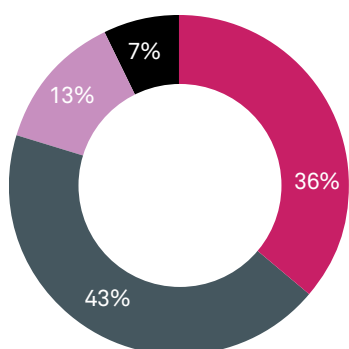
### Finalisations

In 2024–25, the Division finalised 3,357 criminal cases statewide, which is a decrease from the previous year (3,807 criminal cases). This may be attributable to the Division having less resourcing than the previous reporting periods, but with an increase in total initiations. Notably, the Division continued to finalise 71 per cent of criminal cases within 12 months, which was the same rate as in 2023–24.

Of the 3,357 cases finalised:

- 247 (8 per cent) were trial finalisations, a decrease of approximately 5 per cent from 2023–24
- 1,222 (36 per cent) were plea finalisations, a decrease of approximately 21 per cent from 2023–24
- 1,438 (43 per cent) were summary appeal finalisations, a decrease of approximately 8 per cent from 2023–24
- 450 (13 per cent) involved other finalisation types, including discontinuances and remittals to the Magistrates’ Court of Victoria. This reflects an increase of approximately 8 per cent from 2023–24.

STATEWIDE CRIMINAL CASES FINALISED IN 2024–25



- Plea finalisations: 36%
- Summary appeal finalisations: 43%
- Other matters: 13%
- Trial finalisations: 7%

### Verdicts and stage of plea

There were 241 verdicts returned in 2024–25.

Of those verdicts:

- 152 were guilty (on all or some charges) and 84 were not guilty
- 158 verdicts were returned in Melbourne, and 83 verdicts were returned on circuit
- approximately 40 per cent of verdicts were in non-sexual offence matters, and approximately 60 per cent were in sexual offence matters.

Of the matters finalised in 2024–25 where a plea of not guilty was entered into at committal:

- 11 per cent of non-sexual offence matters proceeded to verdict, 52 per cent resolved to a plea of guilty and 37 per cent involved some other form of finalisation, for example, discontinuance, remittal to the Magistrates’ Court of Victoria, or a finding under the *Crimes (Mental Impairment and Unfitness to be Tried) Act 1997 (Vic)*
- 41 per cent of sexual offence matters proceeded to verdict, 28 per cent resolved to a plea of guilty and 31 per cent involved some other form of finalisation, for example, discontinuance, remittal to the Magistrates’ Court of Victoria or a finding under the *Crimes (Mental Impairment and Unfitness to be Tried) Act 1997 (Vic)*.

Of the matters that resolved to a plea of guilty, approximately:<sup>1</sup>

- 8 per cent resolved before or at an initial directions hearings
- 46 per cent resolved after an initial directions hearing
- 21 per cent resolved at or after a final directions hearing
- 14 per cent resolved at or after a pretrial hearing
- 10 per cent resolved on the first day of trial
- 1 per cent resolved during the trial.

Despite the adaptation of the active case management model, the Division has continued to identify appropriate cases capable of resolution. This is evidenced by the percentage of cases resolved prior to a final directions hearing. The Division will continue to appropriately identify and manage cases that are capable of resolution, as this plays a substantial role in facilitating justice and finality in proceedings for victims of crime and accused persons.

<sup>1</sup> ‘PG (plea of guilty) at or after case conference’ has been removed from the list due to imprecision in this measure.

## TRIAL VOLUME

The Court has continued to focus on the timely determination of criminal proceedings and reducing delay in the time to trial.

As at 30 June 2025, the Court had 909 criminal trials pending in Melbourne, which is indicative of the sustained not-guilty initiation increase over the period. There were 279 criminal trials pending across the Court's regional locations. The Division has seen a decrease in regional not-guilty initiations, but there has been an increase in Melbourne.

The Division will continue to monitor and adapt to ensure resources are deployed efficiently.

### *Time to trial*

For trials across the state (in Melbourne and regional locations), the trial listing for a new trial initiation which entered the jurisdiction during the reporting period remained stable at between 12 and 14 months from initiation to trial commencement date.

## CASE MANAGEMENT

The Division's case management system continued to produce significant outcomes for resolution and timely administration of justice for the Victorian community. The case management system pivoted to a 'chambers model' with the three criminal judicial registrars being supported by a division lawyer and two associates each. The Division will continue to adapt the program to deliver the most effective justice outcomes for Victorians.

### *Case conferences and case assessment hearings*

Case conferences and case assessment hearings continued to be part of the Court's case management system. Case conferences and case assessment hearings are primarily used to facilitate resolution discussions and narrow issues in dispute in not-guilty matters. Case conferences are heard by judges and are typically associated with complex cases (multiple co-accused, complex evidentiary issues). Case assessment hearings are most commonly heard by judicial registrars and tend to focus on a discrete issue preventing resolution.

There were 403 case assessment hearings heard in 2024–25 (which was similar to the previous year, at 402 assessment hearings), with 261 case assessment hearing outcomes reported, and of those cases, 193 resolved. There were 257 case conferences heard during this reporting period. Case conference outcomes were reported in 146 cases, and of those cases, 104 were resolved.

The Division has seen that the purpose of case assessment hearings is well understood by the legal profession, with appropriate cases leading towards resolution with judicial intervention. The resolution rates resulting from these hearings continues to be a positive contributing factor to reducing delay and providing finality to parties. The Division remains committed to listing matters for case assessment hearings and case conferences in appropriate cases.

### *Sentencing indication hearings*

The number of sentence indication hearings continued to rise in the reporting period. In 2024–25, the Court heard 360 applications for a sentencing indication hearing across the state, an increase of approximately 23 per cent on the previous year. Of those applications that were determined, 212 (95 per cent) were granted and 10 (5 per cent) were refused. Given the high rate of utilisation and resolution, sentence indication hearings continue to play an important role in case management and the provision of early and final outcomes for both victims and accused persons.

## LIST COURTS

The Division would like to thank all the judges and judicial registrars who supported the General Crime List, Sexual Offences List and Practice Court over the past year.

### *9am General Crime List and Sexual Offences List*

In 2024–25, both the 9am General Crime List and Sexual Offences List continued to facilitate hearings held over Zoom, in person, or a hybrid of both. This flexibility has assisted access to the Court for practitioners and accused persons alike. The 9am sittings of the General Crime List and Sexual Offences List were presided over by Judicial Registrars Phillips, Wilson and Avis. The hearing types held during those sittings were primarily directions hearings, funding mentions, arraignments, conviction appeal first listings and announcements of discontinuance. The Division thanks the judicial registrars for their tireless work during the last year in a significant period of change.

### *Practice Court*

During 2024, the Division consolidated the operations of the Final Directions Hearing List and the 10.30am General List into a single list court: the Criminal Division Practice Court. The Division has continued to evaluate and enhance the Practice Court to improve efficiency, while delivering greater clarity for the profession. The Division extends its thanks to all the judges who have rotated through sittings of the Practice Court, as well as continued to provide feedback on its improvement.

### *Long Trial Case Management*

The Long Trial Case Management List manages criminal trials with an estimated trial duration of 25 days or more. These proceedings are managed by his Honour Judge O'Connell, who continues to assist in the allocation of judges to address case management of substantive pre-trial issues and for the trial. The Division thanks Judge O'Connell for his continued work in this area to ensure these complex matters are adequately managed.

## CIRCUITS

In 2024–25, judges and staff commenced 81 criminal circuits across the Court's 11 circuit locations: Bairnsdale, Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong, Horsham, Latrobe Valley (Morwell), Mildura, Shepparton, Wangaratta, Warrnambool and Wodonga. The Court would like to acknowledge and thank the circuit registrars for their continued support of the Court's work in regional Victoria this past year.

### *'Not before' date listing of circuit trials*

In late 2022, the Division launched a significant reform project for criminal circuit listings. This project explores alternative listings and case management practices to improve the circuit user experience by providing greater date certainty and generally increasing the efficiency of criminal circuits. Throughout 2024, a policy containing guidelines for circuit callovers and a framework for the application of the 'not before date' concept was implemented. Following positive engagement and feedback regarding the policy, these directions were inserted and formally integrated into the Criminal Division Practice Note.

The Division thanks Judge Doyle for his continued work in managing the Division's circuit listings across the state.

## SEXUAL OFFENCE CASES

There were 350 sexual offence trial initiations in 2024–25. Of those cases:

- 36 per cent (127 cases) involved a child and/or cognitively impaired complainant (special hearing matter)
- 64 per cent (223 cases) involved an adult complainant.

### *Finalisation of special hearing cases*

The Division finalised 127 special hearing cases involving a child and/or cognitively impaired complainant, of which:

- 30 per cent (38 cases) involved a plea of guilty either at committal or after the matter had been committed to the Court on a plea of not guilty
- 41 per cent (52 cases) proceeded to verdict following trial
- 29 per cent (37 cases) finalised by some other outcome, for example, *Crimes (Mental Impairment and Unfitness to be Tried) Act 1997 (Vic)* outcome, discontinued et cetera.

Of those special hearing cases that proceeded to verdict:

- 62 per cent (34 cases) were Melbourne matters
- 38 per cent (21 cases) were circuit matters.

### *Ground Rules and Special Hearing listings*

The practices around listing special hearings alongside criminal trials have continued to be implemented. These practices seek to maintain continuity in representation and judicial involvement. Matters with the following criteria have continued to be listed alongside the trial:

- the matter involves sexual offending with a child/ cognitively impaired complainant
- the matter is proceeding as a trial
- the trial is listed in Melbourne
- the matter involves only one complainant.

The Division continues to prioritise these proceedings, as they involve some of the most vulnerable court users in the criminal justice system.

## NON-TRIAL WORK

The Court continued to hear a significant volume of non-trial work, including pleas, appeals and applications. The majority of non-trial work has now returned to in-person hearings; however, the Court recognises the flexibility that online hearings bring to the profession, as well as the Court, in managing workloads while facilitating open justice.

### *Bail applications*

Bail continues to be a topic of interest for the Division, as well as to the wider criminal justice community. In 2024–25:

- 453 applications for bail were made. This is an increase of approximately 13 per cent compared with 2023–24
- 688 applications to vary bail were made. This is similar to 2023–24, when 698 applications to vary bail were made
- 135 applications to revoke bail were made. This is an increase of approximately 11 per cent from 2023–24.

## COLLABORATION WITHIN THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

In 2024–25, the Division maintained strong collaborative ties with the legal profession, meeting regularly with organisations including the Office of Public Prosecutions, Victoria Legal Aid, the Criminal Bar Association, the Law Institute of Victoria, the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions, the Judicial College of Victoria, Juries Victoria, Corrections Victoria, the Child and Youth Witness Service and the Victorian Government Reporting Service.

The Court consulted extensively with the legal profession. This included in relation to challenges facing the profession, programs to upskill junior criminal barristers to act in jury trials and ways the Division can increase the awareness of electronic trials. The Division thanks all stakeholders for their collaboration and engagement during 2024–25. This will ensure the continued improvement of justice outcomes for the Victorian community. The Division looks forward to further cooperative pathways, and opportunities for improvement, in the next financial year.

## LAW REFORM

The Court continued its strong focus on consulting with government on proposed legislative and regulatory reforms relating to the Court's operations. This financial year saw some significant reforms that will shape the Division's future.

These include:

- the *Justice Legislation (Committals) Act 2025 (Vic)*, which is due to commence on 28 December 2025. All sexual offences, family violence offences and stalking will be included in the group of criminal proceedings that prohibit cross-examination of witnesses at a committal hearing. These reforms will also strengthen the test for s 198A *Criminal Procedure Act 2009 (Vic)* applications for pre-trial cross-examination. The Division has actively taken steps to plan for a larger cohort of proceedings – this includes potentially redistributing resources to give priority to the hearing and determination of these criminal proceedings. The Division will continue to work with the profession to best implement these changes
- amendments to the *Bail Act 1977 (Vic)* which were introduced in the first half of 2025. These amendments have identified community safety as the paramount consideration that bail decision-makers need to take into account when an accused person applies for bail. Notably, the amendments have also re-categorised offences to address the prevalence of certain types of offending in the community. The Division will ensure the judiciary is well-equipped to handle new applications that arise as the profession embraces these reforms
- the introduction of serious crime prevention orders (SCPO) in the *Criminal Organisation and Control Act 2012 (Vic)*. A new scheme will replace declaration and control orders in the Supreme Court. The SCPO scheme allows the Chief Commissioner of Police to apply to the County Court for orders restricting activities of individuals involved in serious criminal activity. The Division has worked closely with Victoria Police to develop a relevant Practice Note and related forms to ensure a smooth transition into the new scheme.

The Division thanks the Law Reform and Policy Team, and all staff involved, for their work in ensuring the Division is supported through times of change.

## CRIMINAL DIVISION EXECUTIVE AND ADMINISTRATION

### *Criminal Division Executive*

In the past year, the Division experienced a structural change in the Criminal Division Executive. Her Honour Chief Judge Chambers was Head of the Criminal Division between August 2024 and May 2025. Following her Honour's appointment to Chief Judge on 27 May 2025, I was appointed to the position on 16 June 2025. I thank the Chief Judge for her Honour's support and guidance during the transition in my role as Head of the Criminal Division.

I would also like to thank Judge Moglia (Judge in Charge of Melbourne Listings and Allocations), Judge Dawes (Judge in Charge of Melbourne Non-trial Listing and Allocations, and Judge in Charge of the Court Integrated Services Program), Judge Doyle (Judge in Charge of Circuit Listings and Allocations), Judge Johns (Judge in Charge of the County Koori Court), Judge D Sexton (Judge in Charge of the Drug and Alcohol Treatment Court) and Judge O'Connell (Judge in Charge of the Long Trials List) for their continued leadership and assistance during 2024–25.

Since I stepped into the role of Head of Division in June 2025, the roles of Judge in Charge of Melbourne Listings and Allocations and Judge in Charge of Melbourne Non-trial Listing and Allocations have ceased, as the Practice Court and allocations team have now subsumed these roles.

### *Criminal Division Administration*

In 2024–25, the Division went through a great deal of change, and I am grateful for the support the Division received from the approximately 26 staff who make up the Criminal Division Administration. I would like to acknowledge and thank Director, Rachele Furletti, and the three staffing groups within the Criminal Division Administration (Case Management, Criminal Registry Services and Court Resources and Allocations) for their continued hard work during the previous year.

# REPORT OF JUDGE IN CHARGE OF THE COUNTY KOORI COURT **JUDGE JOHNS**, AND MANAGER OF THE COUNTY KOORI COURT **TERRIE STEWART**



Judge Johns

The County Koori Court was established in 2009 as a key initiative of the Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement. It was developed as a partnership between the Victorian Government and the Koori community. The aims of the Court were to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal people in the criminal justice system by increasing Aboriginal participation in the sentencing process, and to provide a more culturally appropriate and sensitive court.

The County Koori Court has now been operating in Victoria for 17 years. It sits in eight regions across the state, including Latrobe Valley (Morwell), Melbourne, Mildura, Shepparton, Warrnambool, Geelong, Wodonga and Bendigo. There are almost 50 Elders and Respected Persons currently appointed to the County Koori Court across Victoria. Each Elder and Respected Person brings a wealth of cultural knowledge and connection to the regions in which they sit, and each has a strong commitment to the County Koori Court process.

Over the past year, 54 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander participants went through the County Koori Court. During the Koori Court process, the offender is encouraged to engage with Elders and Respected Persons and to reflect on their behaviours. Within the County Koori Court process, Elders and Respected Persons contribute deep cultural knowledge and wisdom to the sentencing process. The role of the Elders and Respected Persons in the sentencing conversation gives the County Koori Court its unique authority and flavour, and assists in ensuring that the sentencing decision of the judge is fully informed, including in the provision of culturally appropriate programs and services aimed at the rehabilitation of the offender.

## **NEW ELDERS AND RESPECTED PERSONS INDUCTION TRAINING**

In 2025, the County Koori Court welcomed nine new Elders and Respected Persons. In this financial year, Court Service Victoria's Dhumba Murmuk Djerring Unit took on responsibility for the appointment, training and ongoing organisational support of new Elders and Respected Persons to standardise the approach across jurisdictions. This new arrangement involved redeveloping Elders and Respected Persons induction training. Recently appointed County Koori Court Elders participated in a new-format, three-day, cross-jurisdictional induction training, which included dedicated County Court facilitators and content. Newly appointed Elders and Respected Persons were able to commence sitting from July 2025.

### PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TRAINING FOR ELDERS AND RESPECTED PERSONS

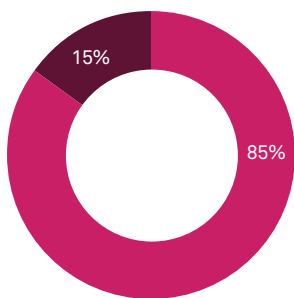
In June 2025, the County Koori Court offered accredited Aboriginal Mental Health First Aid training to all County Koori Court Elders and Respected Persons. This training equips Elders and Respected Persons with new or refreshed skills to effectively engage with Koori Court participants who may be experiencing mental health issues. Over 30 Elders and Respected Persons from across Victoria participated in the training. The accredited participants can now use their additional knowledge to communicate and engage with Koori Court participants. This initiative not only strengthens cultural safety but supports a holistic and culturally informed sentencing process.

### CULTURALLY RELEVANT DISPLAYS IN THE MELBOURNE COUNTY COURT

A photo display of each Elder and Respected Person appointed to the County Koori Court is now featured on the ground and level 4 public spaces of the Melbourne County Court. These displays celebrate and honour the unique contribution Elders and Respected Persons make to the County Court.

In 2024–25, the County Koori Court Unit purchased new artworks by participants of the TORCH program for display across back of house and public areas of the Melbourne County Court. These works, created by local artists, provide a visual acknowledgment of the Traditional Owners and their enduring connection to land and culture. The artworks are displayed to create a more welcoming and less intimidating court environment, and for the Court to publicly acknowledge the importance of First Nations culture.

COUNTY KOORI COURT PARTICIPANTS BY GENDER 2024–25



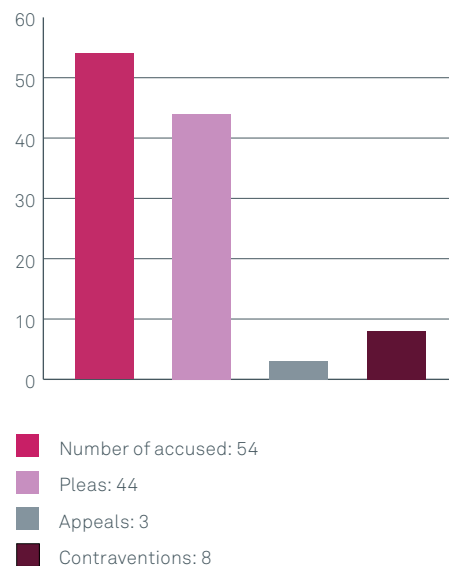
- Male: 46 participants (85%)
- Female: 8 participants (15%)

### JUDGES CULTURAL AWARENESS TRAINING

The County Koori Court has continued to provide an important cultural right for First Nations peoples in eligible matters across the eight Victorian regions in which this Court sits. The successful operation of the County Koori Court rests on a genuine partnership between Elders and Respected Persons and the judges who sit in the County Koori Court. It is a partnership built on mutual respect and a genuine shared commitment to embed Aboriginal culture into the sentencing process.

There are currently 40 judges sitting in Crime who are trained to sit in Koori Court in Melbourne and in our Circuit regions. This number is growing each year. A prerequisite for judges to sit in Koori Court is the completion of the Judicial Officers Aboriginal Cultural Awareness Training offered bi-annually by the Court. This training is provided by an external facilitator and involves the participation of Elders and Respected Persons from each of the regions in which the Koori Court sits.

COUNTY KOORI COURT STATEWIDE ACTIVITY 2024–25





Chief Judge Chambers and Judge Johns with the first group of Elders and Respected Persons who attended Aboriginal Mental Health First Aid training in June 2025.



The second group of Elders and Respected Persons who attended Aboriginal Mental Health First Aid training, with facilitator Bonnie Chew in June 2025.

# REPORT FROM THE JUDGE IN CHARGE OF THE COURT INTEGRATED SERVICES PROGRAM (CISP) JUDGE DAWES



Judge Dawes

The County Court of Victoria's Court Integrated Services Program (CISP) commenced as a pilot in early 2021, expanding services to individuals in the indictable crime stream of the Magistrates' Court of Victoria and to those seeking County Court bail or deferral of sentencing.

CISP has since become pivotal to the Court achieving its goal of embedding therapeutic justice programs to improve community safety and divert medium-high risk individuals with relevant support needs from the justice system. In 2024, CISP secured four years of funding under the Department of Treasury and Finance's Early Intervention and Investment Framework.

CISP offers a coordinated, team-based approach to assessing and treating accused persons. The program focuses on early intervention and proactively addressing underlying causes of offending behaviour.

Each potential participant is assessed to determine program suitability, risk and relevant support needs before being placed on the program. Once on the program, CISP connects participants with services including alcohol and other drug treatment, crisis accommodation and housing support, disability services, mental health services and cultural support.

## KEY DATA

CISP received 157 referrals in 2024–25, which represented a 15 per cent increase from last year. As CISP becomes more established in the Court, the suitability of referrals improves. As a result, more assessments led to program placements this year. In 2024–25, over 75 per cent of eligible referrals progressed to a suitability assessment for the program.

Since it commenced in 2021, CISP has supported 125 participants through to completion. Participants who complete an episode of CISP case management demonstrate their stage of readiness to engage in changed behaviour by meaningfully participating in support and treatment pathways. Some of the individual and community outcomes include improved quality of life for participants, individual and community safety, and reduced recidivism rates. Referrals for First Nations peoples, women and young people (< 25 years old) are prioritised for assessment.

The staff in CISP have completed relevant training to deliver a culturally safe and appropriate service. CISP staff maintain ongoing cross-jurisdictional collaboration with the County Koori Court, and community-based organisations, to ensure that First Nations participants receive services that align with the CCV Self-Determination Plan.

## PROGRAM INSIGHTS AND IMPROVEMENTS

### *Participant complexity and mental health*

Throughout a CISP episode, each participant is allocated to an Advanced Case Manager who utilises evidence-based screening tools to assess the areas of need that require support and treatment. The Advanced Case Managers coordinate a tailored treatment plan and facilitate engagement with support and treatment services.

In 2024–25, CISP participants presented with more complex treatment and support needs than in previous years, particularly in relation to mental health. As a result, the average timeframe (228 days) of a CISP episode has slightly increased from last year. To address this emerging presentation, CCV CISP staff completed a series of specialised training sessions to improve mental health assessment processes and referral pathways.

### *Early Intervention Investment Framework*

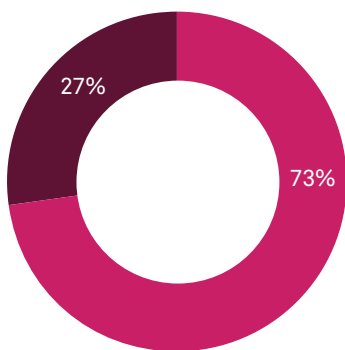
In preparation for the first year of Early Intervention Investment Framework reporting, the Court surveyed CISP participants about their health and wellbeing. Responses showed that 94 per cent of CISP participants found the program very helpful compared with prison or similar programs; more than two-thirds found the program helped to improve their health and wellbeing compared with other justice programs.

### *Data integration: CISP environment improvements*

Further to the above, CISP received improvements to its data architecture in 2024–25. Enhancements have allowed for more detailed reporting and monitoring capabilities for program staff.

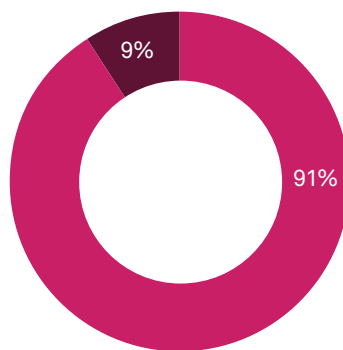
## REFERRALS 2024–25

REMANDED/ON BAIL



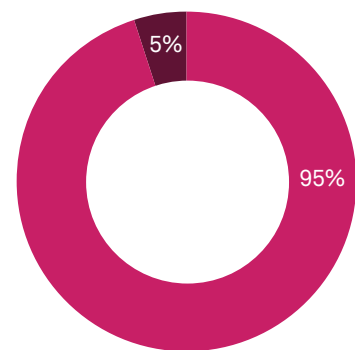
■ Remanded (73%)  
 ■ On bail (27%)

GENDER



■ Male (91%)  
 ■ Female (9%)

ABORIGINAL OR TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER



■ Non-Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (95%)  
 ■ Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (5%)

## CROSS-JURISDICTIONAL COLLABORATION

### *Family violence*

A specialist family violence practitioner from No To Violence (NTV) commenced with CISP in 2024–25. The practitioner delivers risk assessments, service referrals, secondary consultations and individual counselling for family violence prevention. This work embeds specialist, evidence-based family violence expertise within Specialist Courts and is available to CISP and the Drug and Alcohol Treatment Court.

### *Housing service*

This year CISP continued to focus on providing participants with access to suitable and secure housing. In 2024–25, CISP secured five Transitional Housing Management properties. In partnership with The Salvation Army, CISP now provides medium-term transitional accommodation and specialist support from Housing Case Managers. This program has broadened housing options, reduced reliance on emergency accommodation and addressed critical, ongoing participant housing needs.

CISP will continue to respond to available and emerging evidence around program efficacy, therapeutic best practice and participant needs to strengthen the model and outcomes for participants and the Victorian community.

## REFERRALS 2024–25

CCV = COUNTY COURT OF VICTORIA

MCV = MAGISTRATES' COURT OF VICTORIA

	Jul 2024	Aug 2024	Sep 2024	Oct 2024	Nov 2024	Dec 2024	Jan 2025	Feb 2025	Mar 2025	Apr 2025	May 2025	Jun 2025	Total
Referrals – CCV	17	12	8	14	17	10	11	19	13	12	12	12	157
Mental Health and Advice Response – CCV	5	3	5	1	7	3	7	6	5	4	5	7	58
Assessments completed – CCV	9	7	9	1	11	6	7	4	8	8	8	6	84
Assessments completed – MCV	17	20	19	21	18	34	20	27	31	22	12	16	257
Participants accepted onto CISP – CCV	4	7	5	1	5	5	1	2	3	4	7	5	49
Participants accepted onto CISP – MCV	4	5	3	8	4	17	8	5	9	9	10	10	92

# REPORT FROM THE JUDGE IN CHARGE OF THE DRUG AND ALCOHOL TREATMENT COURT (DATC) JUDGE D SEXTON



Judge D Sexton

The County Court's Drug and Alcohol Treatment Court (DATC) was established in April 2021, following the amendment of the *County Court Act 1958 (Vic)* via the *Justice Legislation Amendment (Drug Court and Other Matters) Act 2020 (Vic)*. The DATC is an innovative sentencing option that addresses criminal behaviour related to drug and/or alcohol dependence.

In 2023, an external evaluation undertaken by KPMG found that Victorian Drug Courts are a sound investment that significantly reduce participant substance use and reoffending. In 2024, the DATC secured four years of funding under the Department of Treasury and Finance Early Intervention and Investment Framework to continue delivering on these important outcomes.

## PURPOSE AND MODEL

The DATC promotes recovery and, through the rehabilitation of the participant, protects the community from further substance-driven offending. Community safety is promoted by stringent eligibility criteria, intensive supervision and judicial oversight of compliance with drug and alcohol treatment orders (DATOs). The DATC is not available to people charged with violent or sexual offences.

The DATC model is underpinned by evidence-informed contemporary treatment and a range of therapeutic interventions to address substance dependence and support behaviour change. Participants are required to attend frequent appointments with the DATC team, regular court review hearings, supervised urine drug screening and other treatment and support as needed.

There are three main phases of the program that support graduated treatment and supervision. Participants are required to demonstrate progress against treatment goals and compliance with DATO requirements to progress to the next phase.

In line with international drug court best practice, DATC judges are trained in therapeutic interventions and directly engage with participants about their progress, motivation, and compliance with the DATO requirements. The DATC judges are supported by clinical advisers, counsellors and case managers who provide updates and advice regarding risks and needs associated with criminal behaviour and treatment motivation and progress. Victoria Legal Aid and the Office of Public Prosecutions provide dedicated lawyers who are embedded into the team. Partnerships with external agencies deliver housing support, group recovery programs, and family violence interventions.

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

### *Participant success*

In 2024–25, the DATC saw 20 participants complete their DATO with no further reoffending.

The Court held formal graduation ceremonies to acknowledge the significant achievements of successful participants. These participants attained abstinence from substances, reconnected with family and friends, were engaged in employment and/or education and had ceased offending behaviour. The positive outcomes of each participant highlighted the tangible benefits of the program to individuals and families, the community and the justice system.

### *Program success*

One of the program's objectives is to improve individual outcomes and community safety by maximising the number of participants with access to a DATO. This year the demand for DATC was higher than last, with almost double the number of referrals received.

## SERVICE DELIVERY ENHANCEMENTS

### *Family violence services*

The DATC partnered with No To Violence, a family violence prevention agency, to embed a specialist family violence worker into the team. This role provided critical services and supported risk mitigation and family violence prevention. The initiative enhances the impact of the DATC in promoting safety for victim survivors of family violence through targeted and evidence-informed intervention.

### *Cultural safety*

Referrals for potential First Nations participants are prioritised for consideration in the DATC. The DATC judicial officers and team are trained in cultural safety and collaborate with the County Koori Court and Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to deliver services that align with the CCV Self-Determination Plan. The DATC Lead Judge and members of the team strengthened engagement with Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service through a presentation in February this year.

### *Participant education/vocational services*

Partnership with Skills First Reconnect continued to support the education and employment goals of DATC participants. Access to employment and training is essential for many participants in maintaining recovery, gaining financial stability and contributing to the community. This year participants had access to career counselling, short and pre-vocational courses and accredited certificate and diploma qualifications.

### *DATC Court Dog pilot*

The DATC Court Dog pilot commenced in June 2025. It fosters a supportive and therapeutic environment for participants who are particularly distressed or anxious. This partnership with the Office of Public Prosecutions involved an accredited facility dog, and her handler, attending review hearings. Participants were visibly calmed by the court dog and improved engagement with the DATC judge was observed. The pilot is in its final stages and will be internally evaluated to assess outcomes and benefits to the Court.

### *Continuous professional development*

The 2024–25 Education Plan provided staff, judiciary and program partners with specialist skills and knowledge in line with international best practice. The DATC worked with leaders in therapeutic justice and drug courts to deliver foundational training to judicial officers and the multidisciplinary multiagency teams. Highlights included a Pennington Institute session on new and emerging drug use trends and engaging with US treatment court organisation All Rise on updated adult treatment court practice standards.

## DATA AND INSIGHTS

### Key demographics and performance data

There were 85 new referrals to the DATC in 2024–25. This was a significant increase in demand from the previous year, where almost half that number were received.

The DATC is operating at capacity with 52 DATOs and a further 52 pending matters. Based on historical data, it is anticipated that a minimum of 80 per cent of these pending matters will result in a new DATO. There were almost double the number of graduations this year compared to last.

Consistent with previous years, most referrals related to men between 35 and 44 years old. There were five referrals received for First Nations candidates.

### REFERRALS AND ORDERS

Total referrals	85
DATOs imposed	40
Total active orders at 30 June 2025	52 (plus 2 suspended)

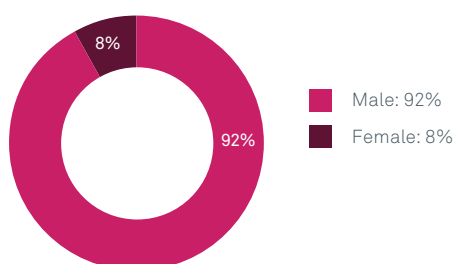
### AGE AT REFERRAL

< 25 years	4	4.40%
25–34 years	25	27.47%
35–44 years	41	45.05%
45–54 years	12	13.19%
55–64 years	3	3.30%

### INCOMING AND EXITED MATTERS

Number of pending matters (at 30 June 2025)	52
DATOs imposed	40
DATOs not imposed	51
DATO graduations	13
DATO completions	7
DATO cancellations	8

### DATC REFERRALS BY GENDER



## DRUG USE TRENDS SUMMARY 2024–25

### Positive tests by substance detected

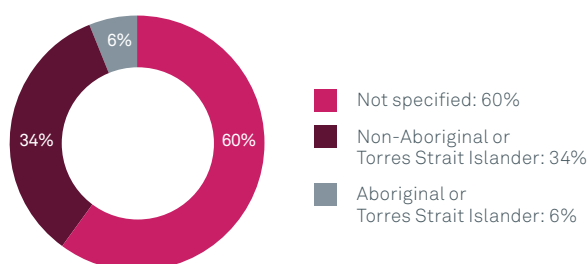
Methamphetamine (ice) remained the most prevalent substance detected in supervised urine drug screens. This is a consistent finding in the DATC cohort. Cannabis, alcohol and heroin were the next most frequently detected substances. Heroin was not as prevalent last year. However, opiate replacement therapies (buprenorphine and methadone) used for treating heroin dependency were detected in high numbers of tests. This is congruent with the treatment regimens of many program participants.

### Monitoring and evaluation

The DATC reports against key outcome measures, under the Department of Treasury and Finance Early Intervention Investment Framework. Evaluation data indicates that the DATC is making strong progress on key measures in reference to reduced days in custody, reduced substance use, positive behaviour change and improved health and wellbeing.

DATC participants were surveyed on the effectiveness of the program in helping to improve their health and wellbeing. The survey was developed in collaboration with the Magistrates' Court of Victoria and builds on the participant voice evaluation from 2023 (the Victorian Drug Courts evaluation by KPMG). The outcomes show improved participant experiences over the last two years. This includes 95.5 per cent of surveyed participants rating the DATC as very helpful for their sense of wellbeing when compared to other justice-related programs; up 16 per cent since the 2023 survey results.

### DATC REFERRALS FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CANDIDATES



# REPORT FROM THE HEAD OF THE COMMON LAW DIVISION JUDGE PURCELL



Judge Purcell

**In 2024–25, the Common Law Division worked hard to progress cases to trial in a just, timely and efficient manner. The Division also embarked upon reform projects, including the publication of the Common Law Practice Note.**

The Common Law Division is responsible for a broad and complex case load. A substantial proportion of its work involves personal injury proceedings arising from industrial accidents, transport accidents, accidents in a public setting, medical negligence or alleged abuse in an institutional setting. In addition, the Division manages a wide spectrum of other matters, including testator family maintenance proceedings, defamation, asset confiscation, adoption, surrogacy, name change applications and some quasi-criminal proceedings.

All proceedings are allocated to one of the Division's 11 specialist lists. These Lists are overseen by the judges in charge, supported by judicial registrars and the Common Law Registry, to ensure the effective and consistent management of cases.

## HEAD OF DIVISION

In August 2024, I took over from Judge Pillay as the head of the Common Law Division, and as Judge in Charge of the General, Serious Injury and Applications Lists. Judge Pillay's three-year tenure guided the Division out of the COVID-19 period as restrictions eased, and the work of the Division returned to normal practices. His Honour also oversaw other reforms, including the establishment of the Institutional Liability List, the Court-based mediation pilot program and the development of the consolidated Common Law Practice Note. I would like to acknowledge Judge Pillay's dedication and leadership over this period.

## DEPARTURES

Judicial Registrar Gurry retired on 25 September 2024. Judicial Registrar Gurry was appointed in October 2016 as the inaugural judicial registrar in the Common Law Division, and until 2022 he was the sole judicial registrar. Judicial Registrar Gurry was responsible for the management of a large volume of interlocutory applications in the Division, the reserve list and for considering a large volume of consent orders and applications made on the papers.

I extend my gratitude to Judicial Registrar Gurry for his dedicated service to the Division and wish him all the best in retirement.

## APPOINTMENTS

The Court welcomed the appointment of Judicial Registrar Lynch to the Common Law Division. Judicial Registrar Lynch had been with Slater & Gordon for 27 years, beginning as a lawyer and progressing to Practice Group Leader, Head of Practice and later, Senior Legal Counsel.

## NEW JUDGES IN CHARGE

At the beginning of the reporting period, I took over the Appeals and Post Sentence Applications List (the APSA List) from Judge Robertson and managed the List until May 2025, when Judge Pillay then stepped in as the Judge in Charge.

Judge Morrish was appointed as the Judge in Charge of the Medical List in July 2024, taking over from Judge Clark.

Judge Clark was appointed as the Judge in Charge of the WorkCover List in July 2024 and was later replaced by Judge Sanger in May 2025.

The Self-Represented Litigant List was divided into two, with Judge Tran retaining the self-represented litigants in the General List, and Judge Ginnane taking over the self-represented litigants in the Serious Injury List.

## CASE LOAD

In the reporting period of 2024–25, 4,894 cases were initiated, a slight decrease from the last reporting period. A decrease in initiations in the Medical, Confiscation and Institutional Liability Lists was offset by modest increases in the General and Serious Injury Lists.

The reporting period saw the Division finalise 4,872 cases, a 6 per cent increase on the previous reporting period and the highest number of finalisations ever recorded in the Division. Contributing to this increase was a notable increase in finalisations in the APSA List, which saw a 103 per cent increase in finalisations, largely due to the attempt to clear the backlog of intervention order appeals. The increase in finalisations contributed to the Division nearly achieving the target of a clearance rate of 100 per cent.

## MELBOURNE TRIAL LISTINGS

The Division maintained a high level of listings in the reporting period, with 2,614 trials listed, a six per cent increase on the previous reporting period. The number of serious injury applications was slightly lower, with 1,403 listings. This was to accommodate an increased number of intervention order appeal hearings, which increased from 113 in 2023–24 to 349 in 2024–25. This increase in listings of intervention order appeals was in part made possible by the assistance of the Criminal Division judges, who heard and determined a number of these appeals.

Despite the increase in listings, the Division could not keep trial dates within the target timeframes, being 12 months for a jury trial and six months for a serious injury application. The Division is reviewing its listing practices and intends to further increase listing levels to return to target timeframes.

Although the number of trials that commenced before a judge decreased by 33 per cent from 165 in the previous reporting period to 111 in this reporting period, the number of trials before a jury that proceeded to a verdict increased to 26, a 30 per cent increase from the previous year. This likely due in part to a decrease in matters resolving during trial in the reporting period.

Fifty-eight hearings were marked as ‘not reached’ during the reporting period, when no judge was available to hear the matter on the listed date, a significant increase from the previous reporting period when 32 hearings were not reached. When the hearing of a proceeding is not reached, all efforts are made to minimise the inconvenience to the parties, and proceedings are generally listed within three months or earlier of the original hearing date.

The Division works hard to keep the number of ‘not reached’ matters to a minimum. However, with a large case load, and with many proceedings resolving prior to trial, the Division must list an appropriate number of matters on any given day to ensure an efficient use of the judges’ time, and to ensure that matters are listed for trial within target timeframes.

### Summary of Melbourne trial listings

	2023–24	2024–25	Variance
Number of trials listed	2476	2,614	6%
Trials commenced before a judge	165	111	-33%
Serious injury applications listed	1588	1,403	-12%
Serious injury applications commenced before a judge	348	260	-25%
Hearings not reached	32	58	81%
Jury trials proceeded to verdict	20	26	30%

*Summary of circuit trial listings*

	2023–24	2024–25	Variance
Number of trials listed	231	283	23%
Trials commenced before a judge	20	16	-20%
Serious injury applications listed	351	376	7%
Serious injury applications commenced before a judge	47	53	13%
Hearings not reached	15	6	-60%
Jury trials proceeded to verdict	6	4	-33%

**CIRCUITS**

The reporting period saw the Common Law Division resuming circuit listings in the Morwell Court in the Latrobe Valley region, after two years sitting at Sale, which was well received by the regional practitioners.

Listings on circuits increased during the reporting period, with a 23 per cent increase in trial listings and a seven per cent increase in serious injury application listings.

**APPROPRIATE DISPUTE RESOLUTION**

Across the Division, parties are required to undertake private mediation prior to trial. Where appropriate, the Court may also offer Court-provided mediation before a judicial officer or a Division lawyer.

*Judicial mediation*

Judicial mediations are frequently offered in matters relating to self-represented litigants, and in compensation applications under s 85B of the *Sentencing Act 1991* (Vic).

During the reporting period, 80 judicial mediations were conducted, a 32 per cent increase from the 67 judicial mediations that were conducted in the previous reporting period. Of the 80 mediations, 41 resulted in the resolution of the proceeding.

Twenty-seven judicial mediations were conducted in proceedings involving a self-represented litigant, with 13 resulting in the resolution of the proceeding.

*Court-based mediation*

In the previous reporting period, the Division introduced a Court-based mediation pilot program. The program involved Common Law Division lawyers, who are deputy registrars and accredited mediators, offering

mediations in suitable proceedings in the General List, typically close to the trial date, provided that all interlocutory steps had been completed, including participation in a private mediation.

The pilot proved highly successful, and as a result, Court-based mediation is now a permanent feature of the Division's practice.

In this reporting period 18 mediations were conducted with 12 matters resolving at the mediation. This was a 36 per cent reduction in the number of mediations compared to the 2023–24 financial year. This decrease is due to a reduction in staffing in the Division Lawyer team as a result of lapsing funding in the previous reporting period.

*Common Law Division Practice Note update*

On 17 March 2025, the Division released its new Practice Note. All 20 existing practice notes in the Division have been consolidated into a single, comprehensive Practice Note that provides guidance on procedures for all proceedings in the Division.

The new Practice Note is designed to make it easier for court users to access authoritative information about procedures across the Division, without needing to consult multiple practice notes and guidelines.

*Communication*

Stakeholder meetings continued during the reporting period with members of the profession, including the Law Institute of Victoria, Australian Lawyers Alliance, the Australian Insurance Lawyers Association, the Common Law Bar, and representatives from the two main statutory insurers, the Transport Accident Commission and WorkSafe Victoria. These meetings were held to discuss trial listings and other issues of concern to stakeholders.

# REPORT FROM THE JUDGE IN CHARGE OF THE GENERAL AND SERIOUS INJURY LISTS

## JUDGE PURCELL

The General List is the largest List in the Division. It comprises primarily damages proceedings heard by a judge and jury, or a judge sitting alone.

The Serious Injury List comprises applications for leave to bring a common law proceeding under the *Accident Compensation Act 1985 (Vic)*, the *Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013 (Vic)* and the *Transport Accident Act 1986 (Vic)*.

The General List experienced a two per cent increase in initiations in the reporting period, with 2,376 initiations. In terms of initiations, the General List makes up 49 per cent of all initiations in the Division.

Initiations in the Serious Injury List increased by seven per cent in this reporting period to 1,483. Finalisations decreased by five per cent to 1,450. With the increase in initiations, the number of pending cases increased by two per cent; however, the number of cases pending for more than 24 months decreased by 15 per cent from 224 at the beginning of the reporting period to 190 at its conclusion.

The number of finalisations increased by six per cent to 2,203; however, as finalisations remained lower than initiations, the number of pending cases increased by four per cent to 3,642. Although the total number of pending cases increased, the number of cases pending more than 24 months decreased by four per cent to 490.

Listing levels of serious injury applications decreased during the reporting period by 8 per cent to 1,779. This was due to the need to increase listings of intervention order appeals.

The number of trials listed in the General List remained steady when compared with the previous reporting period, with 2,171 listed statewide.

The decrease in listings contributed to a 14 per cent decrease in judgments in the reporting period, with 192 judgments being delivered, down from 222 in the previous year.

STATEWIDE GENERAL LIST  
INITIATIONS AND FINALISATIONS



STATEWIDE SERIOUS INJURY LIST  
INITIATIONS AND FINALISATIONS



# REPORT FROM THE JUDGE IN CHARGE OF THE ADOPTIONS, SURROGACY AND NAME CHANGES LIST JUDGE TSIKARIS

The Adoptions, Surrogacy and Name Changes List hears applications under the *Adoptions Act 1984 (Vic)*, the *Status of Children Act 1974 (Vic)*, and the *Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1996 (Vic)*.

The List deals with a range of applications, including applications for the adoption of children and adults, discharges of adoptions, substituted parentage orders arising from surrogacy arrangements, and applications to change a child's name or sex descriptor. The List is supported by the Adoptions Registrars in the Common Law Registry.

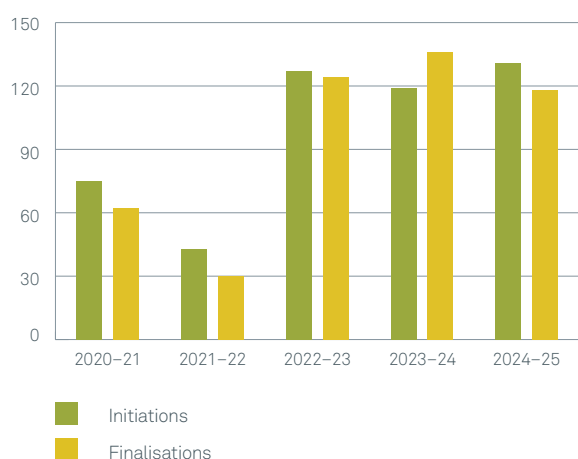
The List received a total of 131 applications in the reporting period, an increase of 10 per cent when compared to the last reporting period. These proceedings were made up of 63 applications under the *Adoption Act 1984 (Vic)*, 44 applications under the *Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1996 (Vic)* and 24 applications for a substitute parentage order under the *Status of Children Act 1974 (Vic)*.

During the reporting period, 118 matters were finalised, a decrease of 13 per cent from the last reporting period.

All applications in the List are actively managed to ensure the timely and transparent finalisation of proceedings, working closely with Adoption Services Victoria and Births, Deaths and Marriages Victoria.

This year, the Court gifted young children for whom adoption and substituted parentage orders were made with the picture book *Family* by County Court Elder Aunty Fay Muir. This is in addition to the teddy bears that Lions Australia continues to generously provide.

STATEWIDE ADOPTIONS, SURROGACY AND  
NAME CHANGES LIST INITIATIONS AND FINALISATIONS



# REPORT FROM THE JUDGE IN CHARGE OF THE APPEALS AND POST SENTENCE APPLICATIONS (APSA) LIST JUDGE PILLAY

The APSA List continues to hear:

- applications for supervision orders under the *Serious Offenders Act 2018 (Vic)* in respect of serious sexual and/or violent offenders
- compensation applications under s 85B and s 86(1) of the *Sentencing Act 1991 (Vic)*
- appeals in relation to family violence and personal safety intervention orders made in the Magistrates' Court of Victoria.

In 2024–25, there were 235 initiations in the List, which is steady when compared to the previous year. The majority of the proceedings in the List were intervention order appeals, of which there were 166 initiations in the reporting period, a 30 per cent increase from the previous year.

## INTERVENTION ORDER APPEALS

At the beginning of the reporting period, there were 163 appeals relating to pending intervention orders, significantly higher than in previous years. This was due to the delays caused while the Court worked during the previous reporting period to adjust its processes in light of the decision of his Honour Justice John Dixon in *AAA v County Court of Victoria & Ors* [2023] VSC 13. In this reporting period, the Division prioritised the listing of intervention order appeals to clear the backlog of pending appeals. The work to clear the backlog was greatly supported by a number of judges from the Criminal Division who took on a significant number of intervention order appeals. I extend my thanks to these judges for their assistance with this critical work.

The increase in the listing of intervention order appeals led to a significant increase in the rate of finalisations, with 230 appeals being finalised in the reporting period, a 121 per cent increase on last year. The high number of finalisations, notwithstanding the increase in initiations, reduced the backlog of pending appeals by 45 per cent to just 89 matters.

The Court is mindful that appeal litigation may involve overt or subtle exploitation of power imbalances that can constitute abuse. The Court is endeavouring to reduce that aspect of the appeal process by modifying the way intervention order appeals are heard. These changes will be introduced in 2025–26.

## SUPERVISION ORDERS AND COMPENSATION APPLICATIONS

During the reporting period, 11 new supervision order applications and 56 matters concerning the breach of a supervision order were filed in the List, which is similar to the previous year. In addition, 18 compensation applications were filed, a 60 per cent decrease on last year. Judicial mediation continued to play a key role in the resolution of compensation applications. During the reporting period, 24 mediations were conducted, resulting in the resolution of 11 matters.

## DEAKIN UNIVERSITY PILOT PROJECT

In January 2025, the County Court and Deakin University entered a memorandum of understanding for a 12-month pilot project that will see the Deakin Law Clinic provide legal advice and assistance to self-represented parties involved in intervention order appeals. The pilot involves the Registry referring self-represented litigants to the clinic, provided that the other party has legal representation.

During the reporting period, 19 referrals were made, and self-represented parties in 12 matters received legal assistance in some capacity, ranging from merits advice for the appellant on their appeal grounds, to the Clinic coming on the record for a party in several cases and representing a party at a directions hearing.

# REPORT FROM THE JUDGE IN CHARGE OF THE CONFISCATION LIST JUDGE HINCHEY

The Confiscation List is a specialist list dealing with applications under the *Confiscation Act 1997 (Vic)* and *Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (Cth)* for the restraint or forfeiture of assets connected with criminal activity.

Proceedings in this List are principally initiated by the Victorian Director of Public Prosecutions and the Commissioner of the Australian Federal Police.

The applications typically dealt with in this List include:

- applications for restraining orders for the preservation of assets, either for the purpose of statutory forfeiture or future compensation orders
- applications for forfeiture of assets utilised in connection with, or derived from, criminal activity
- applications for exclusion from restraint or forfeiture, initiated by persons claiming a lawful interest in restrained or forfeited assets.

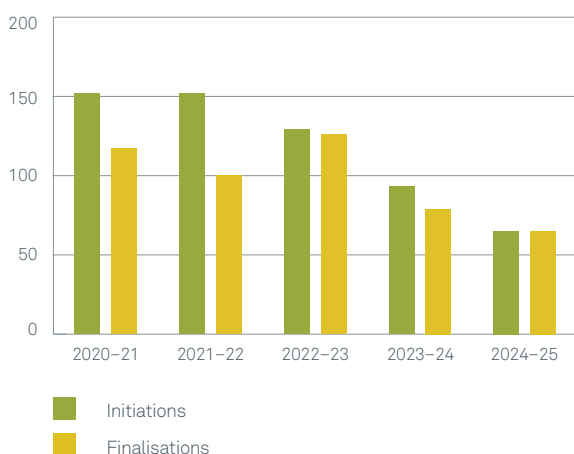
In 2024–25, 65 new proceedings were initiated in the Confiscation List and 65 matters were finalised. This was a 30 per cent decrease from the 93 proceedings initiated in the previous reporting period.

While the number of new initiations is relatively low, a single proceeding in this List may involve multiple applications made by different parties in relation to the restrained property, requiring a significant degree of case management. Over the reporting period, 135 interlocutory hearings were conducted before a judge. These comprised of interlocutory matters dealt with during the weekly Directions List, as well as numerous contested applications that required a separate listing date. Two proceedings were the subject of judicial mediation in the reporting period, with both mediations resulting in the settlement of the dispute without the need for a potentially long and costly trial.

Twice annual meetings of the Confiscation and Proceeds of Crime List users group were held in 2024. The users group continues to play an essential role in facilitating discussion between the profession and the Court. These events help promote a collaborative approach, ensuring that practices are continually refined and improved, leading to more efficient management of Confiscation and Proceeds of Crime matters, in both the County and Supreme Courts.

I wish to acknowledge and thank the Confiscation List Registrar, whose efforts in assisting both practitioners and self-represented litigants with the timely filing of applications and evidentiary material greatly support the preparation of substantive hearings.

STATEWIDE CONFISCATION LIST  
INITIATIONS AND FINALISATIONS



# REPORT FROM THE JUDGE IN CHARGE OF THE DEFAMATION LIST JUDGE CLAYTON

**The Defamation List consists of any proceeding commenced by writ that includes a claim for defamation.**

The reporting period saw 23 cases initiated in the Defamation List, a slight decrease from the 25 initiations in the previous reporting period.

Sixteen cases were finalised in the reporting period, a decrease from the 33 cases finalised in the previous year. Although this contributed to an increase in pending cases, only five cases have been pending for more than 24 months, which is stable when compared with last year, indicating that cases continue to be finalised in a timely manner.

Established List management practices – which include the requirement for plaintiffs to annex a concerns notice to their statement of claim, and the requirement for a defendant who published on an internet platform to provide particulars of publication at the earliest opportunity – have contributed to a further 22 per cent decrease in interlocutory hearings when compared with the previous period, and a 57 per cent decrease when compared to the 2022–23 financial year.

With fewer interlocutory hearings, matters are proceeding to trial more efficiently, with five trials proceeding in the reporting period, an increase from four trials last year.

STATEWIDE DEFAMATION LIST  
INITIATIONS AND FINALISATIONS



# REPORT FROM THE JUDGE IN CHARGE OF THE FAMILY PROPERTY LIST JUDGE FRAATZ

**The Family Property List provides timely, cost-effective and fair resolution of testator family maintenance claims and de facto property claims. It offers streamlined procedures and trial dates within eight months of first administrative mention.**

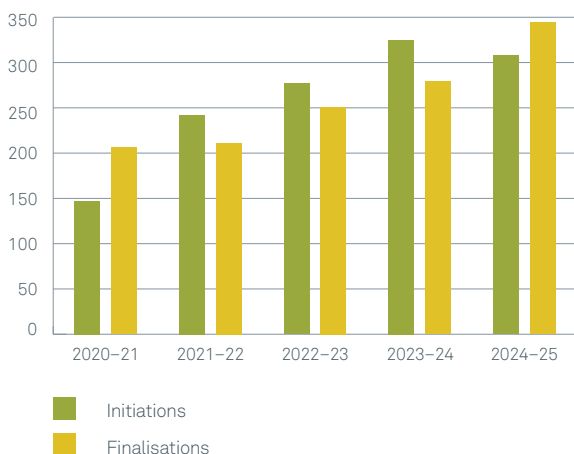
The reporting period saw 308 proceedings initiated in the List, a five per cent decrease from the previous year. The rate of finalisations increased 23 per cent, with 344 cases finalising. This increase in finalisations contributed to the reduction in active cases in the List. There were 188 active cases in 2024–25 compared to 121 active cases in 2023–24, a 36 per cent reduction.

Of the active cases in the List, just four cases (or three per cent) have been active for more than 24 months. This positive result demonstrates the effectiveness of the case management approach in the List, which involves the allocation of a trial date in the initial timetabling orders and the requirement to engage in private mediation.

A key feature of the approach to case management in the Family Property List is to ensure (where possible) that costs remain in proportion to the amount in dispute. Where the value of the estate is less than \$150,000, modified procedures are employed for the management of these lower-value estate disputes, such as the listing of a Court-provided settlement conference in lieu of private mediation, and imposing a cap on legal costs at a percentage of the value of the estate. In the reporting period, five proceedings were identified as involving a lower-value estate. Two lower-value estate matters were resolved at a settlement conference, one before a judge and the other before a Division lawyer, and no matters proceeded to trial. This is a positive outcome for disputes of this kind, where legal costs have the potential to significantly reduce the value of a modest estate.

The number of proceedings involving a self-represented litigant (SRL) remains stable, with 12 new proceedings involving SRLs active during the reporting period. Managing SRLs remains a significant challenge for the Court, requiring substantial time and effort from judges, associates and SRL case managers to guide SRLs through the complexities of litigation. Ten proceedings involving a SRL were finalised in the reporting period, up from eight finalisations the previous year. Of these, seven were finalised with the consent of all parties following a private or judicial mediation.

STATEWIDE FAMILY PROPERTY LIST  
INITIATIONS AND FINALISATIONS



# REPORT OF THE JUDGE IN CHARGE OF THE INSTITUTIONAL LIABILITY LIST JUDGE K L BOURKE

## **The Institutional Liability List consists of proceedings concerning claims against an organisation founded on the death or personal injury of a person due to alleged physical or sexual abuse.**

The List also manages proceedings involving:

- applications to set aside a previous judgment or settlement agreement pursuant to s 27QB or s 27QD of the *Limitation of Actions Act 1958 (Vic)* prior to the commencement of a proceeding on an action referred to in s 27QA of that Act
- claims against an educational organisation arising out of the death or personal injury of a student of that organisation because of alleged physical, sexual or psychological abuse by a fellow student or individual employed or associated with that organisation
- claims for breach of the duty of care imposed by s 91 of the *Wrongs Act 1958 (Vic)*.

During the reporting period, 39 proceedings were commenced in the List, representing a 36 per cent decrease from the 61 recorded in the previous year. A total of 105 cases were finalised, resulting in a 36 per cent reduction in pending cases, from 186 at the beginning of the reporting period to 119 at its conclusion.

To ensure that all matters in the List progress to finalisation in an efficient manner, all proceedings are allocated a trial date at an early stage. Of the 144 trials listed in the reporting period, no matters proceeded to trial, with 102 matters resolving by consent before trial. Two of these proceedings were resolved at a judicial mediation, with the remaining 100 cases largely resolving due to private mediation.

Despite no proceedings running to trial, proceedings in the List require a significant degree of judicial case management, with 145 interlocutory hearings proceeding during the reporting period.

# REPORT FROM THE JUDGE IN CHARGE OF THE MEDICAL LIST JUDGE MORRISH

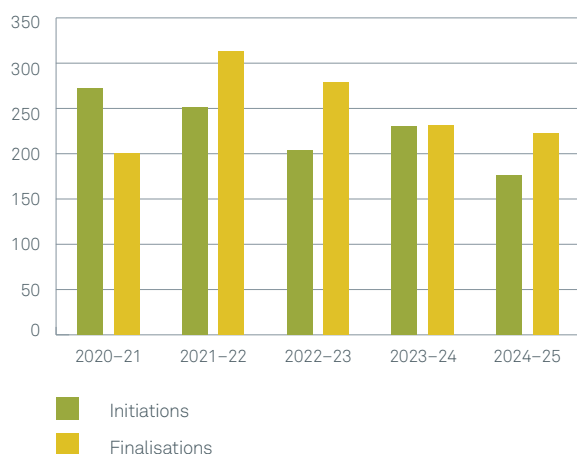
The Medical List is made up of proceedings alleging negligence against health service providers resulting in injury. These types of matters are often very complex.

In the 2024–25 reporting period, 176 proceedings were initiated in the Medical List, a 24 per cent decrease from the previous year. Finalisations decreased by four per cent to 223. With finalisations remaining relatively high, the number of pending cases decreased by eight per cent from 445 at the start of the reporting period to 409 by its conclusion.

Proceedings in the Medical List are subject to close oversight by the Judge in Charge, supported by the Common Law Registry, to ensure the timely completion of interlocutory steps and the avoidance of unnecessary delay. Where interlocutory issues arise that require the Court’s determination, proceedings are listed for directions before the Judge in Charge. During the reporting period, 97 interlocutory hearings were conducted, a 28 per cent decrease compared with the previous year.

Through efficient case management of practices in the List, and with the professionalism and diligence of practitioners, only one matter proceeded to trial in the reporting period. All remaining proceedings were resolved prior to trial, the majority through Court-ordered private mediation.

STATEWIDE MEDICAL LIST  
INITIATIONS AND FINALISATIONS



# REPORT FROM THE JUDGE IN CHARGE OF SELF-REPRESENTED LITIGANTS (GENERAL LIST) JUDGE TRAN

## Proceedings in the General List that involve a self-represented litigant (SRL) are case managed by Judge Tran, with the assistance of the Judicial Registrars.

Litigants may be unrepresented for a variety of reasons. They may be unable to afford legal representation, or they may choose to represent themselves. In the Common Law Division, SRLs often face substantial barriers to effectively engaging with court processes, including limited literacy, lack of English proficiency, mental or physical health challenges and experiences of family violence or other trauma. Litigation in the General List is complex, and access to free or low-cost legal assistance is very limited. Accordingly, cases in the General List that involve an SRL are referred to a judicial officer for case management from an early stage.

During the reporting period, an SRL became active in 56 proceedings in the General List, a decrease of 15 per cent from 66 new SRL proceedings in the previous reporting period.

Thirty proceedings with an active SRL were finalised during the reporting period. Of these finalisations, seven proceedings were resolved with the consent of the parties, 11 proceedings were determined by a judicial officer at a hearing prior to trial and six proceedings resolved at a judicial mediation. Five proceedings were determined at trial, an increase from two proceedings in the previous reporting period. In 18 proceedings, a solicitor commenced acting for a litigant and the proceeding was no longer required to be managed as an SRL proceeding. The total number of active proceedings involving an SRL decreased from 59 at the start of the reporting period to 58 by the end.

With avenues for free or low-cost legal assistance being mostly unavailable for litigants in the General List, the Court is greatly assisted each year by the Victorian Bar through the Pro Bono Barristers Referral Scheme. During the reporting period, 12 referrals were made in proceedings in the General List, of which nine were accepted. Referrals seeking a barrister to appear at a judicial mediation were particularly successful. Of the other three judicial mediations at which pro bono counsel appeared for the litigant, all resulted in the resolution of the proceeding.

The SRL case managers in the Registry continue to provide procedural support to SRLs across most Lists in the Division. Each month, they manage more than 300 email enquiries and 60 phone calls from litigants seeking assistance. At any one time, they are in contact with more than 130 litigants, both those with a proceeding under way, as well as those who have not yet commenced a proceeding. With the SRL case managers dealing with increasing demands across the Court, funding has been secured for an additional role in the Registry to assist in working on ways to streamline Registry processes and enhance services and resources available to litigants.

# REPORT FROM THE JUDGE IN CHARGE OF SELF-REPRESENTED LITIGANTS (SERIOUS INJURY LIST) JUDGE GINNANE

**Proceedings in the Serious Injury List that involve an SRL are case managed by Judge Ginnane, with the assistance of the Judicial Registrars and the SRL Case Managers.**

The SRLs in the Serious Injury List comprise plaintiffs, whose solicitor has ceased acting for them during proceedings. Due to the complexities involved in the plaintiff managing the proceeding without the benefit of legal representation, these proceedings are closely case managed by a judicial officer to ensure that the unrepresented plaintiff is made aware of the procedures that will be involved in the conduct of their proceeding and at any final hearing, and that they have access to relevant documents.

During the reporting period, there was a 40 per cent increase in new SRL proceedings, with 28 new SRL proceedings, up from 20 in the previous year. Twenty proceedings involving a SRL were finalised during the reporting period, a slight increase from 19 in the previous year. Of the 20 finalisations, 10 proceedings were resolved by consent, five proceedings were dismissed by a judicial officer prior to the hearing, in two proceedings the opinion of a medical panel was adopted, and two proceedings were determined at the final hearing of the serious injury application.

With the increase in new SRL activity, the total number of active cases involving an SRL increased from 19 at the start of the reporting period to 24 by its conclusion.

The Court was grateful for the assistance provided by the Victorian Bar through the Pro Bono Barristers Referral Scheme. During the reporting period, seven referrals were made, with three referrals accepted by a barrister, including one referral for counsel to represent the plaintiff at the final hearing of the serious injury application.

# REPORT FROM THE JUDGE IN CHARGE OF THE WORKCOVER LIST JUDGE SANGER

The WorkCover List comprises claims relating to statutory benefits under the *Accident Compensation Act 1985 (Vic)*, the *Workers Compensation Act 1958 (Vic)* and the *Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013 (Vic)* (the Act). The List also manages applications to refer medical questions to a medical panel under s 274 of the Act.

In the reporting period, 56 proceedings were initiated in the WorkCover List, a slight increase on the 54 initiations in the previous year. Fifty-four proceedings were finalised during the reporting period, a decrease from the previous year when 65 proceedings were finalised. The number of pending cases remained stable at 56 cases. Of these 56 pending cases, only one case has been pending for more than two years.

## MEDICAL PANEL REFERRALS IN SERIOUS INJURY PROCEEDINGS

This List also manages applications to refer medical questions to a medical panel under s 274 of the Act. Many of these applications are made in proceedings in the Serious Injury List, with such referrals commonly concerning medical questions regarding causation of the injury, or the extent of any incapacity. Applications such as these are listed for a directions hearing before the Judge in Charge of the List.

In the reporting period, 74 referrals were made to medical panels, largely in proceedings in the Serious Injury List. The reporting period also saw 70 certificates of opinion received from the medical panel. In many of these proceedings where a medical panel opinion was obtained, the proceeding resolved shortly thereafter.

STATEWIDE WORKCOVER LIST  
INITIATIONS AND FINALISATIONS



# REPORT FROM THE COMMON LAW JUDICIAL REGISTRARS JUDICIAL REGISTRARS BALES AND LYNCH

In the Common Law Division, the judicial registrars assist the judges of the Division by case managing proceedings prior to trial which involves determining interlocutory applications, hearing subpoena objections, conducting judicial mediations and making orders on the papers.

During the reporting period, the judicial registrars conducted a total of 789 interlocutory hearings. This included 272 directions hearings, 18 subpoena objections hearings and 110 summons hearings in the General, Serious Injury and Institutional Liability Lists. The remainder of the interlocutory hearings were conducted in the APSA List, which saw 389 interlocutory hearings conducted.

The judicial registrars also conducted 27 judicial mediations in the reporting period, which resulted in the resolution of 11 proceedings. Of the 11 resolved proceedings, six were applications for compensation under s 85B of the *Sentencing Act 1991 (Vic)*.

The judicial registrars continue to manage a large volume of proceedings across the Division that involve a self-represented litigant (SRL). Many of these SRL proceedings are intervention order appeals in the APSA List, where over 85 per cent of proceedings involve at least one SRL.

The judicial registrars also considered a high number of requests for orders and applications that are determined on the papers, with 1,510 orders made during the reporting period. This included applications to adjourn a trial date, case transfer applications under the *Courts (Case Transfer) Act 1991 (Vic)*, applications for approval of compromises in prisoner compensation claims under the *Corrections Act 1986 (Vic)* and applications for extensions of time to serve an originating process and for substituted service.

# REPORT FROM THE HEAD OF THE COMMERCIAL DIVISION JUDGE BURCHELL



Judge Burchell

The Commercial Division (the Division) has seen a significant increase in workload this financial year. By continuing to explore new and innovative reforms, the Division continues to work to ensure that matters are finalised as efficiently and as cost effectively as possible.

## ACHIEVEMENTS

Many new pilot programs and reforms were implemented during this reporting period.

### *Commercial Division planning day and new Practice Note and Standard Orders*

On 21 May 2025, the Division conducted a division-wide planning day that involved participation from all judges, judicial registrars as well as judicial support staff and members of Registry. The purpose of the day was to consider and review our current practices, including:

- the creation of a Commercial Division guide for self-represented litigants
- a draft memorandum of understanding with Deakin University referring self-represented litigants to mediations
- organising a pilot program for triaged low-value claim matters for compulsory oral early neutral evaluations
- revisions to the Practice Note and the Standard Orders booklet.

Following the planning day, the Division commenced work to update the second version of the Commercial Division Practice Note and Standard Orders booklet with a view to publication in August 2025.

### *Surge List Pilot Program*

The Division launched the Surge List Pilot Program, in which judges from other divisions assisted the Division with hearing interlocutory applications. The Pilot was conducted from 12 August 2024 to 20 December 2024. The judges who assisted in the Surge List included Judge Pillay, Judge Fraatz, Judge Anderson, Judge Manova, Judge Carlin and Judge Clayton. In total, 101 interlocutory applications were heard by the Surge List judges.

The judges that volunteered in the pilot assisted to significantly reduce the Commercial Division's interlocutory workload ensuring matters were ready to proceed to trial. Alternatively, this work also facilitated the early resolution of matters, thereby avoiding the need for potentially lengthy trials and judgment writing obligations, and helped the Court to manage the increase in demand and reduce time to trial.

### Early Judicial Intervention in Building Cases Pilot Project

Judge Anderson and Commercial Division Lawyer, Tracey Huang, launched the Early Judicial Intervention in Building Cases Pilot Project to target the increased number of cases initiated in the Building Cases List. The aim of the project was to assist parties in resolving their disputes early or, alternatively, to put in place more effective pre-trial processes. Between 18 September 2024 and 3 December 2024, the Court listed 30 case management conferences and conducted 24 case management conferences. The Court settled four proceedings and assisted the parties in 20 proceedings to put in place more effective pre-trial processes.

### International Judicial Dispute Resolution Network

The International Judicial Dispute Resolution Network (IJDRN) is a voluntary, non-binding association of like-minded judiciaries committed to promoting the early, amicable and cost-effective resolution of court disputes through judicial dispute resolution (JDR), with the aim of achieving fair outcomes for litigants.

On 17 January 2025, the County Court was formally admitted as a member of the IJDRN, with effect from 14 February 2025. Other member judiciaries include England and Ireland, Southern District of New York, Canada, Jamaica, Malaysia, the Philippines and Singapore.

Subsequently, on 29 May 2025, the Court published its Country Report on the IJDRN website, outlining the judicial dispute resolution processes in Victoria. These Country Reports are a valuable resource for the IJDRN's work and serve as a reference for other judiciaries exploring the implementation of JDR in their own jurisdictions.

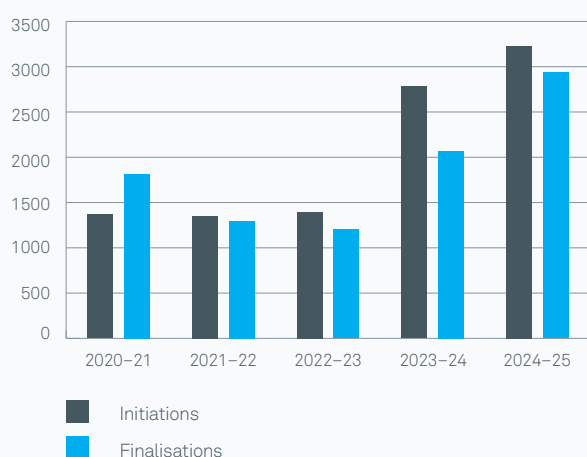
The Country Report details the Court's JDR initiatives across its Commercial, Common Law, and Criminal Divisions. It outlines the various measures undertaken to enhance judicial dispute resolution within the Court's case management framework. These initiatives aim to:

- establish effective pre-trial processes and promote the proportionate resolution of disputes
- encourage cost-effective litigation by reducing the time and financial burden of trials on the Court's limited resources
- support a shift towards judicially facilitated resolution during pre-trial phases through active case management
- facilitate the timely resolution of matters where appropriate
- ensure that cases proceeding to trial are fully prepared and ready to commence
- achieve these outcomes in a timely, tailored, and efficient manner.

### MONASH TAX CLINIC

The Division, in partnership with the Monash Tax Clinic, has extended its memorandum of understanding for a further three years. Under this arrangement, unrepresented litigants in tax disputes may be referred to the Clinic to receive legal assistance.

STATEWIDE COMMERCIAL DIVISION INITIATIONS AND FINALISATIONS



## DIVISION ACTIVITY AND THE VICTORIAN CIVIL AND ADMINISTRATIVE TRIBUNAL (VCAT)

The General List has seen a significant increase of 14 per cent in initiations compared with the same period last year. By the end of the reporting period, there were 173 active Building Cases List cases, compared with 167 active cases at the conclusion of the 2023–24 reporting period and 135 active cases at the end of the 2022–23 reporting period. However, increased initiation levels are expected to continue across the Division, given the ongoing fall-out from the Court of Appeal decision in *Thurin v Krongold Constructions (Aust) Pty Ltd* [2022] VSCA 226 and the more recent VCAT decision in *Plunkett v Portier Pacific Pty Ltd (Civil Claims)* [2024] VCAT 205. Initiation levels for the reporting period in the Division have increased by 16 per cent, from 3,230 cases this year compared with 2,781 cases initiated in the previous year. The finalisations rate for 2024–25 has continued to grow, as the Division finalises proceedings from the higher initiation rates experienced in previous years.

The Division continues to assist VCAT with its commercial matters, particularly the Building and Property List. Twenty-nine cases were referred from VCAT’s Building Property List to the Court’s Commercial Division in this reporting period under s 77 of the *VCAT Act 1998 (Vic)*, and 14 cases were allocated to a County Court judge sitting as a VCAT Vice President, under the VCAT protocol. While the protocol commenced as an offer from the Court to assist VCAT in the reduction of its backlog of cases due to COVID-19 impacts, the significant increase in initiations in the Commercial Division, and the Court’s reduction in resources, means the number of cases allocated in the future under this protocol is expected to reduce significantly.

The Head of Division and the Judge in Charge of the Building Cases List continue to communicate with Justice Woodward, President of VCAT, and the acting Head of the VCAT Building Property List to implement guidelines for a non-binding procedure and information exchange with regard to s 77 referrals from VCAT to the Supreme and County Courts.

## APPROPRIATE DISPUTE RESOLUTION

Appropriate dispute resolution (ADR) includes judicial resolution conferences, early neutral evaluation, arbitration and mediations. The Division has continued to encourage parties to use these alternative resolution methods to resolve issues, particularly for low-value claims and cases involving self-represented litigants.

There were 80 ADR events conducted in this reporting period compared with 60 in the previous period. Of the total held, 55 were judicial resolution conferences, eight were mediations before the Division lawyer, with the remaining 25 ADR events referred under the Law Institute of Victoria and Victorian Bar protocols.

## SELF-REPRESENTED LITIGANTS

The Division has experienced a significant increase in the number of litigants representing themselves over the past several years. The number of active SRL cases has increased from 63 in 2022 to 173 in 2025 – an increase of 175 per cent. The Division continues to identify opportunities to provide access to justice for SRLs. These include the creation of the SRL Directions Hearings List, University Law Clinics and ongoing work with Justice Connect.

The SRL Directions Hearing List (the List), sits every second Friday and on average lists approximately 15 matters for directions hearing. The List is managed by Judicial Registrar Muller and with each matter, he looks to identify whether or not the SRL parties intend to prosecute or defend the claim, what the nature of defence is, whether a request for pro bono assistance should be made and if there are opportunities for early ADR. By taking a more proactive, inquisitive approach, the Judicial Registrar can identify matters that can potentially be resolved easily by converting the directions hearing into a case conference at the end of the list or adjourn for a judicial resolution conference.

## PRESENTATIONS

Judge Burchell presented at the International Commercial Law Conference in London on 'Challenges in Dispute Resolution', presented a keynote address at the Hatchery's Women of Colour Leadership and Allyship Summit, presented at the Victorian Public Sector Women of Colour Network Event, presented the Property Law Keynote Address on the transfer of proceedings under s 77 of the *Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 1998* (Vic) at the Law Institute of Victoria's Annual Legal Forum, presented at the Judicial College on 'Challenges in Civil Dispute Resolution: Part A', presented at the New Zealand Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment's Liability Roundtable Conference in Wellington and presented at the Judicial Staff Conference Common and Commercial Law presentations with Judges Tran and Pillay.

Judge Brimer presented at the Victorian Commercial Teachers Association Comview Conference and Expo. Judge Brimer attended the third meeting of the International Judicial Dispute Resolution Network in Malaysia and presented on the learnings from the discussions at the Commercial Division Knowledge Series on Friday 21 February 2025.

Judge Burchell, Judge Kirton and Tracey Huang presented at the VCAT Expert Evidence workshop on expert evidence practice and procedures, as well as facilitating expert conclaves, in the County Court Commercial Division and Building Cases List.

Judge Palmer ran the Advocacy Week at the Victorian Bar Readers Course.

Tracey Huang presented at the Leo Cussen County Court Practice Intensive on case management procedures in the Commercial Division.

Judge Kirton presented at the VCAT Building Property List Planning Day on the 'Impacts of Recent Reforms in Domestic Building Industry'.

## KNOWLEDGE SERIES

The Commercial Division Knowledge Series continued during the reporting period, bringing together judicial officers and staff across the Division and the wider Court to learn from the judges of the Division on a broad range of topics.

## ADR BREAKFAST SERIES

The Division, in collaboration with the Alternative Dispute Resolution Committee, continued its Alternative Dispute Resolution Continuous Education Program for judicial mediators. The program, called the ADR breakfast series, was delivered to the Supreme Court, County Court and VCAT. The sessions, delivered by judicial officers from a number of jurisdictions, as well as expert private mediators, covered a range of different topics. These sessions continue to support the ongoing professional development of our judicial mediators.

## DIVISION STRUCTURE, APPOINTMENTS AND DEPARTURES

The Division consists of seven full-time judges and two full-time judicial registrars with Judge Burchell as Head of the Division.

Judges Kirton, Wise, Ryan, Lauritsen and Macnamara sat in the Division as full-time judges. Judges Brimer and Marks sat in the Division in the first half of the reporting period, and Judges Robertson and Palmer in the second half.

Judicial Registrars David Bennett and Adrian Muller continued to sit in the Division as full-time judicial registrars.

Tracey Huang, appointed as ongoing Division lawyer in the Commercial Division in December 2024, engaged in case management activity and mediations.

## REPORT OF THE JUDGE IN CHARGE OF THE GENERAL LIST JUDGE BURCHELL

**The General List handles the bulk of the work of the Commercial Division. The Court has unlimited monetary jurisdiction in civil matters and cases in the General List frequently raise complicated legal and factual issues.**

There were 1,936 initiations in the General List for this financial year an increase of 14 per cent on the previous reporting period. Of those, 909 cases initiated were for monetary claims under \$100,000, with a further 658 cases for claims ranging between \$100,000–\$500,000. This reporting period saw 1,898 cases finalised, an increase of 40 per cent from 2023–24. Of all the matters where a notice of appearance was filed, 327 cases were finalised in fewer than 12 months. A further 189 cases were finalised in under two years.

## REPORT OF THE JUDGE IN CHARGE OF THE COMPLEX CASES LIST JUDGE A RYAN

**The Complex Cases List facilitates judge-managed, tailored, innovative and alternative practices to assist in the efficient resolution of complex disputes.**

There were four active matters in the Complex Cases List (CCL) in the 2024–25 financial year, and one matter was finalised via settlement. Matters are entered into the CCL when they require active case management due to the nature or extent of the claim. An example of a complex matter in the CCL is a claim seeking \$221 million in damages and involving parties who are also the subject of criminal proceedings in this Court. The Judge in Charge of the CCL has heard multiple interlocutory applications in relation to the matter and recently published a ruling determining whether the concurrent criminal proceeding justified a stay of the civil proceeding and whether funds paid into court should be released.

# REPORT OF THE JUDGE IN CHARGE OF THE BUILDING CASES LIST JUDGE KIRTON

Matters in the Building Cases List (BCL) are subject to active and intensive case management from the point of initiation, with the aim of enabling all relevant parties to meaningfully engage in a form of appropriate dispute resolution as early as possible. The disputes in the BCL are complex and often involve highly technical issues, expert evidence, multiple parties and a particularly high incidence of interlocutory applications.

## CASE INITIATIONS AND STABILISATION

The BCL has experienced a stabilisation in the number of initiations following exponential growth seen in the previous reporting period. This is largely due to a settling in the volume of cases referred from VCAT involving federal claims. Total initiations in the BCL decreased by 39 per cent, with 141 new cases initiated compared with 230 in the previous financial year.

While there has been a decrease in initiations, this reflects that the referral of cases from VCAT to the County Court is reaching equilibrium, ensuring a more manageable and sustainable workload moving forwards. During this reporting period, 26 cases were referred from VCAT to the Court under s 77 of the *Victorian Civil and Administrative Act 1998* (Vic). This stabilisation marks a positive shift in the overall workload, following a period of significant expansion in case numbers and pressure on the List and Division.

## CASE FINALISATIONS

There were 158 matters finalised within the BCL during the reporting period, compared with 146 finalisations the previous financial year, reflecting an increase of eight per cent.

## ACTIVE PROCEEDINGS

At the time of writing, there are 173 active proceedings within the BCL, a four per cent increase on this time last year. Of the active proceedings, 23 involve self-represented litigants. These matters require significantly more intensive case management than those involving exclusively represented parties. One issue that is increasingly prevalent in these cases (not exclusive to BCL) is the use of generative artificial intelligence (gen AI) in preparing submissions, applications and affidavits. Documents generated by gen AI and submitted to the Court frequently involve hallucinated case law, inaccurate and legally incorrect output. Despite guidance published by this Court, the use of gen AI is often not disclosed by the party utilising it. Increased scrutiny and research have been necessary to discover the use of gen AI (undertaken by opposing parties and the Court), with resulting cost consequences.

## BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTION SECURITY OF PAYMENT APPLICATIONS

During the reporting period, there were 21 applications initiated under the *Building and Construction Security of Payment Act 2002* (Vic) and 14 were finalised.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The BCL takes this opportunity to recognise and acknowledge all the mediators and facilitators and the expert witnesses who are integral to the operation of the List. You assist parties to achieve the most commercially effective outcome, and the Court relies on the high settlement rates you achieve to be able to manage the workload.

## REPORT OF THE JUDGE IN CHARGE OF THE ARBITRATION LIST JUDGE BRIMER

The Arbitration List hears applications under s 8(1) of the *Commercial Arbitration Act 2011* (Vic) to refer parties to arbitration and refers civil proceedings or part of a civil proceeding to arbitration by agreement of the parties under s 66(1) the *Civil Procedure Act 2010* (Vic) (CPA).

Arbitration is a private dispute resolution process where parties agree to resolve their dispute by referring it to an arbitrator, who makes a binding decision by an award.

Where parties agree to arbitrate and enter into an arbitration agreement in writing, the Court will refer the proceeding to arbitration under s 66(1) of the CPA.

Arbitration Victoria, the Resolution Institute, and the Victorian Commercial Arbitration Scheme offer rules for a streamlined arbitration process with capped fees and a short timeframe to award. Parties are free to appoint any arbitrator or arbitration body of their choice.

## REPORT OF THE JUDGE IN CHARGE OF THE BANKING AND FINANCE LIST JUDGE WISE

The Banking and Finance List (BFL) is a specialist list for cases relating to the lending of money, including enforcement of guarantees and mortgages, and proceedings involving claims for the possession of land.

There were 1,153 cases initiated in the BFL in the past financial year. This is an increase of 35 per cent on the last reporting period (which in turn was an increase of 79 per cent on the reporting period before that). The drivers of this year-on-year increase are not definitively known. However, they may relate to financial institutions continuing to initiate litigation for loans that were 'on hold' during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Of these cases, 884 were for claims up to \$500,000. A further 193 cases were for claims ranging from \$500,000 to \$1 million and 76 cases for claims exceeding \$1 million.

This reporting period saw 879 cases finalised, an increase of 62 per cent on the same period last year.

At the time of writing, the BFL has 166 active cases. Of those, 22 active cases involve self-represented litigants.

### NEW INITIATIVES TO REDUCE COST TO LITIGANTS AND ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN ON THE COURT

In an effort to reduce the total days cases spend in process, the BFL has introduced a new process for the initiation of its proceedings. The aim is to get parties to an initial mediation very early in the process before the expenditure on legal costs becomes an impediment to settlement.

The Court is also initiating a pilot project utilising its powers under s 66 of the *Civil Procedure Act 2010* (Vic) to refer appropriate matters initiated in the List, whether with or without the parties' consent, to alternative dispute resolution by the Australian Financial Complaints Authority.

The List will closely monitor the results of these initiatives to ensure that they meet the objectives of reducing the time and cost to the parties of litigation.

# REPORT OF THE COMMERCIAL DIVISION JUDICIAL REGISTRARS JUDICIAL REGISTRARS BENNETT AND MULLER

The judicial registrars assist the judges of the Division by case managing proceedings, determining interlocutory disputes, making orders on the papers, hearing enforcement applications and objections to subpoenas, conducting trial assessments and judicial resolution conferences, and assisting with the administration of the Division. They also work closely with Registry staff, judges of the Division and the Head of Division.

The judicial registrars also sit on a number of Court committees. During the year they delivered a number of presentations to legal practitioners and university students on a range of topics.

## JUDICIAL REGISTRAR ACTIVITY

The judicial registrars had 875 interlocutory matters (applications and directions hearings) listed before them, of which 479 proceeded to a hearing in court. This included the conduct of 279 directions hearings and the hearing of 88 applications by summons. Judicial Registrar Muller conducted a fortnightly directions hearing day for matters involving self-represented litigants.

The judicial registrars conducted 52 judicial resolution conferences, of which 21 resulted in the complete resolution of the proceeding. For matters that did not completely resolve, the parties were assisted in narrowing the issues in dispute and/or agreeing upon orders for the future conduct of the proceeding, which removed the need for a further directions hearing.

# JUDICIAL OFFICERS

Judges	Date appointed
Her Honour Chief Judge Amanda Chambers*	27 May 2025
Her Honour Deputy Chief Judge Meryl Sexton	20 August 2001
Her Honour Judge Liz Gaynor	10 September 2002
Her Honour Judge Sandra Davis	26 October 2004
Her Honour Judge Jeanette Morrish	9 August 2005
Her Honour Judge Katherine Bourke	11 December 2007
His Honour Judge Frank Gucciardo	27 May 2008
His Honour Judge Mark Gamble	3 February 2009
His Honour Judge Gerard Mullaly	7 April 2009
His Honour Judge Michael Tinney	16 March 2010
Her Honour Judge Gabriele Cannon	30 March 2010
His Honour Judge Gavan Meredith	28 May 2013
Her Honour Judge Claire Quin	25 February 2014
Her Honour Judge Sara Hinchey	26 May 2015
Her Honour Judge Samantha Marks	3 October 2016
His Honour Judge Gregory Lyon	18 October 2016
Her Honour Judge Carolene Gwynn	9 May 2017
His Honour Judge Doug Trapnell	14 June 2017
His Honour Judge Michael O'Connell	25 July 2017
Her Honour Judge Aileen Ryan	15 August 2017
His Honour Judge Trevor Wraight	31 October 2017
Her Honour Judge Patricia Riddell	8 November 2017
His Honour Judge Michael Cahill	29 May 2018
Her Honour Judge Sarah Dawes	14 August 2018
His Honour Judge Scott Johns	14 August 2018
Her Honour Judge Martine Marich	14 August 2018
His Honour Judge David Sexton	3 September 2018
His Honour Judge Philip Ginnane	11 September 2018
Her Honour Judge Elizabeth Brimer	16 April 2019
His Honour Judge George Georgiou	18 April 2019
His Honour Judge Arushan Pillay	6 August 2019
Her Honour Judge Rosemary Carlin	10 September 2019
Her Honour Judge Anne Hassan	29 October 2019
His Honour Judge Kevin Doyle	29 October 2019
His Honour Judge John Cain	29 October 2019

Judges	Date appointed
Her Honour Judge Fran Dalziel	28 February 2020
Her Honour Judge Sarah Leighfield	10 June 2020
His Honour Judge David Purcell	10 June 2020
Her Honour Judge Fiona Todd	13 July 2020
Her Honour Judge My Anh Tran	9 October 2020
His Honour Judge Jack Vandersteen	1 January 2021
Her Honour Judge Julie Clayton	25 January 2021
Her Honour Judge Anna Robertson	22 June 2021
His Honour Judge Marcus Dempsey	22 June 2021
Her Honour Judge Sharon Burchell	22 June 2021
His Honour Judge Pardeep Tiwana	22 June 2021
Her Honour Judge Kate Hawkins	10 August 2021
His Honour Judge Stewart Bayles	10 August 2021
Her Honour Judge Kellie Blair	10 August 2021
Her Honour Judge Nola Karapanagiotidis	10 August 2021
His Honour Judge Daniel Holding	10 August 2021
Her Honour Judge Angela Ellis	10 August 2021
His Honour Judge Andrew Fraatz	1 March 2022
Her Honour Judge Maria Tsikaris	1 March 2022
His Honour Judge Simon Moglia	1 March 2022
His Honour Judge Gary Clark	1 March 2022
Her Honour Judge Caitlin English	5 April 2022
His Honour Judge Peter Rozen	5 April 2022
Her Honour Judge Áine Magee	25 October 2022
His Honour Judge John Kelly	25 October 2022
Her Honour Judge Barbara Myers	25 October 2022
Her Honour Judge Diana Manova	14 June 2023
Her Honour Judge Robyn Harper	14 June 2023
His Honour Judge Andrew Palmer	5 September 2023
Her Honour Judge Suzanne Kirton	5 September 2023
His Honour Judge Michael Wise	30 January 2024
Her Honour Judge Liberty Sanger	30 January 2024
Her Honour Judge Krista Breckweg	10 December 2024
His Honour Judge Justin Lewis	25 February 2025

\* First appointed a Judge of the County Court of Victoria on 9 June 2015.

Retired Judges	Date retired
His Honour Judge John Carmody	23 September 2024
Her Honour Judge Frances Hogan	5 February 2025
His Honour Chief Judge Peter Kidd**	27 April 2025

Reserve Judges	Date appointed
His Honour Judge Michael McInerney	21 June 1994
His Honour Judge Graham Anderson	17 March 1998
Her Honour Judge Frances Hogan	2 October 2001
His Honour Judge Michael Bourke	10 September 2002
Her Honour Judge Wendy Wilmoth	8 April 2003
His Honour Judge Damian Murphy	24 October 2006
His Honour Judge Duncan Allen	21 August 2007
His Honour Judge Michael Macnamara	7 February 2012
His Honour Judge Peter Lauritsen	24 May 2016
His Honour Judge Paul Higham	15 August 2017
His Honour Judge Geoff Chettle	1 September 2021

Judicial Registrars	Date appointed
Matthew Phillips	11 February 2020
Alex Wilson	23 March 2020
Adrian Muller	13 October 2020
David Bennett	5 October 2021
Rosalind Avis	5 October 2021
Belinda Bales	5 October 2021
Craig Lynch	26 September 2024

\*\* Appointed as a Judge of the Victorian Court of Appeal.

## EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP TEAM

The Executive Leadership Team, led by the CEO, supports the Court through the delivery of core administrative functions. These include guiding governance and policy, managing finances and assets, delivering strategic initiatives and providing essential support to the judicial officers, judicial support and other administrative staff as well as to the Registry.

### JO RAINFORD

#### *Chief Executive Officer*

The Chief Executive Officer and Principal Registrar supports the Chief Judge as the head of the County Court of Victoria and leads the Court's Administration. Jo supports the Chief Judge in achieving the Court's strategic priorities, including being a court of excellence. The role is accountable for the proper administration of the Court's operations as well as its people, financial and corporate functions.

Jo sits on the Courts Executive which is made up of the CEOs from each jurisdiction in the Courts Group and also chairs the Court's Executive Leadership Team.

Jo considers the innovation and people leadership aspects, as well as collaboration with judicial officers and staff across the Courts Group, as the most rewarding aspects of her role. This allows her to positively contribute to ensuring the highest quality of support to judicial officers in discharging the purpose of the Court, delivering excellent justice outcomes.

### JASON GOLISZEK

#### *Principal Advisor to the Chief Judge*

Jason supports the Chief Judge in relation to her Honour's roles as head of the County Court, member of Courts Council and Chair of the Board of Management. He manages the Chief Judge's chambers and provides advice to the Chief Judge on strategy, law reform and policy.

Over the 2024–25 period, Jason found the most rewarding part of his role to be the support he provided during the transition period from the former Chief Judge Peter Kidd to the new Chief Judge Amanda Chambers. Further, he has taken a leading role on court security.

### LIVIA 'LIV' MACNEIL

#### *Executive Director Judicial Support Services*

Liv leads the judicial support services function, that provides essential support staff to the judicial officers of the Court. She is a program and project specialist with extensive experience in the delivery of high value and high-risk initiatives, more broadly across the court system, and in both public and private sectors. Liv has led large-scale transformation in complex operational environments.

Liv and her team are highly focussed and committed to delivering improved, effective, support to associates and tipstaves, and in turn judicial officers. The team strives for excellence in service delivery and pastoral care, achieved through streamlined processes, robust evidence-based decision-making and ongoing evaluation for continuous improvement.

### ALISON EDWARDS

#### *Executive Director Operations*

Alison leads the delivery of registry operations across the Criminal, Common Law and Commercial Divisions of the Court, as well as records management. With a focus on accessibility, efficiency and operational excellence, the role oversees service modernisation, streamlined digital workflows, and supports the Court's strategic directions.

Acting in the role since March 2025, Alison works closely with judicial officers, registrars and other staff to support timely and effective service delivery. Workforce wellbeing and safety are also priority areas for Alison, including the implementation of training and early engagement strategies for high-demand service points.

**KRISTY ROWE***Director of Specialist Courts and Strategy*

Kristy leads the strategic planning, governance and delivery of Specialist Courts, which includes the County Koori Court, the Drug and Alcohol Treatment Court, the Mental Health Advice and Response Service and the Court Integrated Services Program. In addition, this role is responsible for contributing to key strategic objectives of the Court as needed, including supporting the Court's Senior Leadership Team to undertake dedicated court improvement projects. Kristy is also leading the implementation of the Court's staff *Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy*.

Kristy considers leading innovative therapeutic responses, making a direct contribution to community safety and supporting programs that improve justice outcomes and cultural safety for First Nations peoples to be the most rewarding aspects of her role. Building two Specialist Courts programs from concept to full realisation and watching these programs become a valuable part of the Court has been a key highlight. Kristy supports a passionate and dedicated multidisciplinary team who are committed to innovation and service excellence.

**TRACEY WATSON***Director Business Services*

Tracey leads the provision of a range of strategic projects and corporate services including facility and fleet management, security, information technology, and data analytics, risk and compliance. She also provides leadership in the finance, communication, media and human resource functions. Tracey has worked across multiple jurisdictions and corporate services to deliver strategic projects and initiatives to improve court systems and streamline operations. Tracey is supported by a results-driven, energetic and purposeful team dedicated to supporting the work of the Court.

**CARLA SCAFI***Koori Strategic Adviser*

Carla is a Wiradjuri woman who provides strategic leadership in advancing First Nations justice across the Court. She oversees the development and delivery of high-level initiatives that support integrated, culturally responsive and self-determined outcomes for First Nations communities. Carla advises the judiciary, Executive Leadership Team and key stakeholders on emerging justice issues impacting First Nations peoples in Victoria.

Over the past year, Carla has led the development of the Court's inaugural Self-Determination Organisational Cultural Change Plan, a key milestone in embedding self-determination as a core principle of the Court's operations. Her work has also focussed on uplifting the Court's capability to collect and use First Nations data in more meaningful ways, strengthening the evidence base for improved outcomes. Carla continues to engage with Court Services Victoria, and key community stakeholders to ensure Koori business remains central to the Court's vision and long-term strategic priorities.

# FINANCIAL INFORMATION FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2025

The County Court of Victoria's financial information for the year ended 30 June 2025 is published as part of Court Service Victoria's (CSV) audited accounts in the *Court Services Victoria Annual Report 2024–25*. This report can be viewed by visiting [www.courts.vic.gov.au](http://www.courts.vic.gov.au).

## COMPREHENSIVE OPERATING STATEMENT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2025

CONTINUING OPERATIONS	Note	2025 Actuals \$'000	2024 Actuals \$'000
Income from transactions			
Output appropriations <sup>1</sup>	1a	48,142	42,769
Special appropriations	1b	42,746	48,980
Grants	1c	536	-
<b>Total income from transactions</b>		<b>91,424</b>	<b>91,749</b>
Expenses from transactions			
Employee expenses and judicial officer remuneration	2	79,444	81,258
Interest expense	3	123	60
Supplies and services	4	10,875	12,106
<b>Total expenses from transactions</b>		<b>90,442</b>	<b>93,424</b>
<b>Net result from transactions (net operating balance)</b>		<b>982</b>	<b>(1,675)</b>
<b>OTHER ECONOMIC FLOWS INCLUDED IN NET RESULT</b>			
Other gains/(losses) from other economic flows	5	56	188
<b>Total other economic flows included in net result</b>		<b>56</b>	<b>188</b>
<b>Net result</b>		<b>1,038</b>	<b>(1,487)</b>
<b>OTHER ECONOMIC FLOWS – OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME</b>			
Items that will not be reclassified to net result			
Changes in physical asset revaluation reserve		-	-
<b>Total other economic flows – other comprehensive income</b>		<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Comprehensive result</b>		<b>1,038</b>	<b>(1,487)</b>

## NOTES TO THE COMPREHENSIVE OPERATING STATEMENT

1. **Appropriations:** Once annual Parliamentary appropriations are applied by the Treasurer, they are controlled by CSV and recognised as income when applied in accordance with the relevant Appropriations Act.
  - a. **Output appropriations:** Income received to deliver outputs to the Government is recognised when those outputs are delivered and certified by the relevant Minister against specified performance criteria.  
Output appropriations in 2024–25 totalled \$48.142 million, an increase of \$5.373 million compared with 2023–24 (\$42.769 million). This increase is mainly due to the consumer price indexation and additional Treasurer Advance to assist with the changes in the cost allocation methodology between special and output appropriations.
  - b. **Special appropriations:** Under the *Court Services Victoria Act 2014*, income related to special appropriations is recognised when the amount appropriated for that purpose is due and payable by CSV.  
Special appropriations in 2024–25 totalled \$42.746 million, which is a reduction of \$6.234 million compared with 2023–24 (\$48.980 million). This decrease in appropriation is mainly due to the change in cost allocation methodology as stated above.
  - c. **Grants:** Grant revenue is recognised as income in accordance with AASB 1058 as all grants received are not enforceable and do not have sufficiently specific performance obligations to be accounted for as contracts with customers in accordance with AASB 15 *Revenue from Contracts with Customers*.  
Grant revenue in 2024–25 was \$0.536 million, received from the Victorian Legal Services Board to support judicial services.
2. **Employee expenses and judicial officer remuneration** include all costs related to the employment, including wages and salaries, fringe benefits tax, leave entitlements, superannuation, termination payments and work cover premiums.  
Employee expenses in 2024–25 totalled \$79.444 million, which is a decrease of \$1.814 million compared with 2023–24 (\$81.258 million). This was mainly influenced by organisational restructures and corporate consolidation.
3. **Interest expense** represents \$0.123 million incurred in 2024–25 for vehicle lease arrangements.
4. **Supplies and services** incorporate a provision of service payments totalling \$10.875 million in 2024–25, which involves information technology, security, building management, maintenance, office supplies and equipment, resourcing court improvements, new initiatives and Circuit Court expenses.
5. **Other economic flows included in net result** represents net gain/(losses) on non-financial assets and changes in the volume or value of an asset or liability that do not result from transactions. Gains from other economic flows in 2024–25 include \$0.056 million gains from the revaluation of the present value of the long service leave liability due to changes in bond interest rates.

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County Court of Victoria  
250 William Street  
Melbourne VIC 3000

Telephone: 03 8636 6888  
[countycourt.vic.gov.au](http://countycourt.vic.gov.au)