



CHIEF JUSTICE'S CHAMBERS
SUPREME COURT
MELBOURNE 3000

15 September 2021

Mr Christopher Blanden QC
President
Victorian Bar
525 Lonsdale Street
MELBOURNE VIC 3000

Ms Tania Wolff
President
Law Institute of Victoria
470 Bourke Street
MELBOURNE VIC 3000

BY EMAIL

Dear Presidents

Message to the Profession

Over the past 18 months I have been deeply impressed by how barristers and solicitors have continued to support the community and the work of the courts. They have continued to serve their clients throughout the pandemic by transforming how they work. It has been remarkable. This achievement comes at a time when practitioners are working in very trying circumstances. I want to acknowledge and thank the legal profession for their efforts. The courts could not have continued to operate without their assistance.

The latest lockdown has been particularly challenging for the legal profession. I know from my discussions with you both, as well as discussions with individual barristers and solicitors, that working remotely, not having the same connections with colleagues, providing support to family including home schooling and childcare, is putting a significant strain on lawyers with levels of fatigue increasing. The high standards that lawyers expect of themselves have been tested. The reserves that people draw on during difficult times are not as they were.

I want to assure the profession that all members of the Supreme Court appreciate the difficulties that barristers and solicitors are working under.

Over the duration of the pandemic, the judges and I have spoken often about the desirability for flexibility and the need to take into account in all that we do the unusual circumstances that prevail. In particular, I had a number of discussions and emails last week with judges about this given the ever increasing impact of the current lockdown on so many barristers and solicitors.

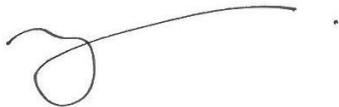
The Court encourages all parties to approach the current circumstances cooperatively. Lawyers should not feel that they cannot or should not approach

other parties to seek their consent to extensions of time or other accommodations as a result of the current difficulties. Quite the reverse. The Court encourages barristers and solicitors to have an open dialogue and to be realistic about what can be done in the current environment and how long it will take.

The Court will endeavour to accommodate requests for extensions of time or flexible arrangements while ensuring fairness to all parties. The interests of justice are best served by lawyers being able to apply their skills properly in the representation of their clients.

I again extend my deep appreciation and thanks to all barristers and solicitors for their continuing efforts and the critical role they play in assisting the Court to fulfil its function and serve the community.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'A' followed by a long horizontal stroke that curves upwards at the end.

ANNE FERGUSON
Chief Justice