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Media Release: Four new judicial appointments to the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia

The Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia (FCFCOA) is extremely pleased to welcome the following judicial appointments announced today by the Attorney-General for Australia, Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash.

Barrister Richard Schonell SC, appointed to Division 1 of the FCFCOA, Sydney

Barrister Andrew Strum QC, appointed to Division 1 of the FCFCOA, Melbourne

Senior Judicial Registrar Anna Parker, appointed to Division 2 of the FCFCOA, Adelaide

Barrister Dearne Firth, appointed to Division 2 of the FCFCOA, Brisbane

These appointments follow the appointment of [11 new judges](#) to the Court that were announced last month. This brings the total number of judges nationally to 108 (35 in Division 1 and 73 in Division 2), making it the largest court in Australia and resourced to better manage its demanding workload in the area of family law.

The Chief Justice of the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia, the Hon Will Alstergren said that he was delighted with the appointment of such distinguished and highly skilled practitioners who are all well-regarded for their incredible depth of knowledge and experience in family law.

“The calibre of these appointments, together with many other new judges who have joined the Court this year, reflects the high esteem in which the Court, and its Judges, are held.”

Biographical details:

Barrister Richard Schonell, appointed to Division 1, SYDNEY

Sydney Barrister Richard Schonell SC was called to the Bar in March 1993, having previously practiced as a solicitor in commercial law with Allen Allen and Hemsley and then in family law. Since coming to the Bar he practiced in family law and appeared almost exclusively in matters in Division 1 of the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia. Mr Schonell took silk in October 2010 and for many years was a member of the NSW Bar Association’s Family Law Committee, a past Chair of the Family Law Committee and has been the Bar Association’s delegate to the NSW Legal Aid Review Committee. He was also a regular contributor and speaker at conferences and seminars on Family Law. Mr Schonell has, over the last 30 years, developed experience in all facets of the law as it applies to proceedings in the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia. He has also appeared in the Full Court of the then Family Court of Australia as well as the High Court of Australia. A focus of his practice over many years has been appearing in complex property disputes as well as in complicated parenting disputes. Whilst based in Sydney, he was regularly retained to appear in Division 1 in other States. Mr Schonell is a well-regarded a Mediator and is an Accredited arbitrator in family law matters and has been recognised by Doyle’s Guide as amongst the leading Family Law Senior Counsel in Australia.

Barrister Andrew Strum QC, appointed to Division 1, MELBOURNE

Melbourne Barrister Andrew Strum QC was admitted to practice in 1992 and signed the Bar Roll in November 1993. Prior to signing the Bar Roll, he was the Legal Associate to the Honourable Justice Steven Strauss, former Judge of the Appeal Division of the Family Court of Australia. Mr Strum has extensive experience practising in all areas of the family law and de facto jurisdictions, including pre-trial applications, trials, appeals, mediations and arbitrations. He has written and presented papers on a range of family law related topics, including forum non conveniens, bankruptcy, third parties, superannuation and Jewish divorce law. Mr Strum was a member and past secretary of the Family Law Bar Association, and has consistently been recognised in Doyle's Guide, most recently as Leading Family Law Senior Counsel – Victoria, 2021 (Doyle's Guide, 2 December 2020) and Leading Family Law Senior Counsel – Australia, 2021.

Senior Judicial Registrar Anna Parker, appointed to Division 2, ADELAIDE

Dr Anna Parker graduated with a Bachelor of Arts (Hons) and Bachelor of Laws (Hons) in 2005 from Monash University. She has subsequently also completed a Master of Laws from the University of Melbourne and a Doctor of Juridical Science from Monash University. Dr Parker completed her Articles of Clerkship at Harwood Andrews Lawyers and subsequently practised as a solicitor in the area of family law at specialist family law firms for approximately 10 years, including as a Partner of a family law firm. Dr Parker was accredited as a Family Law Specialist by the Law Institute of Victoria in 2011. She was called to the Bar in May 2016 and practised as a Barrister exclusively in family law from 2016 until her commencement as a Senior Judicial Registrar and National Operations Judicial Registrar – Judicial Case Management with the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia in December 2020. While a Senior Judicial Registrar with the Court, Dr Parker was a member of the Rules Harmonisation Working Group and played a critical role in the development of the Court's new Central Practice Direction and new case management pathway.

Barrister Dearne Firth, appointed to Division 2, BRISBANE

Queensland Barrister Dearne Firth was called to the Bar in 2010 and practices primarily in family law, child protection, domestic violence, regulatory prosecutions and criminal law. Ms Firth has extensive experience appearing in both Division 1 and Division 2 of the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia, as well as the Supreme Court, District Court and Magistrates Court of Queensland. Additionally, Ms Firth is a nationally accredited mediator and arbitrator. Ms Firth was a committee member on the board of the Family Law Practitioners Association of Queensland, and was named in Doyle's Guide as a recommended barrister as one of the Leading Parenting & Children's Matters Barristers - Queensland, 2019 and 2020; and named as a recommended barrister - Leading Family Law Junior Counsel - Queensland, 2020. She was also a finalist nominated for Barrister of the Year at the Women in Law Awards 2017.

Chief Justice Alstergren said that the appointment of such highly experienced family law practitioners has never been more important than now, following the Court's release of concerning [statistics](#) that demonstrate the extent of family violence allegations and other risk factors faced by vulnerable parties and children involved in family law.

“Data from over 20,000 electronic Notices of Child Abuse, Family Violence or Risk filed in parenting disputes, shows that nearly 80% of the Court's matters involve at least one major risk factor (including child abuse, family violence, mental health issues, alcoholism or other substance abuse), and nearly one half of such matters have 4 or more of those risk factors in them. The Court's Lighthouse Project also demonstrates that more than 60% of our parenting disputes screen as high risk.

“The Court is grateful for the timely appointment of judges, however, we remain focused on securing further resources to enable the Court to expand critical projects nationally such as the Lighthouse Project and the PPP500 List to provide a better and safer approach for vulnerable parties involved in the family law system,” Chief Justice Alstergren added.

The continuation and expansion of these projects and other court initiatives forms part of a series of recommendations outlined in the recently published report prepared by the [*Joint Select Committee on Australia’s Family Law System*](#).