

The Workers Rehabilitation & Compensation Tribunal

Annual Report

2018/2019

Presented to both Houses of
Parliament pursuant to s24 of the
*Workers Rehabilitation and
Compensation Act 1988*





WORKERS REHABILITATION AND COMPENSATION TRIBUNAL

TASMANIA

4 October 2019

The Hon. Elise Archer
Minister for Building & Construction
Level 10, Executive Building
15 Murray Street
HOBART TAS 7000

Dear Minister

WORKERS REHABILITATION AND COMPENSATION TRIBUNAL - ANNUAL REPORT 2018/2019

I am pleased to submit the 2018/2019 Annual Report for the Workers Rehabilitation and Compensation Tribunal. The report summarises the operations of the Tribunal during the financial year commencing 1 July 2018.

Following the tabling of the report in Parliament, it will be available for public access on the Tribunal's website at www.workerscomp.tas.gov.au.

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'R. B. Webster', written over a thin horizontal line.

R. B. Webster
CHIEF COMMISSIONER

Table of Contents

1	Overview	1
2	Activities 2018/2019	1
3	WRCT Accommodation.....	3
4	Summary of Referrals to the WRCT 2018/2019.....	4
5	Initial Disputes – Section 81A Referrals/Section 77AB Referrals.....	6
6	Conciliation Process.....	7
7	Arbitrated Hearings	10
8	Total Referrals Finalised in 2018/2019 regardless of Lodgement Year	11
9	Approval of Settlements – Section 132A(4) Referrals	12
10	Injury Management, Rehabilitation and Return to Work	13
11	Appeals to the Supreme Court of Tasmania.....	13
12	Review of Legislation	13
13	Legislative Amendments	13
14	Report on Financial Statement.....	14
15	Intent for 2019/2020	15
16	Tribunals’ Users Group	17
17	COAT Executive.....	18
18	Members of WRCT & Staff.....	18

In accordance with s24 of the *Workers Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988* (the Act) I submit to the Minister my report on the operation of the Workers Rehabilitation and Compensation Tribunal (WRCT) during the 2018/2019 financial year.

1 Overview

The WRCT is an independent statutory body established by the Act¹. The WRCT is constituted by the Chief Commissioner, a Commissioner or a Part-Time Commissioner². Both appointees to the positions of Chief Commissioner and Commissioner fulfil the eligibility requirements of the Act in that they are Australian lawyers of at least 5 years' standing as Australian legal practitioners³. The Chief Commissioner was appointed on a fulltime basis for 5 years in November 2016 whereas the Commissioner was appointed for 2 years at 0.6FTE in February 2017. The Commissioner has subsequently been appointed for another year at 0.85FTE.

The functions of the WRCT are as follows⁴:

- to determine all claims for compensation referred to it under the Act.
- to determine such other matters as are referred to it under the Act.
- to exercise the powers conferred and the duties imposed on it in the Act.
- to hear and determine any appeal referred to it under the *Workers (Occupational Diseases) Relief Fund Act 1954*.

1.1 Summary of Human Resources

The following table provides a summary of the number of Full Time Equivalent staff employed by the WRCT as at 30 June each year.

	30 June 2019 Actual	2019 Budget
Full Time Equivalent Staff	5.9	8

2 Activities 2018/2019

The WRCT Case Management System (CRMS) implemented in July 2012 and updated in June 2017 has provided a more efficient method of case management and has resulted in the ability to provide accurate statistical information in a less labour intensive manner. This system covers WRCT matters along with matters in

1 s16
2 s17
3 s17A and s17B
4 s20

the Anti-Discrimination Tribunal and Motor Accidents Compensation Tribunal for which the WRCT is also responsible.

In addition to the work summarised in section 4 of this report, the WRCT continued to carry out work for other Department of Justice Outputs. In total, the WRCT received \$24,557.50 for hearings relating to the Health Practitioners Tribunal and Motor Accidents Compensation Tribunal, as compared to \$19,625.00 for 2017/2018.

2.1 Motor Accidents Compensation Tribunal

The WRCT administers the operation of the Motor Accidents Compensation Tribunal (MACT). Services provided by the Tribunal Members of the MACT ie the Chief Commissioner and Commissioner of the WRCT are reimbursed in accordance with a Service Level Agreement entered into in December 2010 with the Department of Justice. This arrangement was altered in October 2015 when the Chief Commissioner was appointed as the Chairperson of the MACT and the formal administration of that Tribunal transferred to the WRCT. The fee for service funding remains the same and it requires updating. The administrative and running costs of the MACT are not covered by the Service Level Agreement so a budgetary allowance of \$10,424.00 has been made for the administrative and running costs of this tribunal which sum is shared with the Health Practitioners Tribunal. The fee for service arrangement set out in the Service Level Agreement, as I indicated in last year's annual report, does not properly represent the value to consolidated revenue provided by the WRCT in performing the functions of the MACT noting that the WRCT is separately funded by the Workers Compensation Fund (non-consolidated revenue)⁵.

2.2 Health Practitioners Tribunal

The WRCT also administers the operation of the Health Practitioners Tribunal (HPT). The HPT has been established to hear and determine disciplinary matters and reviews of decisions under the *Health Practitioner Regulation National Law (Tasmania) 2010*. The Chairperson (Mr R Webster, Chief Commissioner of the WRCT), has the power to appoint professional and community members to the HPT.

Work performed by the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson together with support staff is reimbursed by the Australian Health Practitioners Regulation Authority in accordance with a Service Level Agreement with the Department of Justice which was entered into in December 2011. Once again this is a fee for service arrangement and does not provide for the general administrative expenses associated with operating this tribunal. The Service Level Agreement provides that the Department of Justice agrees to provide:

“1.2.1 Management of and administrative support for the operation of the Tribunal.

1.2.2 Administrative support of the Tribunal includes general administrative duties, hearing room hire, all registry work, recording services (including provision of recording of hearings in audio format on compact disc) and video conferencing.”

⁵ See the further discussion about this on page 15

As mentioned in paragraph 2.1 a budgetary allocation of \$10,424.00 has been made for the administrative and running costs which is shared between this tribunal and the MACT.

2.3 Asbestos Compensation Tribunal

The WRCT administers the operation of the Asbestos Compensation Tribunal (ACT). The ACT has been established under the *Asbestos-Related Diseases (Occupational Exposure) Compensation Act 2011*. The primary responsibility of the ACT is to determine all disputes relating to referrals made pursuant to that legislation.

Work performed by the Chief Commissioner and Commissioner together with support staff is reimbursed by the Department of Justice in accordance with a Service Level Agreement entered into in December 2011. Given that funding for the ACT is also from the Workers Compensation Fund it is again recommended the budget for the WRCT simply includes a sum to cover the costs of running the ACT. A modest sum only will be required as this Tribunal received two referrals in the 2018/2019 year, no referrals in the 2017/2018 year, one referral in the 2016/2017 year, one referral in the 2015/2016 year, no referrals in the 2014/2015 year and one referral in the 2013/2014 year.

2.4 Anti- Discrimination Tribunal

On 1 July 2015 the WRCT officially assumed the administration and conduct of the Anti-Discrimination Tribunal (ADT) from the Magistrates Court. The Chief Commissioner of the WRCT was appointed the Chairperson of the ADT. The ADT had until that time been a Division of the Magistrates Court and no specific budgetary allocation had ever been made but rather the running costs were absorbed within the general allocation made to the Court. A payment of \$90,000 was made to the WRCT budget for the 2015/2016 year to meet the operational costs of the ADT. This figure increased marginally to \$92,169.00 for 2016/2017 and to \$94,637.00 in 2017/2018. After successful discussions with the Attorney-General in the 2017/2018 year funding was increased to \$204,144.00 in the 2018/2019 year.

3 WRCT Accommodation

In November 2013 the WRCT Registry and its main premises re-located from Level 4, 169 Liverpool Street, Hobart to Level 7, NAB House, 86 Collins Street, Hobart after the expiry of its lease at the Liverpool Street premises. At its current premises, in addition to registry space there is staff accommodation (offices and work spaces), two hearing rooms, two conciliation rooms and two meeting (break out) rooms.

In August 2015 the WRCT's northern base relocated to new and improved premises at 1/111 St John Street, Launceston. These premises provide a hearing room, two conference rooms, two meeting (break-out) rooms and an open plan staff office area. WRCT staff are based in Hobart and travel as required to the North and North-West of the State.

There are video conference facilities at the premises in Hobart and Launceston.

If a conciliation is required in a matter where the worker resides on the North West coast then rooms at the Devonport Community & Health Services Centre which is

located at 23 Steele Street, Devonport, are utilised on a monthly basis. A modest fee is incurred for the use of these rooms.

The WRCT discontinued its use of premises in Burnie in 2015. These premises were predominantly used for s81A hearings. The vast majority of these hearings were resolved by consent either when the Commissioner and his clerk were travelling to Burnie or shortly after they arrived in Burnie. This travel to Burnie and Launceston in these circumstances amounted to an uneconomic and inefficient use of the WRCT's resources. Instead, the WRCT trialled the hearing of s81A hearings by telephone throughout the State⁶. After the success of the trial, this procedure has continued and this has resulted in vastly reduced travel time for the Chief Commissioner and Commissioner which has in turn resulted in the more efficient use of WRCT time.

4 Summary of Referrals to the WRCT 2018/2019

4.1 Summary of Referrals (by Nature of Referral) received in 2018/2019

NATURE OF REFERRAL	FINANCIAL YEAR		
	2016/ 2017	2017/ 2018	2018/ 2019
132A(4) - Referral for Settlement Approval	145	164	141
132A(9) – Referral for review of Settlement made within 3 months of Agreement			1
143P		3	
77AB - Employers Liability for Expenses less than \$5000/Liability not accepted	7	10	10
90C - Disagreements About Medical Reviews	2	3	2
127 – Order or Judgment Against Nominal Insurer/Referral of order to Nominal Insurer		3	
S138AB(3) - New Act (2010) Election to Claim Damages		2	
S138AB-Election to Claim Damages	1	2	6
S143 - Injury Management Notifications	10	7	10
S37 – Effect of Failure to Give Notice of Injury		1	1
S38(3) - Effect of Failure to Make Claim		1	
S42-Reference of Claims for Compensation to the Tribunal	143	132	134
S60A-Application for Interim Orders	4	8	9
S67-Amount of compensation in case of death			
S67F-Dispute of liability in respect of death of worker	1	2	
S68 - Dependency Questions & Apportionment	1		
S69-Amount of Compensation in case of incapacity	3	5	10
S71-Compensation for Permanent Impairment	46	53	67

⁶ This is permitted by s81A(6)

NATURE OF REFERRAL	FINANCIAL YEAR		
	2016/ 2017	2017/ 2018	2018/ 2019
S75(3) - Constant Attendant Services or Household Services	2		
S77AA-Dispute regarding non-payment of expenses	30	31	31
S77-Dispute regarding medical or rehabilitation services	19	24	12
S78(3) – Injuries contracted by gradual process – contribution of employers	1		
S81A(5)-Dispute liability to continue to pay compensation	11	9	11
S81A-Dispute liability for weekly payments and other benefits	575	624	682
S86(4)-Worker disputing termination or reduction of payment by an Employer	64	62	78
S87 - Application for Tribunal to consider weekly payments beyond age 65	4	9	4
S88 - Application to review weekly payments	108	108	154
S91 – Payment of compensation money to person entitled and to Public Trustee		1	
S97A - Disputes Between Insurers	2		
Grand Total	1179	1264	1363

4.2 Total Referral Numbers by Year

FINANCIAL YEAR				
2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019
1271*	1387**	1179	1264	1323***

* This total was incorrectly reported in the 2014/2015 Annual Report

** This total was incorrectly reported in the 2015/2016 Annual Report due to a typographical error

*** This total differs to the total reported in paragraph 4.1 because occasionally a new referral will refer a worker's claim to the Tribunal under more than one section; e.g. s42 and s71 or s42 and s60A

4.3 Initial Dispute rate (section 81A) in respect of the Tasmanian Workers Compensation Scheme

Year	Total Number of Workers Compensation Claims	Number of s81A referrals	Percentage
2014/2015	7756	573	7.39*%
2015/2016	7481	627	8.38%
2016/2017	7124	575	8.07%
2017/2018	7187	624	8.68%
2018/2019	7769	682	8.78%

* The calculation in the 2014/2015 Annual Report was incorrect

4.4 Number of s81A referrals followed by the lodgement of a s42 referral

The WRCT received 682 section 81A referrals in 2018/2019. Of those 682 referrals 45 workers (approximately 6.6%) went on to file s42 referrals and to commence the conciliation process in respect of their disputed claim. This represents a reduction from the figure in 2017/2018 of 9.5%.

5 Initial Disputes – Section 81A Referrals/Section 77AB Referrals

Referral Section	2014/ 2015	2015/ 2016	2016/ 2017	2017/ 2018	2018/ 2019
77AB - Employers Liability for Expenses less than \$5000/Liability not accepted	6	4	7	10	10
S81A-Dispute liability for weekly payments and other benefits	573	627	575	624	682
Total	579	631	582	634	692

5.1 Finalisations of s81A and s77AB Referrals

How Section 81A and Section 77AB Referrals Were finalised	
In Progress as at 30 June 2019	1
No Reasonably Arguable Case	8
Consent Reasonably Arguable Case	333
Discontinued	8
Reasonably Arguable Case	330
Dismissed for want of jurisdiction	2
Total	682

5.2 Average days for the Resolution of s81A or s77AB Referrals lodged and finalised in 2018/2019

Outcome	Number	Average Days to Finalisation
No Reasonably Arguable Case	8	64
Consent Reasonably Arguable Case	328	17
Discontinued	8	49
Reasonably Arguable Case	330	20
Dismissed for want of jurisdiction	2	24
Average Days Regardless of Resolution Type		20

5.3 Nature of Injury in respect of s81A and s77AB Referrals

Section 81A and Section 77AB Referrals By Nature of Injury	
Psychological	319
Shoulder	45
Neck	17
Back	89
Knee	46
Hand/Wrist	44
Arm	22
Other	110
Total:	692

Approximately 46% of disputed claims were for psychological injuries.

6 Conciliation Process

All matters referred to the WRCT with the exception of referrals pursuant to section 81A, 67F, 132A and 60A must follow the conciliation process⁷.

The conciliation process consists of two stages. The preliminary stage consists of a number of teleconferences conducted by the Registrar or Deputy Registrar with the parties during which:

- the issues in dispute are identified;
- parties agree to time frames in which any necessary investigations such as medical or factual assessments are to be undertaken;
- there is discussion about the claim generally in order to obtain concessions where appropriate in respect of any facts, law or procedure;
- the WRCT ensures matters progress in an expeditious manner to conciliation if an agreement is unable to be reached in this preliminary phase.

Once it is determined and agreed by all parties they have completed any necessary investigations the matter will proceed to the formal stage which is the conciliation conference. This is a face to face meeting of all parties to the reference. Discussions are on a “without prejudice” basis and parties are required to attend and participate in a conciliatory manner.

If a claim remains unresolved at the conclusion of a conciliation conference the Registrar or Deputy Registrar will certify the matter ready to progress to an arbitrated hearing. Since my appointment I have modified the Practice Directions so parties to a reference that has not resolved at conciliation are given dates for hearing at the conclusion of the conciliation conference. The parties are required to confirm those dates within 7 days of the conference after which a matter will be set down for

⁷ The conciliation process is provided for in Division 2 of Part V of the Act (ss42A-42N). These provisions are supplemented by Practice Directions issued by the Chief Commissioner.

directions which are made to ensure the referral proceeds to hearing on the allocated dates. This new procedure is designed to reduce the time between an unsuccessful conciliation conference and an arbitrated hearing.

6.1 Non section 81A/77AB Referral numbers

Referrals other than Initial Dispute Referrals				
2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019
693	756	597	630	631

6.2 Referrals by Nature of Injury for Referrals other than s81A or s77AB

Referrals by nature of injury (other than section 81A/77AB)	
Psychological	178
Shoulder	53
Neck	16
Back	155
Knee	55
Hand/Wrist	39
Arm/Elbow	22
Other	113
Total:	631

Approximately 28% of these referrals related to claims for a psychological injury.

6.3 Average Days to finalisation for matters resolved in Conciliation

Referral Type	Number	Average Days to Resolve
S143 – Injury Management Notifications S143P	4	104
90C - Disagreements About Medical Reviews	1	33
S138AB-Election to Claim Damages	2	30
S37 – Effect of Failure to Give Notice of Injury	1	26
S38(3) – Effect of Failure to Make Claim	1	77
S42-Reference of Claims for Compensation to the Tribunal	63	135
S60A – Application for Interim Orders	2	31
S69-Amount of Compensation in case of incapacity	3	103
S71-Compensation for Permanent Impairment	41	110
S77AA-Dispute regarding non-payment of expenses	13	131
S77-Dispute regarding medical or rehabilitation services	5	79
S81A(5)-Dispute liability to continue to pay compensation	3	73
S86(4)-Worker disputing termination or reduction of payment by an Employer	32	125

Referral Type	Number	Average Days to Resolve
S87 - Application for Tribunal to consider weekly payments beyond age 65	2	117
S88 - Application to review weekly payments	82	117
Total	255	118*

*This is figure in the 2017/2018 was 104 days. However, there was also a significant increase of 20% in the number of referrals resolved in conciliation in 2018/2019 when compared to the previous year.

It should be noted when considering the above tables that in many respects the time frame in which a matter can be resolved during either the preliminary or face to face stage is outside of the WRCT's control as there can be many delays by one party or both in providing medical evidence. This is by no means a criticism of the parties because on many occasions this is outside of their control due to the delay in obtaining appointments with and reports from treating or independent doctors/specialists. There is also a practice of expanding negotiations with respect to a dispute before the WRCT in order to consider a settlement of the claim for compensation in its entirety and this of itself takes the parties longer to prepare for.

6.4 Average Days to First Listing (Hearing or Tele-conference) – All Types of Referrals

Referral Type	Average Days to First listing
S132A(9) – Referral for review of settlement made within 3 months of agreement	13
S77AB - Employers Liability for Expenses less than \$5000/Liability not accepted	18
S90C - Disagreements About Medical Reviews	28
S138AB-Election to Claim Damages	6
S31C(1) – State of Connection determination	15
S37 – Effect of Failure to Give Notice of Injury	17
S42-Reference of Claims for Compensation to the Tribunal	22
S60A-Application for Interim Orders	10
S69-Amount of Compensation in case of incapacity	19
S71-Compensation for Permanent Impairment	28
S77AA-Dispute regarding non-payment of expenses	28
S77-Dispute regarding medical or rehabilitation services	17
S81A(5)-Dispute liability to continue to pay compensation	17
S81A-Dispute liability for weekly payments and other benefits	16
S86(4)-Worker disputing termination or reduction of payment by an Employer	28
S87 - Application for Tribunal to consider weekly payments beyond age 65	16
S88 - Application to review weekly payments	22
Overall Average	17

When considering the information in the above table it should be noted where there are instances of a higher average number of days to first listing there could be a number of reasons for this including:

1. the WRCT has an existing referral which is listed at a future date and the parties request that they be dealt with together;
2. parties request an adjournment of the initial listing to a date in the future. This can be due to a number of factors including the unavailability of a party or his or her counsel on the initial listing date or alternatively the need to obtain expert evidence before the matter can be usefully advanced through the conciliation process.

7 Arbitrated Hearings

An arbitrated hearing is held before the Chief Commissioner or Commissioner sitting alone⁸. A party to a proceeding may, with the approval of the WRCT, be represented by a person of that party's choice⁹. A proceeding is to be heard in private unless all parties agree the proceeding may be open to the public¹⁰.

The WRCT is not bound by the rules of evidence but may inform itself on any matter in such manner as it thinks fit¹¹ and the proceedings shall be conducted with as little formality and technicality and with as much expedition as the requirements of the Act and a proper consideration of matters to be resolved permit¹².

However these provisions do not displace the WRCT's obligation to afford procedural fairness to the parties and to ensure that the principles of natural justice are followed.

Although the initial intent of the architects of the Act may have been to have an informal and non-adversarial system, the harsh reality is that many workers compensation matters involve complicated determinations of law, findings of fact (sometimes in circumstances where disputed facts are aggressively contested) and the weighing of expert medical opinion. Given the significant value of the entitlements which are the subject of workers compensation disputes, the parties not surprisingly require determinations which are transparent and in accordance with the law. The WRCT hearings therefore remain more akin to an adversarial model rather than an inquisitorial one, but the WRCT can be expected to be less formal and more flexible in relation to proceedings and the adducing of evidence than a court of law. However action taken by the Tribunal which strays away from the generally accepted rules of evidence or procedure is likely to be closely scrutinised where there is a prospect that the other party will be prejudiced or where justice would be unlikely to be served.

All determinations of the WRCT (except for those in respect of section 81A references where in most cases determinations are made at the time of the hearing) are in writing and are published on <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/cases/tas/TASWRCT>.

⁸ s17
⁹ s47(1)
¹⁰ s48(1) and (2)
¹¹ s49(1)(a)
¹² S49(1)(b)

7.1 Matters Resolved at Arbitrated Hearings in 2018/2019

The timeframe in which a matter can be resolved by way of hearing is outside of the WRCT's control because from the time a referral is filed it must follow the conciliation process prescribed in Division 2 of Part V of the Act. During conciliation many delays can occur but the most common is the delay encountered by one or both parties in obtaining the necessary expert medical opinion which supports the case being advanced. As already stated in this report, this is by no means a criticism of the parties because on many occasions this is outside their control due to the delay in obtaining appointments with, and reports from, treating or independent doctors/specialists. Delays can also occur in respect of the availability of parties and witnesses. The simple reality is parties and their witnesses fall ill, take holidays or have conflicting commitments which result in their unavailability for a hearing. The WRCT has, since my appointment, indicated it will part hear a matter and take evidence from the unavailable witness at a later date in an effort to progress a matter. However, if the matter does not settle prior to the commencement of the hearing or during the hearing, the matter cannot be finalised until evidence is taken from the unavailable witness at a later date.

Matters Resolved at Arbitrated Hearings Regardless of Lodgement Date	Total
81A No Reasonably Arguable Case	7
Reasonably Arguable Case	328
Resolved After Hearing - Applicant Unsuccessful	2
Resolved After Hearing Applicant Successful	4
Resolved After Hearing Commences	1
Resolved After Notice of Hearing Issued	12

8 Total Referrals Finalised in 2018/2019 regardless of Lodgement Year

The WRCT finalised 1307 referrals in the 2018/2019 financial year regardless of their year of lodgement¹³. Of the 1307 referrals, 1008 were matters lodged within the 2018/2019 financial year with the remaining 299 being referrals lodged in prior years. Just on 76% of matters filed in this financial year were therefore finalised in this financial year.

Finalisation Period	2018/2019
1 Month	827
1-3 months	145
3-6 months	172
6-9 months	95
9-12 months	68
Over 12 months	

¹³ This is an increase of 9 matters from the previous year.

Finalisation Period	2018/2019
Total	1307

9 Approval of Settlements – Section 132A(4) Referrals

Amendments to the Act which came into effect on 1 July 2010 place restrictions on claims being settled in exchange for lump sums by agreement within 2 years of injury. The WRCT must approve such a settlement. The WRCT is required to take into account whether all reasonable steps have been taken to enable the worker to be rehabilitated, retrained or return to work¹⁴, or the worker has returned to work¹⁵, that the worker has received independent financial and/or legal advice paid for by the employer¹⁶, that any section 71 entitlement has been considered¹⁷ or that special circumstances apply¹⁸ and the proposed settlement is in the worker's best interests¹⁹.

In the 2018/2019 year the WRCT received 141 s132A(4) referrals. A total of 141 have been approved. The average number of days to resolve a reference of this nature is 8. In the majority of cases the time to resolve is considerably less however a number of the referrals received required further information prior to approval which took the parties time to provide and which led to an increase in the average time to resolve.

Of the 141 s132A(4) referrals which were approved, 44% (62) had earlier been disputed under s81A, findings of a reasonably arguable case had been made and therefore liability for the claim remained in dispute.

Section 132A Referrals lodged in 2018/2019 by Nature of Injury	
Psychological	45
Back	30
Shoulder	15
Knee	20
Arm	3
Other	28
Total:	141

¹⁴ s132A(6)(a)(i)

¹⁵ s132A(5)(a)(ii)

¹⁶ s132A(7)(a)

¹⁷ s132A(7)(b)

¹⁸ s132A(6)(c)(i)

¹⁹ s132A(6)(c)(ii)

10 Injury Management, Rehabilitation and Return to Work

The WRCT is now able to assist parties where disputes in relation to injury management, rehabilitation or return to work under Part X of the Act occur. Workers, employers, insurers or injury management co-ordinators may refer disputes to the WRCT for informal conciliation²⁰. This service is provided in a prompt manner. If the conciliator is unable to resolve the issue it will be referred to a Commissioner for consideration at an early stage which will assist in ensuring that rehabilitation efforts remain in place.

The number of notifications in 2018/2019 was 10 whereas in 2017/2018 the figure was 7. Those referrals have resulted in clarification of the issues and ultimately resolution of the referral or in the minority progression to a section 42 referral for determination by the WRCT.

11 Appeals to the Supreme Court of Tasmania

Any party aggrieved by any determination, order, ruling or direction of the WRCT on a point of law may appeal to the Supreme Court of Tasmania.

In 2018/2019, four appeals were filed in the Supreme Court of Tasmania.

The following table indicates their progress.

APPEAL OUTCOME	Matter Count
Dismissed	2
Upheld	0
Decision Pending	2

12 Review of Legislation

The Chief Commissioner is a member of the Legislative Review Advisory Committee established to provide advice to the WorkCover Tasmania Board. This Committee has not met since my appointment in November 2016.

13 Legislative Amendments

Despite the Legislative Review Advisory Committee not meeting, there was a significant amendment to the Act during the 2018/2019 year which was contained in the *Workers Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment (Presumption as to*

²⁰ s143Q

Cause of Disease) Act No 11 of 2019 which commenced on the day it received Royal Assent²¹ which was on 4 June 2019.

In 2013 amendments to the Act established a rebuttable presumption that particular forms of cancer developed by fire fighters are taken to be work-related for the purpose of claiming workers compensation under the Act. In addition the amendments²² required the Minister for Building and Construction to commission a review by 30 June 2018 as to whether a presumption, that post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is occupationally caused for relevant workers, should be included in the Act.

My predecessor, Stephen Carey, and the experienced clinical psychologist, Dr Jacqui Triffitt, were appointed to conduct the review. They made a number of recommendations, one of which was the Act not be amended to provide a deeming provision that in respect of certain occupations, employment contributed to a substantial degree to the suffering of PTSD.

The *Workers Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment (Presumption as to Cause of Disease) Act 2019* inserted s28A into the Act. That section provides that in certain circumstances where a worker suffers PTSD his or her employment is deemed to have contributed to a substantial degree to that injury. The deeming provision applies only to workers who might be described as public sector employees and its operation is subject to the defences set out in s25(1A) and s25(2) of the Act and any evidence to the contrary. It is therefore a rebuttable presumption.

More recently ACIL Allen Consulting has been engaged by the WorkCover Tasmania Board to undertake a review to consider whether a rebuttable presumption should apply to certain categories of private sector workers that suffer PTSD in their employment so that it is deemed their employment contributed to the PTSD to a substantial degree. The Tribunal has been identified as an important stakeholder in this review and has been contacted for comment. I have contacted ACIL Allen Consulting advising I will participate in an interview.

14 Report on Financial Statement

Operating Expenditure			
	Budget	Actual	Variance
Total Salary Related Expenditure	\$1,031,062	\$779,631	\$251,431
Total Non-Salary Related Expenditure	\$603,124	\$556,967	\$46,157
Total Operating Expenditure	\$1,634,186	\$1,336,598	\$297,588

TOTAL EXPENDITURE

²¹ See s2 of that Act.

²² See s162A of the Act.

TOTAL EXPENDITURE	
2013/2014	\$1,384,017
2014/2015	\$1,266,360
2015/2016	\$1,371,798
2016/2017	\$1,335,958
2017/2018	\$1,328,915
2018/2019	\$1,336,598

The Department of Justice engaged KPMG to conduct an audit of the funding and accounting for the various tribunals²³ overseen by the Chief Commissioner of the WRCT. That firm was engaged by the Department as a result of my predecessor's comments in his 2015/2016 annual report that the WRCT was subsidising the costs of the other tribunals it administers and in so doing funds provided to it were not being utilised for the purposes of the Act. The objective of the audit was to consider the application of, and accounting for, the funds provided to support the various activities of the tribunals which are the responsibility of the Chief Commissioner and to ensure that those funds were being applied in compliance with current policies and legislative requirements of the various tribunals. Work on the audit commenced in August 2017 and a draft report was prepared by December 2017. It was finalised by February 2018. The audit considered the current procedures for the recovery by the WRCT of the cost of the work done in other tribunals and found overall the procedures used to account for tribunals' funds are effective. It recommended any service level agreement be reviewed to ensure the fee being charged for the service being provided adequately reflects the cost of providing those services. That review has not yet commenced. As I said last year, the bigger issue, from my point of view, is where possible the service level agreement should be scrapped in favour of a direct budget allocation. Not only would that method ensure the proper cost of services provided to other tribunals is recovered, because overheads, for example, would be included, but it would reduce red tape and save the time of staff who have to administratively seek reimbursement. The time saved can be directed towards our core business of efficiently managing the work of the WRCT. My major concern, which was funding of the Anti-Discrimination Tribunal, has been addressed. See section 2.4 above.

15 Intent for 2019/2020

- Continue to discuss with the Department of Justice the findings of the KPMG audit and the issues I have identified in Section 14 of this report.
- Continue my review of the Council of Australasian Tribunals (COAT) Australia and New Zealand Tribunal Excellence Framework which has been adopted by NCAT. COAT "*considers that there are core values that tribunals should uphold and apply in carrying out their function of dispute resolution. The values are:*
 1. *Equality before the law;*
 2. *Fairness;*

²³ See sections 2.1-2.4 of this report

3. *Impartiality;*
4. *Independence;*
5. *Respect for the law;*
6. *Accessibility;*
7. *Competence;*
8. *Integrity;*
9. *Accountability;*
10. *Efficiency.*

At the heart of these values is the consideration of the parties before the tribunal, or the tribunal's users"²⁴.

- The WRCT will continue to endeavour to secure sufficient local medical practitioners to allow the use of medical panels in the WRCT or seek other means to provide a structured process whereby such panels can be created at regular intervals
- The WRCT will continue to progress the integration of the Tribunals hosted by WRCT into a common IT case management and reporting format.
- The WRCT will engage with stakeholders in respect of the project to establish a consolidated Civil and Administrative Tribunal.
- The WRCT will continue to provide input into what it believes to be legislative amendments necessary to improve dispute resolution procedures within all tribunals overseen by the WRCT. The WRCT will seek clear legislative authority to mandate rules of practice to achieve a less adversarial environment in all tribunals operating under the umbrella of the WRCT.
- Continue to accept speaking engagements at which the work of the WRCT can be discussed and explained to stakeholders and to the public.
- Continue to assist in the teaching of the workers compensation unit of the legal practice course to those who have completed their law degree and who are seeking admission to practice.
- Continue to hold meetings of the Tribunals' Users Group (see Section 16 below) in order to improve practice and procedure and ultimately the service delivery of tribunals.
- In December 2017 I replaced Justice Geason as the Tasmanian representative on the COAT Executive (see section 17 below). I will continue to attend meetings of the Executive.

16 Tribunals' Users Group

In late 2017 I formed a Tribunals' Users Group. The purpose of that group is to provide a consultation mechanism which involves frequent tribunal users. The role of the group is to provide feedback and suggestions on operational and policy issues relating to the services provided by WRCT, MACT, ACT, HPT and ADT. I have invited senior legal practitioners from the North West, North and South of the State to join that group. It meets approximately six times per year. The first meeting was held on 1 December 2017 and subsequent meetings have been held in 2018 and 2019.

Because of the volume of work in the WRCT as compared to the other tribunals, most of the issues discussed inevitably relate to the WRCT.

Issues dealt with at past meetings include:

- the process of setting matters down for hearing after an unsuccessful conciliation;
- the form of discovery;
- the provision by the Tribunal of electronic notices of hearing;
- delay with respect to the provision of doctors' reports;
- exchange of lists of authorities;
- the functioning of medical panels;
- the dearth of occupational physicians in Tasmania;
- "hot tubbing" of expert witnesses;
- on 4 March 2019 Mr Colin McKenzie and I attended a forum run by WorkCover with respect to the contents of the claim form and initial medical certificate;
- on 8 March 2019 a submission was provided to WorkCover on its IME Guidelines, Information Sheet and Request for Treatment form;
- I provided a submission on 18 April 2019 with respect to the review of s87 of the Act; and
- more recently the Users Group has provided its comments to WorkCover with respect to a National Certificate of Capacity Prototype which was released by WorkCover for comment.

17 COAT Executive

The purpose of COAT is to facilitate liaison and discussion between the heads of tribunals both in Australia and New Zealand. It endeavours to “*support the development of best practice models and model procedural rules, standards of behaviour and conduct for members and increased capacity for training and support for members.*”²⁵

The Executive meets approximately five times a year usually by teleconference. There is one National conference per year and one planning day. The National conference is normally held in a different State or Territory each year. As indicated in section 15 of this report, I will continue to attend meetings of the Executive. I will bring back any ideas or initiatives to this Tribunal if they will assist in improving the process by which claims are managed and determined.

18 Members of WRCT & Staff

The staff of the WRCT are noted in the diagram on the next page.

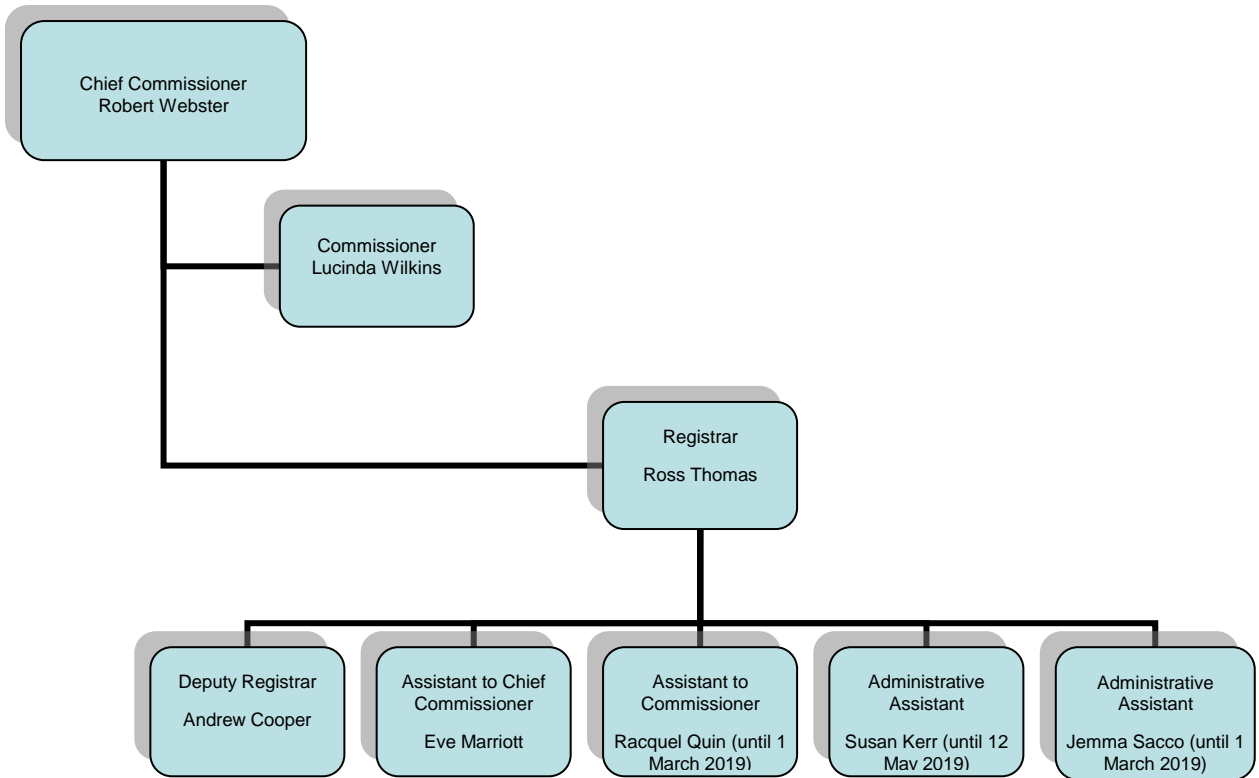
On 1 March 2019 Racquel Quinn left her position as Executive Assistant to Commissioner Wilkins to take up the position of Manager, Sentence Management Unit at the Tasmanian Prison Service. The vacancy created by Mrs Quinn’s departure was advertised and a selection process was conducted. Susan Kerr was the successful applicant and she commenced that role on 13 May 2019. Mrs Kerr’s previous position as Administrative Assistant has been advertised with interviews scheduled for the week commencing 26 August 2019.


Jemma Sacco commenced maternity leave on 1 March 2019. That vacancy was advertised and Jade Barnett was the successful applicant. Ms Barnett commenced the role of Administrative Assistant on 29 April 2019. She will continue in that role until Mrs Sacco returns from maternity leave.

I wish to record my appreciation for the good work of the WRCT staff and the support that has been provided to both Commissioner Wilkins and myself this year. As I indicated in last year’s report, although both of us had appeared in this jurisdiction for many years prior to our respective appointments in November 2016 and February 2017, that role is far different from the roles we now occupy. Coming to grips with the systems and processes implemented by the former Chief Commissioner and Commissioner over many years, in not only this jurisdiction but in four others under our stewardship, has been, from our point of view, seamless because of the professionalism and assistance of WRCT staff.

In addition because of staff changes and the change in working arrangements of some staff there has been a greater volume of work this year for the remaining staff of the Tribunal. I wish to personally thank those staff for putting in the extra time to perform that work thereby ensuring that the Tribunal has continued to operate efficiently.

²⁵ COAT website: <http://www.coat.asn.au>.




R Webster
Chief Commissioner