



CORONERS COURT OF NEW SOUTH WALES

**Coronial inquests/inquiries into 2019-20 New South
Wales Bushfire Season and related deaths**

Virtual Courtroom Protocols and Procedures

September 2021

Virtual Courtroom

A Virtual Courtroom brings the physical courtroom to a virtual space. It is a digital method for court cases to be progressed without the need for participants to attend in person.

The use of this technology is at the Coroner's discretion, however, there is greater reliance during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Please note that virtual courtrooms are still formal courtrooms and as such all usual court etiquette, protocols, procedures and restrictions apply.

How to connect to a Virtual Courtroom

Parties can connect to the Virtual Courtroom in one of the following two ways:

1. *Video conference* – via a dedicated Weblink (using Cisco Webex). The Weblink can be used from any device (e.g. smartphone, tablet, laptop) with an unrestricted internet connection and a web browser with audio and video capability.
2. *Telephone conference* – dialling in via the dedicated Virtual Courtroom number.

The Court will provide you with connection details for the Virtual Courtroom prior to the relevant hearing date.

Audio/Video Link (AVL)

3. Ensure your device has a working camera. Video conferencing requires a camera to be enabled. It is also recommended that you use a headset and external microphone with your device to minimise audio interference issues.
4. The Cisco Webex meeting platform is the preferred interface for the Coroners Court. You will need to download the Cisco Webex app (free of charge) to enable you to use the Weblink provided by the Court. It is recommended that this occur prior to the date the hearing commences.
5. Once you have installed the Webex app, click 'Launch Meeting' and follow the instructions. Enter/edit your name as you want to appear on the screen and then check **Remember me** which will save this information for the day you have to connect to the Court.
6. It is strongly recommended that you test the device you are going to use to connect to the Court. To test your device, please use one of the following two options:
 - from a computer, smartphone or tablet, use this link: <https://www.webex.com/test-meeting.html>. If you are having any difficulty with testing your device, please email bushfires.legal@justice.nsw.gov.au no later than **the day before** you are scheduled to participate in your hearing.
 - from a Video System, please email bushfires.legal@justice.nsw.gov.au to arrange an interactive test of your system.

As part of testing your device, please review the position of your camera and audio settings so these are ready for when you need to connect to the Court. Make sure you have given the Webex app access to your microphone and camera.

7. Approximately two days before you are required to participate in your hearing, you will receive an email that will appear in the form of a Webex Meeting Invitation labelled NSW Bushfire Coronial Inquiry. The meeting invitation will indicate the standard court hours of 10.00am – 4.00pm.
8. If you are a witness, you are not necessarily required to participate for the entire time specified in the meeting invitation, nor are you required to connect at 10.00am. On the day before your hearing attendance, the solicitor from the team assisting the Coroner who has been dealing with you will make contact to advise of the approximate time that your participation in the hearing will be required. You will also be contacted on the day of your hearing with a confirmed time for you to connect to the Court.
9. To connect to the Court (at your allocated time) open your Webex Meeting Invitation link provided and click **Join meeting**.
10. If required, edit your name and click **Join as a guest**.
11. Connect your audio and video in the preview screen before you join the meeting so you can make sure that you can be heard and seen.
12. Click **Join meeting**.
13. Once you have joined the meeting, you are 'live' in the Virtual Courtroom.
14. Whilst waiting for your participation in the hearing to start and during the course of the hearing, please ensure that the microphone on your device is muted so that no background sound is inadvertently transmitted into the Court.
15. Once your involvement in the hearing has started, please follow the directions of the Coroner and Counsel Assisting.
16. If you are a witness, please make sure your device is unmuted when you are required to speak.
17. If you are an advocate and you wish to speak during your hearing, please unmute your device to do so, and then re-mute your device when you have finished.
18. When you have finished in the hearing, please disconnect from the Weblink.
19. You can continue to watch the hearing via the live stream which can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCH6Wxgb8ZNSOqXFxhGwskfQ>.

You may wish to consider using a device which is independent and not connected to your work/company network unless your IT department can confirm there is no issue with accessing Cisco Webex. The Webex meetings minimum system requirements are available from this link: <https://help.webex.com/en-us/nki3xrq/Webex-Meetings-Suite-System-Requirements>.

Telephone conferencing

20. Only where AVL facilities are unavailable should telephone conferencing be used.
21. Use the telephone number under the **Join by Phone** instructions in the meeting invitation provided prior to your hearing and follow the directions in that call.
22. Once you have entered the meeting, you are 'live' in the Virtual Courtroom.
23. Whilst waiting for your hearing to start and during the course of the hearing, please ensure that the phone is muted so that no background sound is inadvertently transmitted into the Court.
24. Once your hearing has started, please follow the directions of the Coroner and Counsel Assisting.
25. If you wish to speak during your hearing, please unmute your phone to do so, and then re-mute your phone when you have finished.
26. When you have finished in the hearing, please end the call.

Protocols for the Virtual Courtroom

1. The AVL/teleconference details provided by the Court are confidential. You must not provide these details to any other person.
2. Ensure that you use a quiet and private location to limit interference from any background noise.
3. Ensure that there is sufficient internet coverage and connection on your device.
4. Whilst waiting for your hearing to start, please ensure that the microphone on your device is muted so that no background sound is transmitted into the Court.
5. Once your hearing has started, please follow the directions of the Coroner and Counsel Assisting.
6. Ensure that you identify yourself before speaking and refrain from speaking over each other where possible to accommodate the reduced social cues available, and to assist with the court's transcription process.
7. Ensure all relevant materials to be relied upon have been made available to the Court beforehand.
8. Observe all normal court etiquette and protocols in the Virtual Courtroom environment.
9. Note that an audio-visual recording will be made of the Virtual Courtroom.

If you have any questions about this document please contact Lincoln Chee, Director, on 8688 0101 or by email to bushfires.legal@justice.nsw.gov.au.