



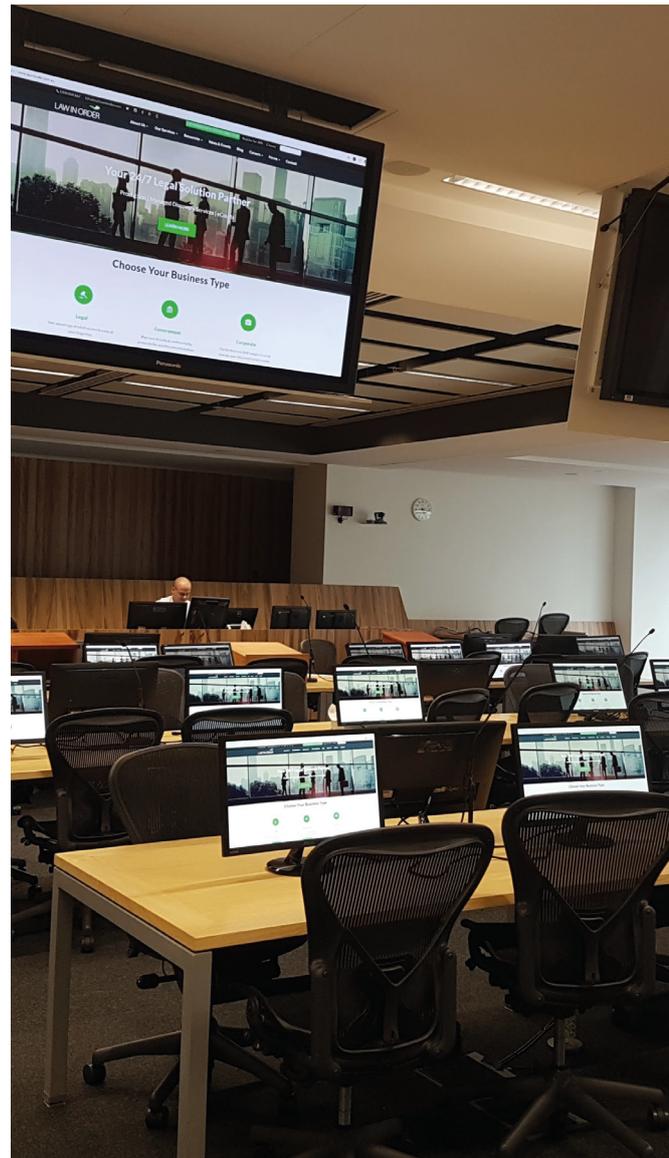
CASE STUDY

Hybrid / Virtual Hearing for Bushfires Royal Commission

The Challenge

Due to COVID-19, we were asked to run the hearings for The Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements (RCNDA) in a hybrid/virtual format.

Initially, the RCNDA was to be conducted with in-person hearings in Canberra and remotely around Australia. Due to the COVID-19 restrictions in the early phases, the project plan needed to change quickly in order to be able to conduct hearings before the final report was due. This meant we had to re-evaluate and redesign the way we would deliver our Royal Commission eHearing services. We needed to ensure the hearing related services would be operational and deliverable during COVID-19 with its evolving requirements. The hearing related services changed from 'in-person' to a virtual and hybrid hearing room environment, utilising virtual hearing services for witnesses and leave to appear parties.





Our Solution

We built a hybrid hearing room at the Attorney General's Department's office in Canberra, designed specifically for the purpose of conducting RCNDA hybrid hearings. This comprised of:

- A hybrid hearing room that could incorporate any portion of physical and virtual hearing room components. We remained cognisant that the greater the virtual and physical requirements, the greater the complexities. We navigated these challenges with our innovative and bespoke technological solutions.
- We designed fresh hybrid solutions to substitute for the traditional 'in-person' elements, incorporating our expertise in video-conferencing technologies and cloud-based evidence services. These hybrid technologies seamlessly amalgamated with existing 'in-person' technologies allowing core participants to be present in a hearing room using the 'in-person' components with the integrated virtual components.
- The implementation of a COVID-19 business plan along with strategies to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 restrictions on the delivery of our service.
- Coordinating our fit-out of the core hearing room infrastructure to ensure all attendees could interact and contribute during the hearing with optimal quality, without breaching social distancing and capacity measures.
- We facilitated Remote Real-time Transcription, using a remote stenographer to join the virtual hearing via the VC platform and transcribe from their remote location. This reduced the quantity of legal support personnel, allowing for more RCNDA staff.

- Implementation of agile and adaptable solutions that could transition from in-person to virtual if required, improving the dynamism and flexibility of our webstreaming service, evidence presentation service, evidence management workflow, realtime transcription, virtual appearances from counsel, external legal teams, witnesses and experts.
- All witnesses appeared virtually and were displayed on screens throughout the hybrid hearing room alongside evidence screens – the new format.

The Outcome

The RCNDA conducted all the required hearings within one year, with minimal delay or disruption throughout the proceedings, all during COVID-19 restrictions. The hybrid hearing room services and virtual operations were delivered with a high standard and optimal quality. There were a few hearings when one of the commissioners was unable to attend the hybrid hearing room in-person and we successfully coordinated their virtual appearance, allowing them to observe witness examination and to ask questions from their home.

The new format of hearing related services was facilitated successfully in the hybrid environment. All elements of a hearing room were available to all personnel either 'in-person' or virtually, depending on their location. All elements were executed with high quality and were received positively by the client.