

**LEGAL PRACTITIONERS'
DISCIPLINARY TRIBUNAL
AT DARWIN**

CITATION: *Law Society NT v Jeffrey Ian Thompson*
2024-02455-SC

PARTIES: **LAW SOCIETY NORTHERN TERRITORY**
Applicant
v
JEFFREY IAN THOMPSON
Respondent

FILE NUMBER 2024-02455-SC

HEARING DATE 16 December 2025

DELIVERED 4 September 2026

TRIBUNAL MEMBERS: MR ALASTAIR SHIELDS (CHAIR)
MS MARY CHALMERS SC (MEMBER)
MR JASMINDER ANAND (MEMBER)

REPRESENTATION:

APPLICANT: Ms Fiona Kepert

RESPONDENT: Mr Luke Officer

REASONS FOR DECISION

Background

1. On 22 July 2024, the Law Society Northern Territory (**Law Society**) commenced disciplinary proceedings in the Legal Practitioners' Disciplinary Tribunal (**the Tribunal**) against Jeffrey Ian Thompson (**the Respondent**) pursuant to section 515 of the *Legal Profession Act* 2006 (**the LPA**).

2. The Law Society filed an Instrument of Consent attaching an amended application for disciplinary proceedings on 22 September 2025, following the filing of a Statement of Agreed Facts on 14 May 2025.
3. On 22 September 2025, the parties filed an instrument of consent seeking orders that the Tribunal approve, pursuant to section 519 of the LPA, the variation of the disciplinary application filed on 22 July 2024.
4. The instrument of consent also sought an order that the Tribunal find the Respondent guilty of unsatisfactory professional conduct pursuant to section 464 of the LPA in relation to the allegation made in the amended application for these disciplinary proceedings,
5. The application was heard in Darwin on 16 December 2025.
6. The amended application for disciplinary action filed by the Law Society alleged that on 24 August 2023 the Respondent sent an email to another solicitor's client in contravention of rule 17.38 of the Rules of Professional Conduct and Practice, and that the Respondent's conduct in sending the email amounted to unsatisfactory professional conduct pursuant to section 464 of the LPA.

Summary of Agreed Facts

7. The Respondent was admitted to practice in Tasmania on 1 February 2016, has held an unrestricted practising certificate issued by the Applicant since 1 July 2022, and has practised law as a sole practitioner under the name Thompson and Associates since 1 July 2022.
8. The disciplinary application before the Tribunal stems from family law matters arising from the separation of former partners. The Applicant represented the mother of a child from time to time in those proceedings, and Ms Julie Holtham (**Ms Holtham**) of Story and Associates represented the father of the child from time to time.
9. On 3 March 2023, the mother, with assistance from the Top End Women's Legal Service, applied for a domestic violence order, naming the mother as the protected person and the father as the defendant, and seeking non-violence orders (ie orders that did not prohibit contact). Ms Holtham did not represent the father in these proceedings.
10. On 3 April 2023 the father filed an initiating application in the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia (**FCA**), seeking interim and final parenting orders. The father was self represented or assisted by a duty lawyer in the FCA proceedings; however, he sought advice from Ms Holtham between 3 April and 18 July 2023.
11. At some time on or prior to 18 July 2023, the Respondent commenced acting for the mother in the FCA proceedings. On 19 April 2023, the Respondent made

an application to Legal Aid NT for a grant of aid in respect of the FCA proceedings, and he appeared before the Registrar of the FCA on 3 May and 20 June 2023 on behalf of the mother.

12. During the month of June 2023, while the father was self-represented in the FCA proceedings, the father had direct contact with the Respondent. There is no complaint alleged in the disciplinary application concerning the contact in June 2023.
13. On or about 18 July 2023, Ms Holtham was engaged to represent the father in the FCA proceedings, and on that date, she filed a further amended initiating application and supporting affidavit on behalf of the father. Order 3 of the interlocutory orders sought that “handovers of the child occur at the child’s daycare centre when opened and otherwise at Catholic Care NT.”.
14. On or about 8 August 2023, the Respondent filed and served a response to the initiating application and a supporting affidavit on behalf of the mother.
15. The location at which handovers of the child were to occur was a contested issue between the parties in the FCA proceedings.
16. On 21 August 2023, Ms Holtham sent correspondence to the Respondent requesting that handovers take place at Catholic Care NT. The Respondent did not reply to Ms Holtham.
17. On 23 August 2023, the mother requested that the Respondent send the father a Centrelink form titled “Details of your child’s care arrangements” (**CCA form**).
18. The Respondent did not fill out or assist the mother to fill out the CCA form. The Respondent forwarded the form to the father by email directly on 23 August 2023 requesting that the father sign it. The Respondent did not copy Ms Holtham into this email.
19. On 23 August the father replied by email to the Respondent as follows:” I can see a couple of mistakes here so I will contact my lawyer, and she will reply to you. Also please respond to my lawyer about Sunday pick up/drop off time and place.”.
20. On 24 August 2023, the Respondent replied to the father’s email of 23 August directly, copying in Ms Holtham. The email response was as follows:

“Dear [father]

If you want to involve your lawyer in every aspect of your life that is your choice.

I was not of the view that your Centrelink matters that arise between you and [the mother] (your ex-partner and the mother of a child that you share parental responsibility for) were matters that need to be handled by your lawyer. I am

only dealing with this as a courtesy to [the mother] because she is feeling worn out by your ongoing actions where you obstruct resolution of matters relating to the care of your child.

As you can appreciate if the childcare arrangement provided by you is not completed and lodged by 25 August 2023 then our client will not be taking [the child] to Childcare as the cost of childcare will increase to around \$600 a fortnight for our client. If that occurs the current arrangements for changeover will need to be changed.

We are also informed that you continue to want to drop [the child] off on Sunday afternoons. This has occurred over the last few weeks at our client's residence and at Gateway. Our client does not consent to you ever attending at her residence.

We again request that you complete or amend and sign the childcare arrangements provided to you.

Yours faithfully”.

21. The statement of agreed facts included the following admissions on the part of the Respondent:

- a) the email dated 24 August 2023 from the Respondent was a breach of rule 17.38 of the Law Society Northern Territory Conduct Rules;
- b) when sending the email dated 24 August 2023 the Respondent was on notice that he should be communicating with the father's legal practitioner and not the father;
- c) the content and tone of the email was unprofessional as it was discourteous and unprofessional; and
- d) the statement in the email “If you want to involve your lawyer in every aspect of your life that is your choice” had the potential to undermine the lawyer/client relationship between Ms Holtham and the father.

Finding of Unsatisfactory Professional Conduct

22. Rule 17.38 of the Law Society Rules of Professional Conduct and Practice as they applied at the relevant time provided:

“A practitioner must not deal directly with the opponent's client unless:

- (a) the opponent has previously consented;

(b) the practitioner believes on reasonable grounds that:

- (i) the circumstances are so urgent as to require the practitioner to do so; and
- (ii) the dealing would not be unfair to the opponent's client; or

(c) the substance of the dealing is solely to enquire whether the person is represented and, if so, by whom.”

23. The Tribunal is of the view that it is reasonable to vary the application for disciplinary proceedings for the purposes of section 519 of the LPA.

24. Having carefully considered the statement of agreed facts and the instrument of consent dated 22 September 2025, the Tribunal is satisfied that the allegation in the amended application for disciplinary proceedings dated 22 September 2025 has been made out, the procedural requirements of section 527 of the LPA have been complied with, and that there is no public interest requirement for a hearing to determine guilt.

25. Having regard to the statement of agreed facts and the instrument of consent dated 22 September 2025, the Tribunal is satisfied that the Respondent Jeffery Ian Thompson is guilty of unsatisfactory professional conduct, pursuant to section 464 of the LPA.

Decision of Disciplinary Tribunal

26. Section 525 of the LPA sets out the range of orders that the Tribunal may make following a finding that a practitioner is guilty of unsatisfactory professional conduct or professional misconduct.

27. The Law Society submitted that an order for a public reprimand under section 525(3)(e) of the LPA, together with a fine pursuant to section 525(5)(a)(i) are the appropriate mechanisms to impress upon the Respondent and members of the profession the importance of compliance with rules prohibiting direct contact with an opponent's client, and that the Tribunal might also consider requiring the Respondent to undertake remedial education in professional ethics at the Respondent's cost pursuant to section 525(5)(b) of the LPA.

28. The Respondent submitted that the breach is at the lower end of seriousness, and that a reprimand of itself would be a sufficient penalty and deterrent. It was also submitted that there is no need for the Tribunal to order that the practitioner undertake relevant education because as a result of the disciplinary process itself, the Respondent has accepted and now knows that the conduct complained of is not acceptable.

29. The Tribunal considers that any breach of the so called “non contact” rule is a serious matter, because the rule exists to protect vulnerable clients and preserve the practitioner-client relationship.
30. In this case, the Tribunal notes that the breach of the rule is limited to a single email, the practitioner eventually accepted his breach of the rule, has admitted to unsatisfactory professional conduct, and has had no adverse findings against him in ten years of practice.
31. The Tribunal agrees that the Respondent’s breaches are at the lower end of the scale of seriousness.
32. In the circumstances, the Tribunal considers that an order publicly reprimanding the Respondent without a fine is appropriate. In forming this view, the Tribunal has had regard to the comments of Moore J in *Re Walker* [2025] VSC 714 that the publication of reasons in which the practitioner is identified “is itself a significant adverse consequence for [the practitioner’s] professional standing”.
33. The Tribunal also recommends that the Respondent undertake further professional education concerning professional ethics as part of his ongoing continuing professional development obligations that are imposed upon all practising practitioners by the Law Society.

Costs

34. Section 529(1) of the LPA requires the Tribunal to make an order requiring a practitioner to pay costs (including the costs of the Law Society) where the practitioner has been found guilty of unsatisfactory professional conduct or professional misconduct, unless the Tribunal is satisfied that exceptional circumstances exist.
35. The Law Society has sought an order that the Respondent pay the Law Society’s costs in the sum of \$11,825.01, inclusive of GST, which represents the Law Society’s costs of briefing Counsel in this matter and does not incorporate the costs of work undertaken by legal practitioners employed by the Law Society.
36. The Respondent has not advanced any arguments that exceptional circumstances exist, nor raised any arguments that the costs are not reasonable.

Orders

37. The Tribunal makes the following orders:
- a) Pursuant to section 519 of the LPA, the disciplinary application filed on 22 July 2024 is varied as set out in the Amended Disciplinary Application filed on 22 September 2025.

- b) Pursuant to section 527 of the LPA, and having regard to the Statement of Agreed Facts dated 14 May 2025 and the Instrument of Consent dated 22 September 2025, the Tribunal is satisfied that the Respondent Jeffrey Ian Thompson is guilty of unsatisfactory professional conduct, within the meaning of section 464 of the LPA.
- c) Pursuant to section 525(3)(e) of the LPA, the Tribunal orders that the Respondent be publicly reprimanded.
- d) Pursuant to section 529 of the LPA the Respondent is ordered to pay the costs of the Law Society in the sum of \$11,825.01 (inclusive of GST) within 28 days of the date of this order.
- e) The names of the parties in the Family Law proceedings referenced in the Disciplinary Application filed on the 22 July 2024, and the Amended Disciplinary Application filed on 22 September 2025, are not to be published without leave of the Tribunal.
- f) The parties have liberty to apply.

Alastair Shields (Chair)
Mary Chalmers SC (Member)
Jasminder Anand (Member)