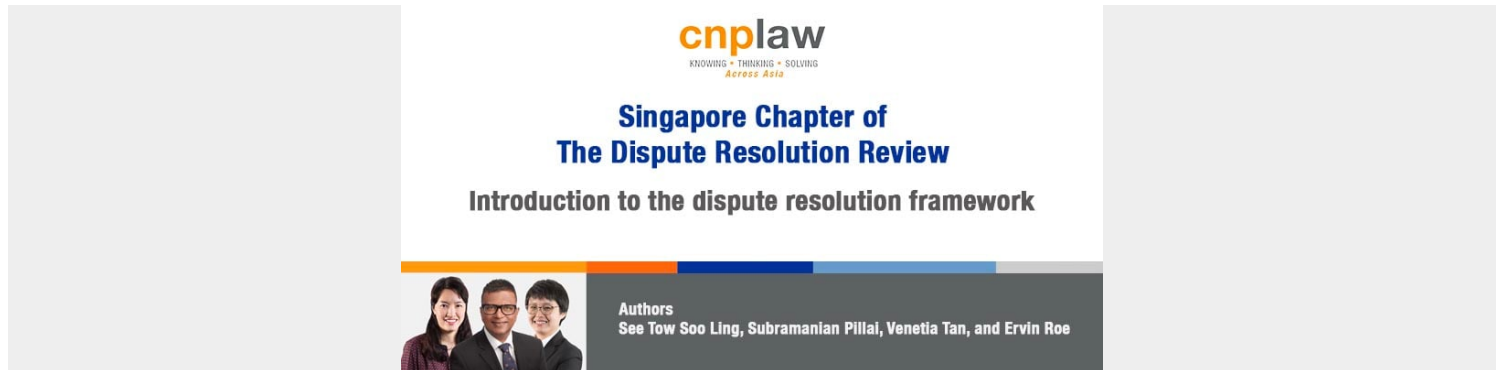


INTRODUCTION TO THE DISPUTE RESOLUTION FRAMEWORK

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Singapore law is based on the principles of common law, similar to the legal systems of other commonwealth jurisdictions. In the more than 50 years since Singapore achieved full self rule and government from Great Britain, its legal system has undergone substantial legislative and procedural changes. The objective behind these changes was to streamline the legal system so that fair, efficient and cost-effective legal processes could be achieved. To date, this objective has been realised to a very large extent. The fine tuning of the legal system and processes in Singapore is a continuous process intended to keep the system abreast and in line with modern technological advances and an ever-changing legal landscape. At the time of writing, the public consultation on proposed reforms to the civil justice system has concluded and we anticipate the proposed reforms to the civil justice system to be introduced soon. The Singapore court system consists of state courts, the Supreme Court and family justice courts. The state courts comprise magistrates' and district courts, which deal with civil claims where the quantum of a claim does not exceed S\$60,000 and S\$250,000 respectively. These courts also deal with criminal cases, for which offences carry a maximum of five years' imprisonment or a fine in magistrates' courts, and a maximum of 10 years' imprisonment or a fine in district courts.

With effect from 1 November 2019, where the quantum of a claim does not exceed S\$20,000, the dispute may be tried before a small claims tribunal, which provides a quick and inexpensive forum for the resolution of small claims commonly arising between consumers and suppliers. The limit can be raised to S\$30,000 if both parties agree and file a memorandum of consent online. Such claims must be filed within two years of the date of the claim arising. Lawyers are not permitted to represent parties in proceedings before small claims tribunals.

The Supreme Court consists of the High Court and the Court of Appeal. The High Court hears civil cases where the claim sum exceeds S\$250,000, and appeals from the state courts. In addition, probate matters where the value of the estate exceeds S\$5 million and ancillary matters in family proceedings where the value of assets are above S\$1.5 million will be heard by the High Court. The High Court also hears capital criminal cases, such as prosecutions against murder and drug trafficking. At present, the Court of Appeal continues to hear appeals of both civil and criminal matters from the High Court. On 7 October 2019, the Singapore Ministry of Law announced that to maintain efficiency in court proceedings, a new appellate division of the High Court will be set up. The High Court will therefore consist of the General Division and the new Appellate Division. Appeals arising from a decision of the General Division will be distributed between the Appellate Division and the Court of Appeal. The Court of Appeal will hear all criminal appeals, prescribed categories of civil appeals and appeals that are made to the Court of Appeal under written law, while the Appellate Division will hear all civil appeals not allocated to the Court of Appeal.

The family justice courts hear the full suite of family-related matters, including divorce, family violence, youth court cases, adoption and guardianship, applications for deputyship under the Mental Capacity Act and probate and succession matters.

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