

**IN THE DISTRICT COURT
AT WELLINGTON**

**I TE KŌTI-Ā-ROHE
KI TE WHANGANUI-A-TARA**

[2022] NZACC 174 ACR 099/22

UNDER	THE ACCIDENT COMPENSATION ACT 2001
IN THE MATTER OF	AN APPEAL UNDER SECTION 149 OF THE ACT
BETWEEN	MEGAN FIFIELD Appellant
AND	ACCIDENT COMPENSATION CORPORATION Respondent

Judgment on the papers.

Submissions: E Phillips for the Appellant
 S Hack for the Respondent

Date of Judgment: 12 September 2022

**JUDGMENT OF JUDGE P R SPILLER
[Late filing of an appeal to the District Court –
s 151, Accident Compensation Act 2001]**

Introduction

[1] The appeal in the above matter was lodged by Ms Fifield on 14 June 2022. The appeal is from the decision of a Reviewer dated 29 April 2022. The Reviewer dismissed an application for review of the Corporation’s decision of 5 October 2021 declining to cover or fund surgery.

[2] On 14 June 2022, Judge Henare issued an Initial Minute which directed that Ms Fifield, by 5 July 2022, formally apply for leave to file the appeal out of time and set out the reasons why the appeal was filed late.

[3] On 29 June 2022, Ms Phillips, for Ms Fifield, submitted that the appeal was filed late because she sought further advice from her doctor, physiotherapist and family as how to best proceed with her matter. Ms Fifield added that she needed to gather herself with support resources and was busy with work, and these factors led to some limitations in her seeking this advice.

[4] On 16 June 2022, Mr Hack for the Corporation submitted that the length of time of delay was negligible, there was unlikely to be any prejudice to the Corporation caused by the delay, and so the Corporation did not object to the late filing of the appeal.

Relevant law

[5] Section 151 of the Accident Compensation Act 2001 (the Act) provides:

- (1) An appellant brings an appeal by sending a notice of appeal to, or filing a notice of appeal in, a specified registry. ...
- (3) The notice must be received by the specified registry—
 - (a) within 28 days after the date on which the reviewer gives a copy of the review decision to the appellant; or
 - (b) ...
 - (c) within any longer time allowed by the District Court.

[6] In *Almond v Read*,¹ Arnold J (for the Supreme Court) outlined the following principles to guide the exercise of the discretion to grant or deny an extension of time to lodge an appeal:

[37] Accordingly, where a litigant takes steps to exercise the right of appeal within the required timeframe (including advising the other party), but misses the specified time limit by a day or so as a result of an error or miscalculation (especially by a legal adviser) and applies for an extension of time promptly on learning of the error, we do not think it is appropriate to characterise the giving of an extension of time as the granting of an indulgence which necessarily entitles the court to look closely at the merits of the proposed appeal. In reality, there has simply been a minor slip-up in the exercise of a right. An application for an extension of time in such a case should generally be dealt with on that basis, with the result that an extension of time should generally be granted, desirably without opposition from the respondent.

¹ *Almond v Read* [2017] NZSC 80, [2017] 1 NZLR 801, (2017) 23 PRNZ 533.

[38] The ultimate question when considering the exercise of the discretion to extend time under r 29A is what the interests of justice require. That necessitates an assessment of the particular circumstances of the case. Factors which are likely to require consideration include:

- (a) *The length of the delay.* Clearly, the time period between the expiry of the appeal date and the filing of the application to extend time is relevant. But in a case where there has been a slip-up and the appeal date has been inadvertently missed, how quickly the applicant sought to rectify the mistake after learning of it will also be relevant. Obviously, the longer the delay, the more the applicant will be seeking an “indulgence” from the court and the stronger the case for an extension will need to be.
- (b) *The reasons for the delay.* It will be particularly relevant to know whether the delay resulted from a deliberate decision not to proceed followed by a change of mind, from indecision, or from error or inadvertence. If from a change of mind or from indecision, there is less justification for an extension than where the delay results from error or inadvertence, particularly if understandable.
- (c) *The conduct of the parties, particularly of the applicant.* For example, a history of non-cooperation and/or delay by an applicant may be relevant.
- (d) *Any prejudice or hardship to the respondent or to others with a legitimate interest in the outcome.* Again, the greater the prejudice, the stronger the case will have to be to justify the grant of an extension of time. Where there is significant delay coupled with significant prejudice, then it may well be appropriate to refuse leave even though the appeal appears to be strongly arguable.
- (e) *The significance of the issues raised by the proposed appeal, both to the parties and more generally.* If there is a public interest in the issues, the case for an extension is likely to be stronger than if there is no such interest.

Discussion

[7] In terms of section 151(3)(a) of the Act, Ms Fifield was required to file a Notice of Appeal against the Reviewer’s decision within 28 days after the date on which the Reviewer provided a copy of the review decision to her. The Reviewer’s decision was dated 29 April 2022, which left a date of 27 May 2022 for the filing of the Notice of Appeal. In the event, the Notice of Appeal was filed on 14 June 2022. This Court is now being asked to exercise its discretion to allow a longer time for filing the Notice of Appeal (in terms of section 151(3)(c)). In deciding whether to

exercise its discretion, this Court will follow the guidelines provided by the Supreme Court in *Almond v Read*.²

(a) The length of the delay

[8] The Supreme Court noted that the longer the delay, the more the applicant will be seeking an indulgence from the Court and the stronger the case for an extension would need to be; and that, in a case where there had been a slip-up and the appeal date had been inadvertently missed, how quickly the applicant sought to rectify the mistake after learning of it would also be relevant.

[9] This Court notes that the delay in this case is 18 days, which is not a significant period of time.

(b) The reasons for the delay

[10] The Supreme Court noted that, if the delay arose from a change of mind or from indecision, there was less justification for an extension than where the delay resulted from error or inadvertence, particularly if understandable.

[11] Ms Fifield stated that the reason for the delay was that she sought further advice from her doctor, physiotherapist and family as how best to proceed with her matter. Ms Fifield added that she needed to gather herself with support resources and was busy with work, and these factors led to some limitations in her seeking this advice.

[12] This Court notes that there appears to have been an element of indecision involved in Ms Fifield's delay, but that this did not extend for a significant period of time.

(c) The conduct of the parties

[13] The Supreme Court observed that a history of non-cooperation and/or delay by an applicant might be relevant.

² Above, note 1.

[14] This Court notes that Ms Fifield's advocate responded reasonably promptly to the Court's direction for reasons for the delay in filing the appeal. The Court is not aware of any history of non-cooperation and/or delay by Ms Fifield, apart from the late filing of this appeal.

(d) Prejudice or hardship to the respondent or to others with a legitimate interest in the outcome

[15] The Supreme Court noted that, where there is significant delay coupled with significant prejudice, then it might well be appropriate to refuse leave even though the appeal appeared to be strongly arguable.

[16] This Court notes that the delay in this case is not a significant one. The Corporation has confirmed that there was unlikely to be any prejudice to the Corporation caused by the delay, and so the Corporation did not object to the late filing of the appeal. The Court is not aware of any prejudice or hardship to others with a legitimate interest in the outcome of the present appeal.

(e) The significance of the issues raised by the proposed appeal, both to the parties and more generally

[17] The Supreme Court observed that, if there is a public interest in the issues, the case for an extension is likely to be stronger than if there is no such interest.

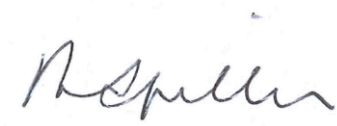
[18] This Court accepts that the proposed appeal is significant to Ms Fifield. The Court is not in a position to assess the significance of the issues raised by the proposed appeal more generally.

The Decision

[1] In light of the above considerations, this Court finds that Ms Fifield has established that the interests of justice require the exercise of the Court's discretion to sustain her application for leave to file her appeal out of time, which is accordingly granted. The Court does, however, draw Ms Fifield's attention to section 161(3) of the Accident Compensation Act 2001 which provides that, if an appeal is not prosecuted with due diligence, the Court may dismiss the appeal on the application of any party. Ms Fifield is therefore required to comply with deadlines

and Court directions in the future processing of his appeal, failing which her appeal will be at further risk.

[2] There are no issues as to costs.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'P R Spiller', written in a cursive style.

P R Spiller
District Court Judge