

[3] On 22 September 2022, Mr Castle for the Corporation submitted that there was no material prejudice to the Corporation and the application for late filing was not opposed.

Relevant law

[4] 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.

[5] 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.

[38] The ultimate question when considering the exercise of the discretion to extend time under r29A 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.

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

- (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

[6] In terms of section 151(3)(a) of the Act, Ms Seary 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 3 June 2022, which left a deadline of 1 July 2022 for the filing of the Notice of Appeal. In the event, the Notice of Appeal was filed on 25 August 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

[7] 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.

² Above, note 1.

[8] This Court notes that the delay in this case is 54 days (nearly eight weeks), which is not an insignificant period of time.

(b) The reasons for the delay

[9] 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.

[10] Ms Seary stated that the reasons for the delay were that she had given birth by emergency caesarean section on 9 May 2022, and, by 3 June 2022, when the review decision was issued, she was looking after a prematurely born baby and not emotionally able to file an appeal.

[11] This Court is satisfied that Ms Seary's delay arose out of understandable error or inadvertence, rather than a change of mind or from indecision.

(c) The conduct of the parties

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

[13] This Court is not aware of any history of non-cooperation and/or delay by Ms Seary.

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

[14] 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.

[15] This Court notes that the delay in this case is nearly eight weeks. However, the Corporation has confirmed that there is no material prejudice to the Corporation and the application for late filing was not opposed. 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

[16] 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.

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

The Decision

[18] In light of the above considerations, this Court finds that Ms Seary 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.

[19] The Court does, however, draw Ms Seary'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 Seary is therefore required to comply with deadlines and Court directions in the future processing of her appeal, failing which her appeal will be at further risk.

[20] There are no issues as to costs.



P R Spiller
District Court Judge