Family Law Act Timeline: 10 Significant Changes

12 June, 1975	• The Family Law Act 1975 (Cth) was created by the Australian government and was applied to all states and territories of Australia. The Family Law Act established the concept of 'no fault divorce' so that couples no longer need proof of fault, only that the marriage has broken down beyond repair.
5 January, 1976	• The Family Court of Australia was established to specially hear family matters, legal disputes and to deal with marriage breakdowns as sensitively as possible. It is made up of a Chief Justice, Deputy Chief Justice and judges and has registries in all states and territories except Western Australia. (The Family Court of Western Australia was subsequently formed under the Family Court Act 1997.)
1987	The Family Court reduced the formality of proceedings so that the focus was on resolution, not winning. A non-threatening environment was created because lawyers and judges no longer wore wigs.
16 December, 1995	• Australia passed the Family Law Reform Act 1995 (Cth) which moved away from parents' 'rights' and moved towards parental responsibility. The focus of family law was that the best interests of the child were of vital importance, as reflected by the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC), which sets out the social, cultural, civil and health rights of children.
1996	• Family law differs from any other type of law because the focus is not on litigation. Following the <i>Family Law Reform Act</i> of 1995, primary dispute resolution (PDR) was introduced to allow both parties to come to an agreement without having to settle the matter in court, which is a costly and lengthy process.
28 June, 2002	• The Family Law Legislation Amendment (Superannuation) Act 2001 came into operation, allowing for superannuation to be treated as property and divided between divorcing couples. In the same year, Western Australia gave equal rights to de facto and same sex couples in property disputes under the Family Court Amendment Act 2002 (WA).
1 July, 2006	 Family Relationship Centres were opened and compulsory medication was required before applying to the court for an order regarding children. The focus continued to be on mediation, as opposed to litigating in court. The Family Law (Shared Parental Responsibility) Act 2006 has been considered one of the most significant changes for family law as it set out the requirements for shared, co-operative parenting duties for children after separation.
1 March, 2008	• Prior to the 2008, a property dispute had to arise out of a marriage. However, under the Family Law Amendment (De Facto Financial Matters and other Measures) Act, the need to re-litigate property division was eased and de facto and same sex couples were given the same property rights as married couples.
7 December, 2011	• The definition of 'violence' was broadened under the Family Law Legislation Amendment (Family Violence and Other Measures) Act 2011. This extended 'violence' to include child abuse, emotional and psychological harm. This demonstrates that the child's best interests are central focus for family law.
12 April, 2013	• The Federal Magistrate's Court (created under the <i>Federal Magistrates Act 1999</i>) was renamed as the Federal Circuit Court of Australia in 2013. It was originally created to lessen the workload of the Family Court of Australia. Today, it handles approximately 70% of applications filed at the federal courts.