



Speech By  
**Hon. Jarrod Bleijie**


**MEMBER FOR KAWANA**

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Record of Proceedings, 5 March 2014

## **MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

### **Justices of the Peace**

 **Hon. JP BLEIJIE** (Kawana—LNP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice) (2.25 pm): The government recognises the substantial voluntary contribution our justices of the peace make every day to the administration of justice in Queensland. We are committed to improving, developing and expanding their role. As a JP qualified myself, I certainly appreciate the amount of work our JPs do and how our justice system would grind to a halt without them.

This government is also committed to revitalising front-line justice of the peace services to ensure that Queenslanders have access to swift and fair justice. That is why we have committed additional funding of \$3.5 million over four years to: pilot the use of JPs to adjudicate some minor civil matters in the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal; and refocus the JP branch.

QCAT is an independent tribunal which actively resolves disputes in a way that is fair, just, accessible, quick and inexpensive. Minor civil disputes make up a significant part of QCAT's jurisdiction and include residential tenancy disputes, dividing fence disputes, minor debt and consumer and trader disputes. This government has committed to a major reform which builds on the success of QCAT to date in providing an integrated tribunal for the resolution of a wide range of disputes.

A trial program of JPs hearing some minor civil dispute matters before QCAT commenced on 3 June 2013 in Brisbane, Ipswich, Maroochydore and Southport. As at 14 February 2014, 2,035 matters have been heard by JP panels across those five areas. The results so far speak for themselves—only 0.8 per cent appeals compared with 1.8 per cent for QCAT overall and a two per cent complaint rate compared with 0.8 per cent overall.

Following the appointment by the Governor in Council of a legally qualified JP in Townsville on 3 October, the trial commenced in Townsville on 9 October 2013. Utilising legally qualified JPs assisted by non-legally qualified JPs to hear and decide minor civil disputes of less than \$5,000 will free up the Magistrates Court and QCAT. JPs have been the subject of rigorous recruitment processes. They are doing a fantastic job.

As I have travelled around the state, I have seen in the last 18 months over 5,000 JPs face to face who have attended various seminars with members of parliament. What is of concern are comments by the Association of Labor Lawyers Inc. on 29 November 2012 when they issued a media release entitled, 'Labor lawyers criticise trial of JP roles in QCAT'. They stated—

The Association has warned against the potential danger of allowing JPs who lack appropriate legal experience to deal with such matters.

The "up-skilling" of JPs under the proposal will be insufficient to replicate the experience attained by legal professionals through completion of a law degree and acting as an officer of the Court.

Shame on the Labor lawyers for their disregard for our justices of the peace and the role they play within our justice system. I table a copy of their press release at that time for the information of members of the House.

*Tabled paper:* Media Statement, posted on 29 November 2012 by Queensland Labor Lawyers, titled 'Labor Lawyers Criticise Trial of JP Roles in QCAT' [\[4592\]](#).

Members may be interested to know that a former state and national president of Labor lawyers is currently a member of this House. It is none other than the Leader of the Opposition. Despite the feedback from the Labor lawyers association, the overwhelming feedback that I am getting is that Queenslanders appreciate the fact that they are simply judged by their peers in what is a common-sense approach to these minor civil disputes under \$5,000. On behalf of the government members of the House, I thank all of our hardworking justices of the peace qualified, some 90,000 in Queensland, for the tireless work they do.