




Speech By
David Janetzki

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH

Record of Proceedings, 10 November 2016

ADJOURNMENT

Downs & South West Law Association

 **Mr JANETZKI** (Toowoomba South—LNP) (6.51 pm): The Downs & South West Law Association is one of 18 district law associations and it represents a vast area of Southern and Western Queensland. I recently met with Catherine Cheek, the president, and executive representatives to discuss a range of issues relating to their members and clients seeking timely and efficient justice.

Access to justice in regional Queensland remains a challenge, with lawyers and clients reporting a number of administrative difficulties. Three of Toowoomba's five courthouses are very small, with some courtrooms lacking video link capabilities. Court waiting areas are crowded and lack privacy, which is of particular concern when addressing domestic violence matters.

In 2016 Toowoomba has been allocated 28 weeks of District Court sitting time and approximately 10 weeks Supreme Court sitting time. This often results in more than one judge sitting at the same time—whether it be two District Court judges or a District Court judge and a Supreme Court judge sitting at the same time. This causes difficulties among the local profession and for the delivery of justice for their clients as Federal Court circuit and QCAT hearings, which compete for the same resources, are sometimes cancelled. Lawyers often find themselves scheduled to appear in two different courts at the same time, diminishing their clients' prospects of success as legal teams are required to be changed late in the proceeding.

The significant sitting time allocation would support the permanent appointment of a District Court judge in Toowoomba on the basis that the judge would also undertake circuit sittings in centres such as Dalby, Roma, Warwick and Stanthorpe. Other regional centres in Queensland displaying a similar or less workload have already been allocated a permanent District Court judge.

Over and above that, there are no higher court civil sittings allocated to Toowoomba, which substantially increases legal costs as litigants and lawyers spend an additional four hours on the road commuting to Brisbane. This is a particular problem when many litigants in civil jurisdictions come from west of Toowoomba, and a hearing in Toowoomba already involves an overnight stay. Such regional litigants find the trip to the big smoke of Brisbane daunting enough already and costly as it involves additional travel and accommodation costs.

The legal system in regional Queensland needs to be properly supported for the sake of the men and women who depend on it for protection or enforcement of their valuable legal rights. I commend the association for their ongoing efforts—Ms Catherine Cheek and her executive who do everything they can to represent legal practitioners in the area and advocate for the highest quality resources to be afforded to legal representation and to clients throughout rural and regional Queensland. I commend the association for their ongoing efforts.