

Question on Notice

No. 494

Asked on Thursday, 15 March 2007

MRS ATTWOOD asked the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice and Minister Assisting the Premier in Western Queensland (Mr Shine) -

QUESTION:

Will he explain how Legal Aid reaches Queenslanders in regional and remote areas?

ANSWER:

Telephone Information and Advice

Queenslanders can access free legal help, no matter where they live, thanks to Legal Aid Queensland's telephone legal information and advice service.

Last financial year, more than 123,000 Queenslanders called Legal Aid Queensland for legal information and more than 15,272 benefited from talking directly to a solicitor in a telephone legal advice session.

This is a crucial service that ensures all Queenslanders can access free and convenient legal help.

Since the implementation of the service in 2002, clients living in rural and regional Queensland have embraced telephone legal advice and information.

This is a valuable service that ensures all Queenslanders can access free and convenient legal help, no matter where they live in the State.

For those people who live in communities where there is no local solicitor or Legal Aid office, this service fulfils a vital need.

Rural and Regional Strategy

The Rural and Regional Strategy was first funded in 1999 and aims to improve access for disadvantaged people living in rural and regional Queensland to legal services.

The Rural and Regional Strategy maintains a network of 40 Community Access Points in rural communities.

Community Access Points are organisations that people identify as places they turn to for support in their town and who agree to act as a Legal Aid Queensland information and service base in communities where there is no Legal Aid Queensland regional office. These organisations include neighbourhood centres, Queensland Government agents, hospitals and courthouses.

Regional Offices

Legal Aid Queensland has 13 regional offices that provide services to people living in rural and regional Queensland.

Regional offices are located at Bundaberg, Caboolture, Cairns, Ipswich, Mackay, Maroochydore, Mount Isa, Rockhampton, Southport, Toowoomba, Townsville, Inala and Woodridge.

The Farm and Rural Legal Service operates out of Toowoomba office and provides advice and assistance to Queensland rural producers who have severe debt related problems or are in dispute with their lenders, or are otherwise facing financial hardship that relates to their business of primary production.

The Farm and Rural Legal Service lawyer travels throughout Queensland to most remote locations to give legal advice. The service assists rural producers on the farm, at a venue of the farmer's choice, at the local Legal Aid Queensland office or by telephone.

Regional Solicitor Program

The Regional Solicitor Program makes rural and regional locations an attractive option for newly admitted solicitors, offering them competitive salary rates and a challenging work environment.

The program aims to bring back new lawyers to rural and regional Queensland who will be willing to stay for a long term period.

The placement lawyers have commented on how they are not only enjoying the cross section of legal experience but the lifestyle benefits rural and regional Queensland has to offer as well.

Since 1 July 2006, there have been thirteen additional placements approved at Mount Isa, Mackay, Gladstone, Rockhampton, Gympie, Charters Towers, Bundaberg and Cairns.

Lawyers are placed in rural and regional communities that currently do not have enough lawyers working in the area to meet local residents' demand for legal aid.

Integrated Indigenous Strategy Unit - Cape and Gulf Outreach Service

Legal Aid Queensland's Integrated Indigenous Strategy Unit (IISU) employs two legal officers as part of its Gulf Outreach Service and four community liaison officers located in Mount Isa, Cairns, Townsville and Rockhampton.

Cape and Gulf Outreach legal services are provided from Legal Aid Queensland's Cairns and Townsville offices and via regular visits by outreach solicitors to remote Aboriginal communities from Cooktown to Wujul Wujul to Lockhart River to Kowanyama Palm Island to Doomadgee.

The Gulf Outreach Service fulfils a vital role in ensuring Indigenous Queenslanders living in remote communities are given a fair go when it comes to accessing quality legal services and understanding the Queensland justice system.