

Question on Notice

No. 336

Asked on Wednesday 12 March 2008

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

QUESTION:

Will he outline the details of the operation of the Murri Court and its effectiveness?

ANSWER:

Murri Courts have been in operation in Queensland since being introduced in 2002.

Murri Courts are normal Magistrates Courts with additional programs designed to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons are not disadvantaged because of cultural or language differences. This is achieved by the voluntary cooperation of local Indigenous community Elders and Respected Persons attending the court and providing cultural advice to the Murri Court magistrate and facilitating effective communication with the defendant to identify the circumstances of the offending and possible rehabilitation responses.

Murri Courts can only exist when there is a viable partnership between local Magistrates and local Indigenous Elders and their community. As such, each Murri Court is a demonstration of commitment to reconciliation and cooperation to understand and appropriately respond to local Indigenous community problems that might result in offending behaviour.

Specific funding to support the Murri Court program was provided by the government following a review of the Murri Court, completed in 2006.

Commencing in the 2006-07 financial year, specific funding was provided to five locations where Murri Courts were initially established. This funding will continue for three years while a detailed independent evaluation of the program is conducted. The evaluation commenced in January 2007. Data will be collected to 31 December this year and will inform the government's decisions on future development of the program.

The Review of the Murri Court provided the government with 18 recommendations of which 17 were actioned immediately. The Review recommendation which related to developing specific dedicated legislation for the Murri Court was deferred until the evidence and experience of the current evaluation is available. Over this period, Magistrates, Elders and other stakeholders are being involved in conferences and consultations to identify the important elements of an effective Murri Court program.

While the Murri Court evaluation is still in progress, there are a number of significant details already available to indicate its effectiveness.

Since November 2006 six new Murri Courts commenced operations in Queensland. These are at Cherbourg, Caloundra, Cairns, Cleveland, Coen and Ipswich. These add to the first five Murri Courts established at Brisbane, Caboolture, Rockhampton, Townsville and Mount Isa.

Each new Murri Court is a positive commitment of local Indigenous communities to partner with the Courts and the government to seek better outcomes from the Justice system. Murri Court is also an endorsement of the strategy to seek advice of Indigenous Elders on culturally appropriate responses to community problems.

Recent data provided demonstrates that the Murri Court is finding viable alternatives to incarceration for offending behaviour, reducing the rates of imprisonment and experiencing fewer failures to appear at Murri Court than might be evident in other courts.

The government believes the activity of the Murri Court enhances the positive regard of Elders in the general community and adherence to traditional values within Indigenous communities. The partnership is generally regarded as improving the standing of the justice system within those communities. Murri Court promotes the resolution of problems and the strengthening of Indigenous communities to maintain their community against the pressures they confront.