

Question on Notice

No. 605

Asked on Thursday, 25 March 2010

Mrs SCOTT asked the Attorney-General and Minister for Industrial Relations (Mr Dick) -

QUESTION:

Will the Minister outline the benefits of a Murri Court, in particular as it operates in the urban Brisbane area.

ANSWER:

Magistrates, service providers and Indigenous communities have worked together to establish 17 Murri Courts in Brisbane, Caboolture, Cairns, Caloundra, Charters Towers, Cherbourg, Cleveland, Coen, Ipswich, Mackay, Maryborough, Mount Isa, Richlands, Rockhampton, St George, Townsville and Toowoomba.

Elders and Respected Persons are integral to the Murri Court process. They serve in the Courts as volunteers, sit with Magistrates, inform Magistrates on cultural matters as required and offer culturally appropriate advice to persons appearing in court.

Positive outcomes demonstrated by the Murri Courts include:

- more effective communication between the court and court participants;
- access to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge to better inform court decisions;
- a better understanding of defendants, leading to more meaningful sentences;
- greater trust and confidence in the legal system on the part of offenders and Elders;
- a positive attitude towards court practice;
- a better understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture; and
- greater respect for Elders in the community.

More specifically, the Brisbane Murri Court employs strategies to:

- reduce the number of Indigenous people appearing in the criminal justice system;
- address cultural issues relevant to bail and sentencing hearings; and
- provide culturally appropriate treatment programs as part of bail and sentencing conditions.

Murri Courts would not be possible without the support of local Community Justice Groups, Elders, and other respected members of the Indigenous community who generously donate their time.

I have great confidence in the Murri Courts and believe their community-based approach leads to outcomes that are positive for the people appearing before them and for the broader community.