

NT magistrates courts - low spenders, slow finishes

But Supreme Court has highest expenditure share

The latest report on Government Services shows the magistrates courts in the Northern Territory had the lowest expenditure (less in-house revenue) in Australia in 2000-01.

The findings are part of the annual report, a product of the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision, and the seventh such report released to date.

The Report examines the performance of the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments in the areas of education, health, justice, community services and housing.

Collectively these services represented about \$64.3 billion of government expenditure in 2000-01 and 9.6 per cent of gross domestic product.

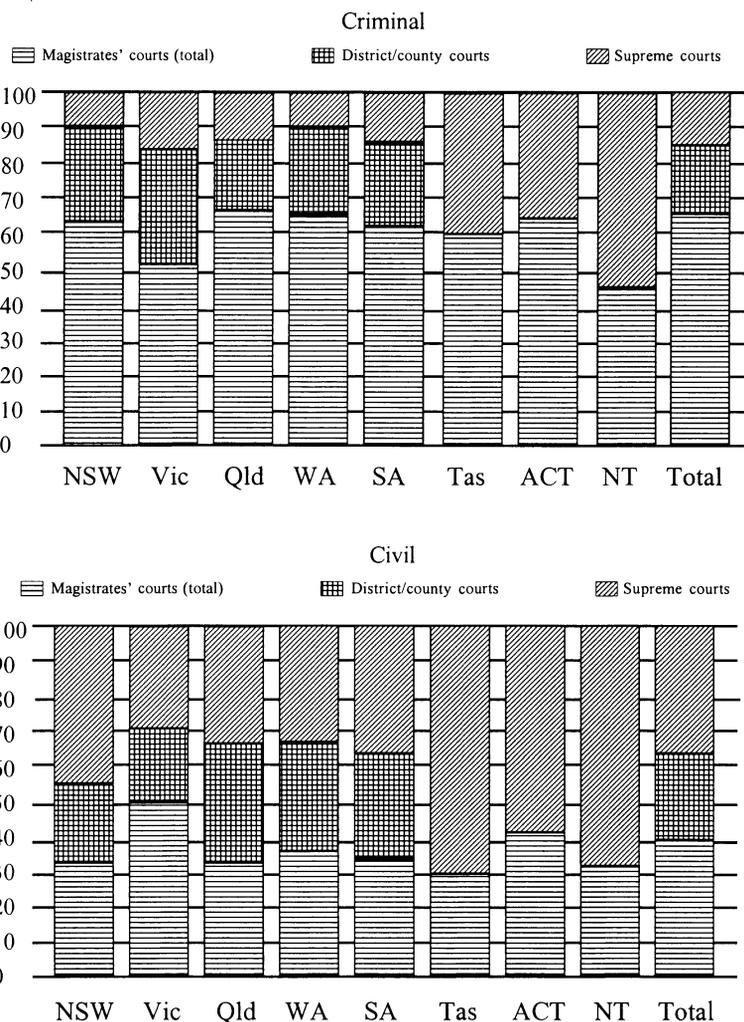
The Report states that nationally, court administration expenditure (less in-house revenue) was higher in the criminal jurisdiction (\$419.6 million) than in the civil jurisdiction (\$350.1 million).

“(Nationally) total magistrates’ courts in the criminal jurisdiction (including children’s and electronic courts) accounted for the highest proportion (62.9 percent) of total expenditure less in-house revenue in 2000-01, followed by district/county courts (24.2 percent), then supreme courts (12.9 percent),” the Report says.

“Across the states and territories, total magistrates’ court share was highest in Queensland (68.0 percent) and lowest in the NT (46.9 percent);... and the NT had the highest supreme court share (53.1 percent) which NSW had the lowest(9.2 percent).”



Proportion of court administration expenditure less in-house revenue, by court level 2000-01



Note: In-house revenue includes revenue earned by in-house providers of library, court reporting and civil bailiff services to external purchasers. The Magistrates courts totals include expenditure on children's court for all jurisdictions and electronic courts for Vic, Qld, WA and SA.

Source: Report on Government Services 2002

The Report also outlines figures for lodgments with the largest increase in Tasmania (a rise of 23.7 percent) and the largest decrease in the Northern Territory (a fall of 28.6 percent).

It treats committals and appeals as separate lodgments.

Under the heading of Timeliness, the Report says the difference of Tasmania, the ACT and the NT having a two-tier court system needs to be taken into account when comparing performances of each jurisdiction.

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“As well, in all jurisdictions, the complexity and distribution of cases may vary,” the Report says.

“For instance, second offences relating to drug matters automatically go to the Queensland Supreme Court whereas this does not occur (for example) in NSW.”

The Report shows that generally, the Northern Territory performed better at finalising criminal appeal matters than it did in finalising non-appeal criminal matters in its Supreme Courts.

The Territory’s ranking for finalising non-appeal criminal matters in the Supreme Courts within 12 months was fourth after WA (1st), Qld (2nd), SA and Tas (equal 3rd).

For criminal appeal matters finalised within 12 months in the Supreme Courts, the Territory’s ranking was third, after Qld (1st) and SA (2nd).

The slowest higher courts appear in the report to be in NSW.

“Timeliness is currently measured by the time taken between the lodgment of a matter with the court and its finalisation,” the Report states.

“This measure can be affected by delays caused by parties other than those related to the workload of the court.

“Generally, lower courts complete a greater proportion of their workload in a shorter period of time because they hear less complex matters.”

According to the Report’s statistics, the Territory’s magistrates courts ranked the slowest in finalising non-appeal criminal matters within 12 months.

Though Queensland’s figures were not available to compare and NSW’s figures did not include their children’s court stats, the NT’s figures show that for 2000-01, 86.5 percent of non-appeal criminal matters were finalised within 12 months in our magistrates courts.

That compares with 98.9 percent for NSW, 98.3 percent for WA, 97.3 percent for Victoria, 91.6 percent for SA, 91.3 percent for Tasmania and 89.6 percent for the ACT.

Non-appeal matters finalised, 2000-01									
Supreme Courts - non-appeal criminal matters finalised within 12 months									
No. of cases	144	113	920	238	88	394	213	349	2459
Percentage	38.2	69	92.8	96.2	73.8	73.8	64.3	70.2	82.6
Ranking	7th	5th	2nd	1st	3rd	3rd	6th	4th	
	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total
Supreme Courts - non-appeal civil matters finalised within 12 months									
No. of cases	10244	1887	4804	2225	1031	1435	790	225	22641
Percentage	66.4	83.9	68.8	59.9	80.5	57.2	42.9	51.6	
Ranking	4th	1st	3rd	5th	2nd	6th	8th	7th	
	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total

Source: Report on Government Services 2002

Note: not included in both tables above and below under civil matters are the figures for the Commonwealth, which the report does outline. The Productivity Commission warns that care should be taken with comparing timeliness data across jurisdictions as both the complexity and distribution of cases may vary. The rankings are Balance’s interpretation.

Appeal matters finalised, 2000-01									
Supreme Courts - criminal appeals finalised within 12 months									
No. of cases	906	413	312	195	109	40	46	33	2054
Percentage	74.1	85	99	76.4	98.2	75	82.6	90.9	82
Ranking	8th	4th	1st	6th	2nd	7th	5th	3rd	
	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total
Supreme Courts - civil appeals finalised within 12 months									
No. of cases	658	241	275	367	265	34	46	166	2052
Percentage	61.5	65.9	91	73.1	99.6	88.3	82.6	91	
Ranking	7th	6th	2nd	5th	1st	3rd	4th	2nd	
	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total

The Report also features a chapter on police services which makes for interesting reading.

While stating throughout that care needs to be taken when comparing the figures state-by-state, the Report’s statistics nevertheless show a high percentage of those “satisfied” with the NT police service (at 72.6 percent).

It also outlines a high real recurrent expenditure rate for police services in the Northern Territory.

“Recurrent expenditure on police services across Australia was approximately \$4 billion or \$225 per person in 2000-01,” the Report says.

The NT’s comparative figure was \$483 per person.

Other statistics offered up by the Report include:

- There were 949 recorded victims of crimes against the person per 100,000 people in Australia in 2000 (compared with 912 in 1999). The rate ranged from 1737 victims per 100,000 in the NT to 475 victims per 100,000 in Victoria.
- There were 14 road deaths per 100,000 registered vehicles in Australia in 2000-01. This ranged from 51 deaths per 100,000 registered vehicles in the NT to 10 in the ACT.
- Nationally there were 25 deaths in police custody and custody-related operations. This ranged from 14 deaths in NSW to none in Tasmania, the ACT and the NT. ①