

Launch of “Our Courts...an inside look” Court Terrace Restaurant Thursday 11 April 2002, 11.00am

Chief Justice Paul de Jersey AC

Young Queenslanders, welcome to the Supreme Court! We are trying to interest you in one of your community’s most significant institutions. You are today among about 6,500 students who annually visit these courts, to learn more about how we operate – and I hope incidentally, if by way of introduction at least, about basic concepts like judicial independence, the separation of powers, the rule of law...

In this place, we seek on your behalf to deliver one of life’s most precious commodities – “justice according to law”, not justice determined by the whim of the particular Judge, but justice consonant with the laws laid down by the parliament and the courts. In doing that, we Judges act independently. We are not, for example, subject to direction from any politician or lobby group – we act independently on your behalf in the public interest. We exercise judicial powers separately from the parliament and the executive. Neither of those other arms of government can intervene in the judicial process. And what is the overall result? It amounts to what we call “the rule of law”: that the law is the circuit breaker which ensures the efficient and just resolution of our differences – between the community and an offender in the criminal court, between individual citizens in the civil courts.

Now these are grand and important notions: justice according to law, judicial independence, the separation of powers, the rule of law. But they are generally not very well understood.

For many years, too many years, secondary students have not learnt anything much about how the courts operate, and of the basis on which they work – that is, for the benefit of you and your parents and families. That’s partly been the fault of the courts themselves. We haven’t realised the importance of telling the people more about what we’re doing.

Last Queensland Day we hosted tours of the court by members of the public. I was very concerned to hear that a number of them did not even realize they were entitled to watch court proceedings. Of course, the potential glare of publicity is at the core of our process.

And so this informative booklet, a publication for which I thank Lynn Sweeney, Michelle Lodge and Rebecca Stack of the Department of Justice, Senior Deputy Registrar Eric Kempin for providing much source material, the Judges for their imprimatur, and the Court Administrator for her motive force. And that you,

young students, are the first to receive it, is very significant. The booklet is intended to be educative, but interestingly helpful as well!

I mentioned earlier the large number of students who annually visit the courts. You carry additional significance today, during National Youth Week, as the initial recipients of this booklet. I hope you will herald an increasingly informed public appreciation of the people's courts.

I take the opportunity today to record my thanks to the Building Co-ordinator Mr Joe Hale, and the Supreme Court Librarian, Mr Aladin Rahemtula, for their valuable assistance in co-ordinating school tours.

As I launch this interesting new initiative, I thank you all for being here, and I hope you find your time here as fascinating as I do.