



Inaugural sittings of Supreme Court at Southport 18-19 May 2004 Opening observations

Chief Justice's observations

I am very pleased to constitute the court at this, the first sittings of the Supreme Court of Queensland at the City of Gold Coast. I expect the sittings to herald more regular, and more substantial, sittings, as need is identified.

The first sittings of the District Court was held on 1 February 1984, before His Honour Judge Hanger, the first resident Judge appointed to Southport. The District Court has sat here continuously since that time. It is a busy centre – last month, for example, Judge Healy disposed of as many as 124 criminal matters.

The people of this region have, I believe, generally accepted as “not inconvenient” the determination of their Supreme Court cases in the courthouse close by at Brisbane. That said, the major status of the Gold Coast in State terms – population, geographical extent, commercial vibrancy – does justify the Supreme Court's now sitting here, when the parties wish it, when it is in truth a “Gold Coast case”, and when considerations of cost, expedition and convenience favour that course.

There is another consideration. We are all Queenslanders, but substantial local communities may fairly expect that they themselves provide the jurors for the trial of crime allegedly committed within their own district. It is no secret I was disappointed when circumstances conspired to preclude the Childers “backpacker” trial proceeding in the nearest Supreme Court centre, which was Bundaberg. It primarily fell to the people of the local community, not the people of Brisbane, to adjudicate upon the case of Mr Long, regular though the ultimate adjudication was. The position with Gold Coast cases is



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of course different, with Brisbane less than an hour away. But that local community expectation is nevertheless of some weight.

Having expressed these views, I should say it was nevertheless not easy to get together even the limited amount of work to be disposed of over the next two days. I had hoped for a larger commitment. What has occurred does rather justify my reflection, expressed to the local profession on 26 March, at the District Law Association event, that the important symbolic significance of the Supreme Court's sitting here may outweigh issues of utility.

But the end point remains this: as my involvement today signals, the Supreme Court will continue to sit at Southport, to meet reasonable demand, and subject as always to our available resources.

A particular thrust of my approach as Chief Justice has been to uphold actively the non-metropolitan regions of the State. Consistently, I am gratified the Supreme Court is now sitting at this important centre.