



OFFICIAL OPENING OF IPSWICH MURRI COURT

Monday, 12 February 2007 at 1.00pm

Ipswich Courthouse

Judge Marshall Irwin

Chief Magistrate

I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet, my Ipswich colleagues - Coordinating Magistrate Donna MacCallum, Magistrates Daley and McLaughlin, Judge Kingham, Ipswich community representatives, members of the Social Justice Group, members of the legal fraternity and all of you – our distinguished guests.

I offer my warmest welcome to you on this significant occasion – the official opening of the Ipswich Murri Court.

I would also like to thank Tanya Oertel for the Welcome to Country on behalf of Uncle Ross Anderson.

It is a privilege to be involved on this occasion and to be so warmly welcomed.

Murri Courts have been operating in Queensland since August 2002. I am proud to say that they have been an initiative of Queensland Magistrates – initially by my predecessor as Chief Magistrate, Di Fingleton and Deputy Chief Magistrate Brian Hine who is with us today.

It was the magistrates, in court every day, who said there is a way we can do better for Indigenous people and reduce their level of over-representation in the prison population. Everyone knows that this is not an easy task. But it is an important step in addressing the issues that Indigenous people encounter in their interaction with the criminal justice system. To achieve this, the court has used a principle in our sentencing legislation that requires it to consider relevant submissions from Community Justice Groups, including Elders and respected persons when sentencing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offenders.

Therefore by applying the law of Queensland it has been possible to give magistrates more culturally appropriate sentencing options with a view to the rehabilitation of offenders and the reduction of recidivism. It is ultimately to the benefit of the community if this can be achieved.

When the new Ipswich Courthouse opens in 2008 it will have a special multipurpose courtroom that will be well designed to accommodate the features of the Murri Court.

The first Murri Court was established in Brisbane. The Murri Court in Ipswich is the seventh to be opened in Queensland, with other courts already operating in Mount Isa, Rockhampton, Townsville, Caboolture and Cherbourg. The court also extends to Indigenous Youth.

One of the inaugural Brisbane elders, Uncle Albert Holt recently said:

“It has been a watershed achievement to structure our Queensland Murri Court process on a spiritual or emotional level generating dignity and respect.”

A recent review of the Murri Court initiated by the previous Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, the Honourable

Linda Lavarch resulted in a \$5.2 million commitment by the Queensland government to the court over the next 3 years. I am delighted that not only will this result in a careful evaluation of the court, but also that it has already resulted in the creation of seven new court coordinator positions, to support the court – including a state wide coordinator. I am pleased that, Ms Fiona Craige who will assist the Ipswich Murri Court and Mr Greg Wiman, the State coordinator are with us today.

This funding will also go towards community education and training for Indigenous elders and respected persons who participate in the court throughout Queensland.

An important aspect of the Murri Court is the involvement of Indigenous elders or respected persons in the court process:

- Advising the magistrate about cultural issues;
- Assisting the offender to understand the court process;
- Assisting the magistrate to decide on a sentence that is most appropriate; and
- Acting as a connection between the court and the local Indigenous communities.

Feedback received from the review is that:

- The involvement of elders and respected persons in the court process helps the offender develop trust in the court;
- The court's problem-solving focus helps offenders to undertake rehabilitation and stop their offending conduct; and
- The court is not regarded as lenient in its sentencing practises. The penalties are onerous, as they often involve treatment and close supervision.

The Murri Court is also regarded as an effective mechanism for increasing participation and ownership by the Indigenous community in the criminal justice process.

I am therefore confident that the Ipswich Murri Court will help establish a link from the court to the local Indigenous community.

I know that this court has been established through engagement between that community and our magistrates over a number of years. I thank and congratulate all of

those who have been involved in this effort which has culminated with the opening today.

I can assure you that the magistracy will continue to work hard at making the legal system accessible for Indigenous people in Queensland.

I look forward to the Ipswich Magistrates Court strengthening its partnership with the Indigenous community in the coming years and months.

I now have much pleasure in declaring the Ipswich Murri Court open.