



**OFFICIAL LAUNCH  
OF THE  
QUEENSLAND MURRI COURT DVD**

**Wednesday 30 July 2008 at 10.00 am  
Level 9, Brisbane Magistrates Court  
363 George Street, Brisbane**

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**Judge Marshall Irwin  
Chief Magistrate**

I acknowledge the traditional owners and custodians of the land. I respect and am grateful for the wisdom of the elders – past, present and future – and their dedication to their communities, and in preserving the knowledge and rich cultural heritage of Queensland for all.

In saying this I adopt the words of the Queensland Murri Court DVD which will be launched this morning by the Attorney-General.

I also adopt, as I have done on many previous occasions, the words of Uncle Albert Holt one of the foundation elders of the inaugural Murri Court in Brisbane. He has said:

“It has been a watershed achievement to structure our Queensland Murri Court process on a spiritual or emotional level generating dignity and respect – an achievement I’m very proud of.”

I am also very proud and privileged that I have been given the opportunity for almost five years to have a close association with the Murri Court and all the wonderful people who have made it the integral part of the fabric of the Queensland criminal justice system that it is today.

As you would know the first Murri Court was implemented in Brisbane in August 2002 by my predecessor as Chief Magistrate, Diane Fingleton and Deputy Chief Magistrate Brian Hine.

In six short years the Murri Court journey has evolved from a small spark struck for culturally appropriate justice by a determined few, to the re-generating fire that is spread now by many dedicated people.

Support for the Murri Court has included the Queensland Government's injection of \$5.2 million over three years from 1 January 2007 to evaluate the courts at Brisbane, Rockhampton, Townsville, Mount Isa and Caboolture.

On 18 June 2008 our 13th Murri Court was launched at St George; and a Murri Court is also being trialled in Mackay.

Our Murri Courts are for both adults and children. Two of the courts operate in the Indigenous communities of Cherbourg and Coen.

The Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) is the evaluator of the courts.

The stakeholders to whom the AIC have spoken in the course of the evaluation have recognised the important fact that the Murri Court represents a more holistic and collaborative approach to dealing with Indigenous offenders, with input from a range of key participants all working towards a shared goal.

As a result the AIC described it as a *collaborative problem solving court*, in which the key participants work together to determine the most appropriate solution to a defendant's offending behaviour.

It is the presence of the elders and respected persons that has made our Murri Courts so successful.

They help get at the cause of criminal behaviour and break down the disengagement that Indigenous people have had with the courts.

There is no doubt that defendants find their appearance before the elders a confronting, emotional and powerful experience.

As you would know it is not a soft option. It is about effective sentencing of offenders who will be sentenced to imprisonment when appropriate. It is not a lighter sentence but one which is more meaningful to the offender. Where they are placed on community-based orders, onerous conditions aimed at their rehabilitation will be attached, including being subject to the requirements and directions of the local Community Justice Group.

To return to the Murri Court DVD, as Magistrate Manthey says in his introduction, the Murri Court adheres to the law of Queensland. It is the same law for everybody - but the Murri Court applies this in a culturally appropriate way.

As the DVD emphasises, Murri Courts are flexible and dynamic. There are no two Murri Courts that operate in exactly the same way. This is because they have been developed with the advice of elders and respected persons to reflect local conditions.

To adopt the words of Magistrate Manthey:

“As a Murri Artist myself, I view the Murri Court like our Art, we have come a long way since the rock paintings. Our Art is contemporary, vibrant and always changing. It is never stagnant. So too must our Murri Courts be.”

In his apology to Australia's Indigenous peoples the Prime Minister spoke of "a future where we embrace the possibility of new solutions to enduring problems where old approaches have failed". He referred to this as "a future where all Australians, whatever their origins, are truly equal partners, and with an equal stake in shaping the next chapter in the history of this great country". The innovative Murri Court is one of these solutions. It is a solution which is working to close the gaps in Indigenous life expectancy, educational achievement and employment opportunities which the Prime Minister has committed to reducing.

Therefore I have been pleased to have heard the Attorney-General say on previous occasions that the Queensland Government is

committed to the expansion of the Murri Courts and supports the excellent work done by the elders and members of Community Justice Groups.

As Uncle Albert Holt says:

“We have gone too far to go back where we came from.”

Accordingly it gives me much pleasure to congratulate everyone who has worked so hard to produce this DVD and to invite the Attorney-General to officially launch it.