

131. Possessing dangerous drugs

131.1 Legislation

[Last reviewed: December 2024]

Drugs Misuse Act 1986 (Qld)

[Section 9](#) – Possessing dangerous drugs

[Section 4](#) – Definitions

[Section 129](#) – Evidentiary provisions

131.2 Commentary

[Last reviewed: December 2024]

The defendant must have:

- (1) Unlawfully possessed;
- (2) A dangerous drug.

Section 4 of the *Drugs Misuse Act 1986* (Qld) defines ‘unlawfully’ as ‘without authorisation, justification or excuse by law’. Section 4 also defines ‘dangerous drug’, with reference to the *Drugs Misuse Regulation 1987* (Qld), schedules 1 and 2. Sections 4A, 4AA, and 4BA of the *Drugs Misuse Act 1986* (Qld) are also relevant to what is a ‘dangerous drug’.

For a dangerous drug that is a thing specified in the *Drugs Misuse Regulation 1987*, schedule 1, part 2 (a *part 2 drug*), a reference in subsection (1) to the quantity of the thing is a reference to the whole weight of all the part 2 drugs (whether of the same or different types) that the person is convicted of unlawfully possessing: *Safe Night Out Legislation Amendment Act 2014* Part 6 amendment of *Drugs Misuse Regulation 1987*.

Knowledge of possession

To satisfy the element of possession, the Crown must prove, directly or by inference, that the defendant knowingly possessed a thing or substance or object which was in fact a dangerous drug: *R v Tabe* [\[2003\] QCA 356](#); [\(2003\) 139 A Crim R 417](#), [8]; upheld by the majority in *Tabe v The Queen* [\[2005\] HCA 59](#); [\(2005\) 225 CLR 418](#).

So far as knowledge is concerned, it is not necessary that the defendant knew that the property was a dangerous drug. It suffices that he or she possessed the substance which is in fact a dangerous drug: *R v Clare* [\[1994\] 2 Qd R 619](#).

A person charged as an accessory will also be guilty of possession of dangerous drugs, if it is established that the accessory aided the principal offender to secure possession of something which is in fact a dangerous drug or dangerous drugs, whether or not the Crown can establish that the accessory believed it contained a dangerous drug or dangerous drugs (see *R v Tabe* [\[2003\] QCA 356](#), [17] (de Jersey CJ, Davies JA agreeing)).

It is a defence if the defendant can prove proved that he or she believed, honestly and reasonably, that the relevant containers did not contain a dangerous drug (see s 129(1)(d) *Drugs Misuse Act*; *R v Myles* [\[1997\] 1 Qd R 199](#), 200, 210).

Meaning of 'concerned in the management or control of a place'

Being 'concerned in the management or control of a place' requires more than bare ownership. Some interest in or personal involvement in the control or management of a place must be shown (see *R v Smythe* [\[1997\] 2 Qd R 223](#), 226)

131.3 Suggested Direction

[Last reviewed: December 2024]

It is a crime to unlawfully have possession of a dangerous drug. [Insert name of drug] is a dangerous drug. If the defendant had possession of that drug, that possession was not lawful. The central issue in the case therefore concerns possession.

(In cases where s 129(1)(c) *Drugs Misuse Act 1986* (Qld) does not apply):

Possession denotes a physical control or custody of a thing with knowledge that you have it in your control or custody. You do not possess a thing unless you know you have it or else can actually exercise control over it.

It is for the prosecution to prove, beyond reasonable doubt, the defendant's knowledge of [here insert fact, e.g. presence of the things containing the drugs]. However, it is not necessary for the prosecution to establish that the defendant knew that the substance was [describe drug]. In other words, the prosecution does not bear the burden of showing that the defendant knew the nature of the substance in [his/her] control or custody. It is enough for the prosecution to prove, directly or by inference, that the defendant knowingly possessed a thing or substance or object which was in fact a dangerous drug.

If you are satisfied beyond reasonable doubt that the defendant had the requisite degree of control or custody to constitute possession, the defendant is guilty unless the defendant has proved that [he/she] then believed, honestly and reasonably, that the [e.g. containers or other thing] did not contain a dangerous drug. If you are persuaded of that, the defendant is not guilty. The standard of

proof concerning this issue is not proof beyond reasonable doubt. The defendant need only prove that it is more probable than not that [he/she] believed, honestly and reasonably, that the [e.g. containers or other thing] did not contain [insert name of drug]. If you are so persuaded, you must return a verdict of not guilty [in respect of the charge of possession of the dangerous drugs].

(In cases where s 129(1)(c) *Drugs Misuse Act 1986* is relevant):

A provision [of the *Drugs Misuse Act*, s 129] arises here for your consideration. It provides that:

‘proof that a dangerous drug was at the material time in or on a place of which that person was the occupier or concerned in the management or control of is conclusive evidence that the drug was then in the person’s possession, unless the person shows that he or she then neither knew or had reason to suspect that the drug was in or on that place’.

The effect of this provision is that if the prosecution satisfies you beyond reasonable doubt that the defendant was an occupier of, or a person concerned in the control and management of, the place where the drugs were found, [he/she] is fixed with possession of those goods in law and will be guilty of the offence of possession unless [he/she] satisfies you that [he/she] did not know of, or have reason to suspect, the presence of those drugs. The burden of proof in this respect lies on the defendant, although it is sufficient if the defendant satisfies you that it is more probable than not that [he/she] neither knew of, nor had reason to suspect, the presence of the drugs.

The occupier of a place is someone who is in occupation of it. This is a question of fact for you. A person who occupies a place will usually do so under some legal right but a squatter may also, for example, be an occupier. To be in occupation involves exercising some degree of control over, or management of, the relevant place. An occupier will be able to exclude others. He or she will usually be physically present at the place, either constantly or from time to time but he or she may exercise occupation through another or others as his or her agent or agents. A person may jointly occupy a place with another or others.

Similar considerations apply when you are considering whether the person is concerned in the management or control of a place. Consideration will primarily focus upon the power of such person to exercise control over the place and the extent to which [he/she] does so and [his/her] power to make decisions concerning the place and carry them out or have them carried out.

It is for you to say if you are satisfied beyond reasonable doubt by the evidence of the defendant's alleged relationship with the place, where the drugs were found, [his/her] alleged activities on or in relation to it, the extent of the control alleged to have been exercised by [him/her] over it, whether [he/she] is someone

to whom the section applies. You will find the defendant guilty unless you are persuaded that it is more probable than not that [he/she] neither knew of, nor suspected, the presence of the drugs in or at that place. And if so persuaded, you will find the defendant not guilty.