

DISTRICT COURT OF QUEENSLAND
ANNUAL REPORT 2019-2020

Table of contents	
Introduction	1
Disposition of Caseload - Overview	1
Civil	1
Appeals	1
Planning and Environment.....	1
Overall Comments.....	1
Criminal appeals.....	3
Planning and Environment Court.....	3
Childrens Court of Queensland.....	4
Regional centres.....	4
Circuits	4
Indigenous and remote circuits	4
Practice Directions.....	4
The Focus Group.....	4
Rules Committee	4
Benchbook	4
Chief Judge’s calendar	5
Continuing judicial professional development	5
Associates’ appointments	5
Access to the Court	5
Court Network.....	5
LawRight	6
Self Represented Litigants Service.....	6
Judicial appointments	6
Judicial retirements.....	6
Acknowledgement	6
Profile of the District Court.....	8
Judges of the District Court.....	8
Regional, planning and childrens court judges.....	9
The Court	10
The work of the District Court	10
The Planning and Environment Court.....	14
Childrens Court of Queensland.....	15
Regional Centres.....	15
Cairns.....	16
Rockhampton	16
Townsville.....	16

Maroochydore.....	16
Southport.....	17
Ipswich	17
Beenleigh	17
Circuit centres.....	17
Judges' committees	18
Civil procedure committee	19
Criminal law committee.....	19
Judicial professional development committee	19
Office of the Executive Director	20
Supreme District and Land Courts Service	20
Registry Services.....	20
Related organisations	23
Supreme Court Library Queensland	23
Appendices.....	25
Appendix 1: Practice Directions	25
Appendix 2: District Court associates as at 30 June 2020.....	27

Chief Judge's overview

Introduction

This is the 24th annual report of the District Court of Queensland, dealing with the organization, operation and performance of the court in 2019-20. The workload of the court is significant as it is one of the largest and busiest of the higher courts in Australia.

The court's performance and workload during the 2019-20 year are reflected in the statistics set out in this report. The court's statistical information accords with the method of reporting adopted by the Commonwealth Productivity Commission's Annual *Report on Government Services*.

Disposition of Caseload - Overview

Criminal

On the criminal side there were 7,580 lodgments during the year. At year's end the number of outstanding matters was 2,980 with 7,419 matters having been finalised. This represents a clearance rate of 97.9 percent.

Of the outstanding matters 18.4 percent were more than 12 months old (from date of indictment presentation) and 4.5 percent were more than 24 months old. These categories would include matters where orders for retrials were made on appeal and matters awaiting determination in the Mental Health Court.

It is again important to note that the statistics provided do not include other hearings such as applications and pre-trial hearings which form no part of the data collated by the Commonwealth Productivity Commission's Annual Report on Government Services (RoGS). Legislative changes, such as the introduction of the Privileged Counselling Provisions of the *Evidence Act 1977* continue to contribute to the increased length and complexity of those hearings and have placed continued strain on judicial resources.

Civil

On the civil side there were 4,247 lodgments with 4,139 matters being finalised. This represents a clearance rate of 97.5 percent. Of outstanding matters at year's end 23.6 percent were more than 12 months old and 4.9 percent were more than 24 months old.

Appeals

During the year 88 civil appeals and 296 criminal appeals were lodged in the Court. Over the same period, 68.2 percent of civil appeals and 101.4 percent of criminal appeals were finalised. At year's end there were 107 civil appeals and 230 outstanding criminal appeals.

Planning and Environment

During the year 483 matters were before the Planning and Environment Court. At year's end there were 414 outstanding matters with 535 matters having been completed. This represents a clearance rate of 110.8 percent. Of the outstanding matters, 34.8 percent were more than 12 months old from the date of filing and 17.9 percent more than 24 months old.

In light of the factors referred to below, the court's performance and workload in 2019-20 has been most creditable. The dedication of the court's 40 judges has done much to ensure the efficient and timely disposition of the lists through the enormous difficulties generated by the COVID 19 virus.

Overall Comments

The COVID-19 virus provided the greatest single challenge to the operation of the Court during the 2019-20 year. It is to the enormous credit of the Court and its Judges that the business of the Court in all of its several jurisdictions continued during this difficult period. The one exception was in the area of jury trials where for a period of several months safety considerations prohibited the assembly of jury panels. One consequence of this was a significant increase in the number of applications for judge

alone trails. The Court continued to conduct hearings in the Planning and Environment Court, in the civil jurisdiction, in the appellate jurisdiction and in the Childrens Court of Queensland.

The COVID 19 crisis highlighted the inadequacies in the Court's IT systems. This is a matter which I have raised in previous reports but which has continued to be the subject of neglect. The need for a modern, fast and reliable I.T. system is now greater than it has ever been. The COVID crisis also highlighted another matter of ongoing neglect, namely, the lack of an electronic filing system such as exists in other Australian jurisdictions.

It is inevitable given the many issues created by COVID 19 that backlogs have developed with the Court's criminal lists. If this backlog is to be addressed across the State, it is essential that any judicial vacancies should be filled without delay. To do otherwise creates great disruption to the court's lists and serves only to place additional pressures on a Court in which judicial resources are already overstretched.

Given the influence of COVID 19 there are difficulties inherent in making statistical comparisons with the Court's performance in previous years. A State-wide clearance rate of 97.9 percent should be regarded as an outstanding achievement in the circumstances.

Criminal

In the criminal jurisdiction, the workload is measured by the number of defendants. These statistics do not include Childrens Court matters, affected child witness hearings or pre-trial hearings.

The court has responsibility for indictable criminal offences, the trials of which are usually heard by a judge and jury, but on occasions by a judge alone. It deals with most of the serious criminal cases.

The trend towards more lengthy and complex civil and criminal trials continues.

Although there was a decrease in the number of criminal lodgements compared with last year it cannot be assumed that this is an indicator of a likely reduction in criminal work flowing to the Court in the future. The COVID 19 virus has undoubtedly played a role in that regard, as it has in the decrease in the number of finalisations of matters compared to last year. Although the criminal clearance rate remained at a commendable 97.9 percent, the number of active pending defendants increased by 4.7 percent (134 matters) compared with last year.

In Brisbane, 2,438 new cases were presented during the year and the court ended the year with 961 outstanding criminal cases (1006 last year), having disposed of 2,415 matters (2,513 last year). The clearance rate in Brisbane increased to 99.1 percent this year from 97.4 percent last year. Of the outstanding cases, 17.5 percent were more than 12 months old from the date of presentation of indictment (13.6 percent last year), and 4 percent were more than 24 months old (4.8 percent last year).

In the major regional centres where judges are based – Beenleigh, Cairns, Ipswich, Maroochydore, Rockhampton, Southport and Townsville – a total of 3,933 new cases were presented during the year and those major centres ended the year having disposed of 3,505 cases, with 1,554 outstanding.

Affected child witnesses

Matters involving child witnesses, and most matters involving offences of a sexual nature involve child witnesses, are complex and time consuming.

Many children are required to give evidence in matters involving charges of sexual or violent offences. During 2019-20 the judges ordered 278 pre-recordings involving 689 witnesses for the District Court or the Childrens Court. Not all the pre-recordings ordered take place as, not infrequently, defendants plead guilty soon after the order is made. Moreover not all matters then go on to trial as some defendants plead guilty after the pre-recording takes place or the Crown enters a nolle prosequi.

The evidence of an affected child witness must be pre-recorded from a remote witness room soon after the indictment is presented, and care is taken to ensure that all pre-trial hearings are completed before that occurs. In Brisbane the pre-recording usually took place within 6-10 weeks of the presentation of the indictment. The child's evidence is later played to the jury at the trial which usually takes place

some months after the pre-recording. To preserve their integrity and security, all video recordings, no matter where recorded in Queensland, are kept by the Principal Registry in Brisbane.

The court's technological and IT administrators responded promptly in replacing or mending defective equipment. Unfortunately such dedication and expertise is not mirrored in many of the recordings of a child's earlier police interview, which are prepared outside the court, but are played to juries pursuant to s 93A of the *Evidence Act 1977*.

Civil

The statistics based on numbers of civil filings in various centres do not reveal the growth in complexity of the court's civil workload. Moreover, in making comparisons with previous years, allowance must be made for the influence of the COVID environment.

During 2019-20 there were 4,247 new civil cases lodged in the court (4,452 last year), with 4,139 matters finalised (4,735 last year). The number of active pending matters increased from 4,332 in 2018-19 to 4,403 in the current year. The civil clearance rate was 97.5 percent compared with 106.4 percent last year. The percentage of active cases older than 12 months was 23.6 percent this year (22.8 percent last year) and the percentage of active cases older than 24 months remained steady.

In Brisbane there were 3,338 new cases (3,584 last year) and a decrease in the number of cases finalised (3,301 compared to 3,823 in 2018-19) resulted in a clearance rate of 98.9 percent (106.7 percent last year). In Brisbane, 23.2 percent of active cases were older than 12 months with 4.7 percent of active cases older than 24 months. These figures remain relatively static compared to the previous year.

District Court Commercial List

A Commercial List was established in October 2010. The list was established pursuant to Practice Direction No 3 of 2010, since superseded by Practice Direction No 4 of 2016 issued 20 May 2016 in view of the court's monetary jurisdiction increasing to \$750,000 from 1 November 2010. During the year the Commercial List judges were Judge McGill SC, Judge Jones, Judge Muir, Judge Kefford, Judge Porter QC and Judge Barlow QC.

Criminal appeals

During the year, a total of 296 criminal appeals were lodged with the court (365 last year) and 300 were finalised, ending the year with 230 active cases and a 101.4 percent finalisation rate. The percentage of active cases older than 12 months was 30.4 percent (22.1 percent last year) and the percentage older than 24 months was 9.1 percent.

Planning and Environment Court

The Planning and Environment Court is structured as a de facto division of the District Court.

This court is the only Queensland court whose files are open to inspection for any litigant, lawyer or member of the public through eFiles, a new online service which makes court documents available to everyone 24 hours a day, seven days a week. All active Planning and Environment Court files originating in Brisbane, Southport, Maroochydore, Townsville or Cairns are accessible through the Queensland Courts website [eCourts](http://www.courts.qld.gov.au) facility:

<http://www.courts.qld.gov.au/information-for-lawyers/search-civil-files-ecourts>.

This court has maintained the high international recognition which it has received for its achievements - the efficiency of its unique structure as an adjunct of the District Court, and as a world leader in individual case management; its alternative dispute resolution process; its efficient management of expert evidence; its regional service and the commitment of its judges to ongoing review and reform. Subject to the direction of the Chief Judge, Judge Michael Rackemann has responsibility for the management and operation of the Planning and Environment Court.

The number of lodgments in this jurisdiction has remained stable – 483 new cases compared to 530 in 2018-19.

The court achieved a clearance rate of 110.8 percent ending the year with 414 outstanding cases and having disposed of 535 matters. Of the outstanding cases, 34.8 percent were more than 12 months old (from date of filing), and 17.9 percent were more than 24 months old. Some cases may take this long due to their complexity and the number of parties involved in the hearings.

In Brisbane, where the longer cases are heard, the court ended the year with 342 outstanding cases having disposed of 451 matters, achieving a clearance rate of 113.9 percent. Of the outstanding cases, 35.7 percent were more than 12 months old and 19 percent were more than 24 months old.

The court offers litigants a no-cost ADR service. This has been internationally recognised as providing visionary ADR access to justice.

Childrens Court of Queensland

The Childrens Court of Queensland is a specialist jurisdiction established under the *Childrens Court Act 1992*. A separate annual report of the Childrens Court of Queensland is prepared under the *Childrens Court Act* and further details of the Childrens Court can be found in that report.

Judge Richards is the current President. There are 31 other judges who also hold commissions under this Act.

Regional centres

The lists in the seven regional centres at Cairns, Townsville, Rockhampton, Maroochydore, Southport, Ipswich and Beenleigh have been well maintained by the regional judges based in those centres. Where necessary they have received judicial support from judges from other centres, particularly from Brisbane judges.

Circuits

Through its circuit load, the court is accessible to those in remote, rural and regional Queensland so that matters can be heard and decided in a timely fashion no matter in what part of the state. The efficient allocation of judicial resources through circuit allocations improves the overall functioning of the court and, by reference to the efficiency and quality of its output, produces more consistent decision-making.

Indigenous and remote circuits

The judges, as in previous years, visited where necessary the remote Aboriginal and Islander communities on circuit. According to the availability of work, Judges sat in the Cape (Weipa/Napranum, Kowanyama, Aurukun, Pormpuraaw and Lockhart River), Thursday Island, and Woorabinda. It was not necessary this year for the court to sit in the Gulf centres of Mornington Island, Doomadgee or Normanton as the limited number of matters from those locations were dealt with in Mount Isa.

Practice Directions

During the year, 16 District Court Practice Directions were issued.

The Focus Group

The Focus Group, chaired by the Senior Judge Administrator and comprising the Chief Justice, the President of the Court of Appeal, the Chief Judge, the Chief Magistrate and the Director-General, met with the Executive Director of the Supreme, District and Lands Courts Service and other senior officers throughout the year. Its purpose is to keep the courts informed about actual and proposed departmental initiatives for the state courts, to provide an opportunity for the courts to participate in the allocation of resources, and to ensure the regular monitoring of the courts' registry and administrative operations.

Rules Committee

The Rules Committee, chaired by Justice Bond of the Supreme Court, since the retirement of Justice Douglas, included the Chief Justice, Justice Morrison and Justice Bond, and from the District Court, Judge Rackemann and Judge Porter QC. The committee met monthly out of ordinary court hours.

Benchbook

The Supreme and District Courts Benchbook provides model directions for the judges conducting criminal trials, specifically designed to apply the *Criminal Code*, which in significant respects differs from the common law applied in some other states. It is a work of collegiate endeavour. During the year under report, Judge Shanahan AM, Judge Rafter SC and Judge Moynihan QC contributed on behalf of

the District Court. The committee works over extended periods updating and adding to this essential and important work.

Chief Judge's calendar

This year as in previous years, I sat in the various jurisdictions of the court, both in and out of Brisbane: including sittings in the regional centres of Cairns, Townsville, Toowoomba and Maroochydore.

During the year I met with the leaders and representatives of the many organisations principally involved in the justice system, such as the Queensland Bar Association, the Queensland Law Society, the Director of Public Prosecutions, Legal Aid Queensland, law school academics, Court Network for Humanity, and the president and committee of Protect All Children Today (PACT) and representatives of the College of Law Practical Legal Training (PLT) Program to advance the implementation of a specific associates' course, designed to enable associates to undertake the PLT for admission to the legal profession.

Aside from regular judges' meetings, meetings of the judges' committees and the Supreme Court Library Committee, conferences and public events, I met regularly with the Chief Justice, the Attorney-General, the Director-General of the Department of Justice and Attorney-General and senior officers of the department, the Executive Director of the Supreme District and Land Courts Service and her deputies, the Sheriff, listings managers and Courts Information Technology staff and had regular meetings with leaders of the legal profession and justice system.

I attended meetings involved in the organisation of the District Court and its registries, meetings of the Supreme Court Library Committee, the Focus Group, and other conferences, seminars and forums in Queensland and elsewhere.

In February, I attended a meeting of the Council of Chief Judges from all equivalent jurisdictions within Australia and New Zealand. These meetings, held biennially, provide an important opportunity for the exchange of information between heads of jurisdictions.

Continuing judicial professional development

During the year many of the judges spoke or presented papers at many important professional meetings and conferences, details of which appear in this report, as well as presiding over moots and speaking to schools and community groups. Details of the judges' judicial professional development involving overseas studies, seminars, programmes or conferences are published annually on the court website. Also, the court calendar is structured so that 2.5 days per annum is set aside for judicial professional development in banc. This time is especially important for the court – it is the only time that the court's 40 judges are together, as 13 of the judges have permanent chambers in various parts of Queensland outside Brisbane.

During the year the judges delivered papers at conferences and seminars throughout the State. It is particularly pleasing to note the contribution made by the judges to continuing legal education programs conducted by the Queensland Bar Association and by the Queensland Law Society.

Associates' appointments

Associates are appointed by the Chief Judge pursuant to s36(2) of the *District Court of Queensland Act 1967*, who may remove or suspend associates by virtue of the *Acts Interpretation Act 1954*, s25. Associates are appointed as deputy sheriffs by the Chief Executive of the Department of Justice and Attorney-General (s213 of the *Supreme Court Act 1995*).

Access to the Court

Court Network

The Court Network, a volunteer service, has operated in the District Court in Brisbane since December 2007, giving support and non-legal information and referral services to court-users attending at the court, whether as litigants or witnesses or their families and supporters. It receives referrals from various services, departments and other persons. The volunteers may be found in the courtrooms and elsewhere throughout the QE II Courthouse. Court Network also operates in Cairns and Townsville.

The volunteers support court-users in the courtroom and familiarise them with the courthouse. They also provide court-users with a safe place in the courthouse and refer them to those community services or

charities which can provide relevant assistance. During the year, court users were assisted in Brisbane, Townsville and Cairns Courts.

Court Network provides a second service in Brisbane with an information and Justice of the Peace service based at the Information Kiosk in the QE II Courthouse.

LawRight

LawRight formerly QPILCH provides the Self Representation Civil Law Service in the QE II Courthouse. The service assists litigants in person prepare for a civil action in the District or the Supreme Court. Completely independent of the courts and government, the service is designed to assist litigants without legal representation take the practical steps necessary to have their case fully heard and determined.

Self Represented Litigants Service

The Self Represented Litigants Service also began in December 2007. It is to be found on the ground floor of QE II Courthouse and is operated by staff from the court's civil registry who also provide advice of a non-legal nature. The service is designed to assist and support those litigants appearing in person in civil matters and provides both private meeting rooms in which to prepare for court as well as computer and printing access.

Judicial appointments

On 20 January 2020, Mr Michael Byrne QC was appointed and sworn-in as a Judge of the District Court of Queensland in the QEII Courts of Law Brisbane.

Judicial retirements

Judge Michael Shanahan AM SC, who was appointed to the District Court of Queensland on 19 August 1999, retired on 23 August 2019.

Judge Douglas John McGill SC, who was appointed to the District Court of Queensland on 9 September 1996, retired on 14 January 2020.

Judge Julie Ryrie, who was appointed to the District Court of Queensland on 12 January 2004, retired on 5 April 2020.

Acknowledgement

Once again, the Judicial Administrator, Judge Smith, has assisted and supported me in the due administration of the court.

I thank the judges, officers of the registry, the court's administrative staff, and the Director-General and his staff, for their dedication to the effective discharge of the court's undertaking during the year under review.

This will be my last report as Chief Judge of the District Court of Queensland. The Court remains the principal trial court of this State and it has today a full complement of 40 Judges. The growth in the Court's workload and jurisdiction since it was re-established in 1959 has been enormous. It can be confidently expected that that growth will continue. By best estimates the population of South East Queensland (the Sunshine Coast, Brisbane Ipswich and the Gold Coast) will increase by as many as 100,000 over the next ten years. The population of North Queensland, particularly around major cities such as Townsville and Cairns, will also continue to grow.

I have referred elsewhere in this report to the urgent need for the upgrade of the Court's IT and filing capacities. If the Court is to meet the needs of the future it is important that attention be given now to addressing those needs. By way of example, as I indicated in my report of last year, the Court facilities at Beenleigh, which can accommodate only one trial judge at any given time, are woefully inadequate to deal with even the present volume of work at that centre. District Courts at Maroochydore and Southport will also require significant expansion and improvement to accommodate what will inevitably be the need for more court rooms and more judicial resources in those centres. Given the geographical area occupied by the city of Brisbane, for how long will it be possible to expect juries to travel to the city heart to fulfil their important role as jurors?

These are but some of the issues that the Court will face in the coming years.

The civil jurisdictional limit of the Court is presently fixed at \$750,000. That limit was extended as a result of the report of the Hon Justice Moynihan delivered in 2008. Justice Moynihan observed that that limit should be “reviewed regularly, at least every five years, and adjusted to reflect the current value of money and other relevant considerations”. Despite that recommendation, there has been no revision of the monetary limit undertaken since the delivery of the Moynihan report. Such a review is long overdue. The civil jurisdictional limit should increase as Justice Moynihan foreshadowed it should be.

I have enjoyed my 31 years as a Judge of this Court and have felt honoured to have been its leader for the last six of those years. The challenges that lie ahead will be many, but I have great confidence in the Judges of the Court and their ability to rise to those challenges.

Profile of the District Court

Judges of the District Court

During the year under report the judges were:

Chief Judge	His Honour Judge Kerry John O'Brien
Judge Administrator	His Honour Judge Paul Edward Smith
Judges	His Honour Judge Douglas John McGill SC Her Honour Judge Deborah Richards His Honour Judge Michael John Shanahan AM Her Honour Judge Julie Maree Dick SC His Honour Judge Michael Edward Rackemann Her Honour Judge Julie Ann Rylie His Honour Judge Ian Francis Macrae Dearden His Honour Judge Anthony John Rafter SC His Honour Judge Gregory John Koppenol His Honour Judge David Charles Andrews SC Her Honour Judge Leanne Joy Clare SC His Honour Judge William Garth Everson His Honour Judge Brian Gerard Devereaux SC Her Honour Judge Katherine Mary McGinness (Southport) His Honour Judge Richard Stephen Jones His Honour Judge David Andrew Reid His Honour Judge Gary Patrick Long SC (Maroochydore) His Honour Judge Bradley Wayne Farr SC His Honour Judge Alexander Adrian Horneman-Wren SC (Ipswich) His Honour Judge Dean Patrick Morzone QC (Cairns) His Honour Judge Michael John Burnett AM (Rockhampton) Her Honour Judge Suzanne Catherine Sheridan His Honour Judge Anthony William Moynihan QC His Honour Judge David Robert Kent QC (Southport) His Honour Judge Milon Craig Chowdhury (Beenleigh) Her Honour Judge Catherine Mary Muir (Southport) Her Honour Judge Nicole Jane Kefford His Honour Judge Dennis Raymond Lynch QC (Ipswich) His Honour Judge Gregory Paul Lynham (Townsville) His Honour Judge Bernard Thomas Porter QC Her Honour Judge Jennifer Marie Rosengren Her Honour Judge Tracy Fantin (Cairns) His Honour Judge Michael Williamson QC His Honour Judge John McGilchrist Coker (Townsville) His Honour Judge Nathan Jarro His Honour Judge Glen Cash QC (Maroochydore) His Honour Judge John Joseph Allen QC (also on QCAT duties) Her Honour Judge Vicki Ann Loury QC His Honour Judge Ken Barlow QC His Honour Judge Michael Byrne QC

Regional, planning and childrens court judges

Regional judges

During the year under report the following judges were allocated to the regional centres as shown:

Maroochydore	Judge Long SC Judge Cash QC
Southport	Judge McGinness Judge Kent QC Judge Muir
Townsville	Judge Lynham Judge Coker
Rockhampton	Judge Burnett AM
Ipswich	Judge Horneman-Wren SC Judge Lynch QC
Cairns	Judge Morzone QC Judge Fantin
Beenleigh	Judge Chowdhury

Planning and Environment Court

The Planning and Environment Court judges during 2019-20 are listed below:

Chief Judge O'Brien	Judge Morzone QC
Judge Richards	Judge Kent QC
Judge Rackemann	Judge Muir
Judge Rafter SC	Judge Kefford
Judge Everson	Judge Fantin
Judge Jones	Judge Williamson QC
Judge Long SC	Judge Coker
Judge Horneman-Wren SC	Judge Cash QC

Childrens Court of Queensland

The Childrens Court judges during 2019-20 are listed below:

Chief Judge O'Brien	Judge Moynihan QC
Judge Smith	Judge Kent QC
Judge Richards - President	Judge Chowdhury
Judge Shanahan AM	Judge Muir
Judge Dick SC	Judge Kefford
Judge Dearden	Judge Lynch QC
Judge Rafter SC	Judge Lynham
Judge Clare SC	Judge Porter QC
Judge Everson	Judge Rosengren
Judge Devereaux SC	Judge Fantin
Judge McGinness	Judge Williamson QC
Judge Reid	Judge Coker
Judge Long SC	Judge Jarro
Judge Farr SC	Judge Cash QC
Judge Horneman-Wren SC	Judge Allen QC
Judge Morzone QC	Judge Loury QC
Judge Burnett AM	Judge Byrne QC

The Court

The work of the District Court

The District Court hears and determines appeals and resolves matters commenced by indictment in criminal cases, claim or originating application in civil proceedings, by trial, hearing or consensus. The Chief Judge is responsible for the administration of the court.

The District Court is the principal court in Queensland for trials of persons charged with serious criminal offences. Criminal trials are usually heard with a jury. Civil matters are normally heard by a single judge. The court exercises equitable and other jurisdiction within its civil monetary limit. The judges have adopted a protocol that, save in exceptional cases, judgments are to be delivered within three months of the conclusion of the hearing. The District Court hears all appeals from the Magistrates Courts. Many of the judges also sit as Planning and Environment Court judges and Childrens Court judges.

Some of the judges serve on committees with responsibility for developing and implementing policies and procedures for the continual improvement of the functioning of the courts. These include the Supreme and District Courts Benchbook Committee; the Learning and Development Committee; the Rules Committee and the District Court judges' committees.

Organisation of work

The work of the District Court judges was organised in terms of the following categories:

- Criminal
- Civil
- Appellate
- The Planning and Environment Court
- Childrens Court of Queensland

Information about the organisation and practices of the court, including calendar, law lists and practice directions are published on the Queensland Court's website.

Criminal jurisdiction

In practice the court deals with all indictable matters other than homicides and the most serious drug offences. The great majority of all defendants charged on indictment came before the District Court in 2019-20. The court regularly conducts trials involving about 24 offences attracting a maximum penalty of life imprisonment.

The court deals with offences under Commonwealth and state drug laws as well as offences under the *Corporations Law*, the *Commonwealth Migration Act 1958* and against federal and state revenue laws.

During the year the Chief Judge, with assistance from other judges, managed the criminal list in Brisbane. In the regions, the lists are managed by the resident judges.

For the larger circuit centres, Judge Long SC had special responsibility for the Gympie and Kingaroy lists, Judge Reid for Maryborough and Hervey Bay, Judge Dick SC for the Mackay lists, Judge Richards for Toowoomba, Judge Dearden for Mount Isa and Judge Clare SC for Bundaberg.

The criminal workload has become manageable through careful case management in Brisbane and in the regional centres as well as in the larger circuit centres, and with regular reviews and case management the Office of the Director of Prosecutions, Legal Aid Queensland and the profession are well aware, as matters pass through the court, of the likely course the matter will take.

This is more difficult for the court in the rural and remote centres. The judges hold callovers and reviews by telephone well before the circuit starts. However it is rare that a prosecutor and defence counsel visit the circuit centre to confer with litigants or witnesses well before the circuit is to start. Consequently, despite the judge's efforts, a plea on the morning of the trial or a late request for an adjournment is more likely in those places.

Cairns encounters problems rarely experienced in south-east Queensland. The court at Cairns covers a sparsely populated area approaching the size of Victoria. Distance is an obstacle to litigants' and witnesses' availability for trials, hearings and conferences with counsel.

Judicial case management of the criminal lists endeavours to ensure that most of the matters which finally result in a guilty plea or nolle prosequi are identified much earlier than was the practice a decade or so ago. Statistics clearly demonstrate that in the larger centres the trials which resolve on the first day by reason of a 'late' guilty plea or nolle prosequi, are much fewer.

Depending upon the lists, each year the judges might sit at up to 38 centres throughout Queensland — that is in Brisbane, the seven regional centres, 24 other centres where jury trials can be held, and some of the 15 remote or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, including those in the Gulf, Cape and Torres Strait.

Table 1: The activity of the District Court criminal list 2019-20

	Number of Defendants ¹			Clearance Rates ⁴	Backlog Indicators ⁵	
	Lodged	Finalised	Active		% > 12 mths	% > 24 mths
Brisbane	2,438	2,415	961	99.1%	17.5%	4.0%
Regional centres						
Beenleigh	607	604	284	99.5%	31.0%	9.5%
Cairns	672	600	240	89.9%	14.2%	2.5%
Ipswich	446	430	205	96.4%	21.0%	1.5%
Maroochydore	470	379	192	80.6%	16.7%	1.6%
Rockhampton	341	238	100	69.8%	14.0%	3.0%
Southport	775	706	392	91.1%	20.4%	8.4%
Townsville	622	548	141	88.1%	13.5%	3.5%
Total for Brisbane and regional centres	6,371	5,920	2,515	92.9%	19.0%	4.7%
Circuit centres						
Bowen	11	13	2	118.2%	0.0%	0.0%
Bundaberg	101	113	41	111.9%	7.3%	2.4%
Charleville	9	10	6	111.1%	33.3%	0.0%
Charters Towers	7	12	-	171.4%	-	-
Clermont	-	-	-	-	-	-
Cloncurry	-	-	-	-	-	-
Cunnamulla	-	-	-	-	-	-
Dalby	61	60	32	98.4%	15.6%	3.1%
Emerald	20	38	13	190.0%	23.1%	0.0%
Gladstone	84	98	18	116.7%	5.6%	0.0%
Goondiwindi	3	7	5	233.3%	0.0%	0.0%
Gympie	58	94	49	162.1%	28.6%	4.1%
Hervey Bay	68	70	40	102.9%	10.0%	2.5%
Hughenden	-	-	-	-	-	-
Innisfail	30	55	11	183.3%	9.1%	9.1%
Kingaroy	44	65	20	147.7%	35.0%	20.0%
Longreach	-	2	2	-	50.0%	0.0%
Mackay	270	288	74	106.7%	6.8%	1.4%
Maryborough	56	72	24	128.6%	8.3%	4.2%
Mt Isa	85	156	50	183.5%	20.0%	6.0%
Roma	18	30	7	166.7%	14.3%	0.0%
Stanthorpe	-	-	-	-	-	-
Toowoomba	226	223	50	98.7%	8.0%	0.0%
Warwick	58	93	21	160.3%	38.1%	0.0%
Total for circuit centres	1,209	1,499	465	124.0%	15.3%	3.2%
State total	7,580	7,419	2,980	97.9%	18.4%	4.5%

- (1) Defendant: As defined by the ROGS rule: A 'defendant' is defined as 'one defendant; with one or more charges; and with all charges having the same date of registration'. Defendants with outstanding bench warrants and defendants with secondary charges such as breaches of court orders are excluded. Also excluded are Defendants who have been committed to the District Court and are awaiting presentation of indictment.
- (2) The unit of measurement of workload is the number of defendants per case. Where a case has multiple defendants each defendant is counted separately. Where the same defendant has two cases lodged on the same day they are counted as two lodgments. Where the same defendant has multiple cases lodged on different days they are counted once for each case.
- (3) The above figures are not comparable to years prior to 2018-19 due to the change in counting rule as outlined in (2). In previous years a defendant who had two cases lodged on the same day was counted once whereas it is now counted twice.
- (4) Clearance Rate: Finalisations/Lodgments
- (5) Backlog Indicator: the number active defendants with proceedings older than the specified time.

Civil jurisdiction

The ambit of the District Court's civil jurisdiction is described in s68 of the *District Court of Queensland Act 1967*, and many of its powers in s69. The court has an extensive general jurisdiction enabling it to deal with:

- all personal claims and any equitable claim or demand up to the monetary limit of \$750,000
- any claim (without monetary limit) referred to the court by the Supreme Court for assessment
- any claim where the parties consent to increase the monetary jurisdiction of the court
- actions to enforce by delivery of possession any mortgage
- actions to grant relief from mistake and for rectification
- actions seeking declarations and consequential orders arising from partnership disputes
- administration of estates where the estate does not exceed in value the monetary limit of the court
- family provision pursuant to the *Succession Act 1981*
- construction of deeds and other documents.

Some matters are disposed of by judges dealing with interlocutory applications in actions commenced by claims or originating applications. The more complex matters are case managed by the judges, leading to their early disposition.

The Report on Government Services (RoGS) unit of measurement for the civil jurisdiction is a case. Secondary processes, such as interlocutory applications, are excluded. RoGS files include all claims and originating applications.

A civil case is considered active if it has not been finalised by adjudication, transfer to another court, and settlement by mediation, default judgment, notification that parties have discontinued, or else is deemed to be resolved as, for example, where there has been no activity for 12 months.

Table 2: Clearance rate in civil cases

	RoGS Non Appeal Cases			Clearance Rate *	Backlog Indicator	
	Lodged	Finalised	Active		From filing date	
					% > 12 mths	% > 24 mths
Brisbane	3,338	3,301	3,463	98.9%	23.2%	4.7%
State Total	4,247	4,139	4,403	97.5%	23.6%	4.9%

*Clearance rate - finalisations/lodgments

Backlog Indicator: the number active defendants with proceedings older than the specified time.

Commercial List

The District Commercial List was established in October 2010. The list was established pursuant to Practice Direction No 3 of 2010, since superseded by Practice Direction No 4 of 2016 issued 20 May 2016 in view of the court's monetary jurisdiction increasing to \$750,000 from 1 November 2010.

The Commercial List judges during the year were Judge McGill SC, Judge Jones, Judge Muir, Judge Kefford, Judge Porter QC and Judge Barlow QC.

Applications court

The *Uniform Civil Procedure Rules* provide for a proceeding to be commenced in some circumstances by an application, and also provide for an application to be made to the court in the course of a proceeding that will ultimately be dealt with fully at a trial or hearing.

Interlocutory and originating applications were dealt with quickly and efficiently by the court. There was no great delay for reasons associated with the court in hearing either type of application, at any centre where there is at least one resident judge.

Appellate jurisdiction

During the year this court heard and determined 365 criminal appeals and 72 civil appeals from the Magistrates Court.

Case management of appeals to the District Court continued with regular reviews of outstanding appeals throughout the year.

This table shows the clearance rate in criminal and civil appeals.

Table 3: Clearance rate in criminal and civil appeals

	RoGS Appeal			Clearance Rate *	Backlog Indicator	
					From filing date	
	Lodged	Finalised	Active		% > 12 mths	% > 24 mths
Civil						
Brisbane	49	25	72	51.0%	41.7%	16.7%
State Total	88	60	107	68.2%	38.3%	18.7%
Criminal						
Brisbane	157	122	161	77.7%	33.5%	6.8%
State Total	296	300	230	101.4%	30.4%	9.1%

*Clearance rate - finalisations/lodgments

Backlog Indicator: the number active defendants with proceedings older than the specified time.

The Planning and Environment Court

The court is constituted by a District Court judge appointed to it. Many of the judges who may constitute the court are based in Brisbane. With the exceptions of Beenleigh and Rockhampton a Planning and Environment Court judge is based in each regional centre. The court may sit anywhere.

The court was first constituted in 1966 as the Local Government Court, then renamed in 1991 pursuant to the *Local Government (Planning and Environment) Act 1990*, and then continued pursuant to the *Integrated Planning Act 1997* and now, pursuant to the *Sustainable Planning Act 2009* (SPA). The court's rules and Practice Directions are made under the SPA.

The court exercises jurisdiction over a myriad of planning and/or environmental disputes. Matters are often complex and many have significant environmental, social and economic consequences. The court has unlimited monetary jurisdiction. It may make declarations and other orders; make interim enforcement orders and final enforcement orders; conduct full merits reviews of decisions of local governments and government entities; hear claims for compensation and punish for contempt.

Judges travel throughout Queensland to hear and determine planning matters, so that matters may be heard at a place close to the site or development, and the community which it affects.

Practice and procedure in the Planning and Environment Court is characterised by active list supervision, individual case management and the comprehensive deployment of ADR mechanisms.

The judges actively supervise the lists and their flexible case management achieves the just and expeditious resolution of the real issues in proceedings at a minimum of expense. The court's management of experts is recognised as one of the best in the common law world.

A large number of cases are finalised without proceeding to a full hearing. The court's ADR service is free of cost to the parties and is provided throughout the State. Parties may avail themselves of the ADR service by agreement or pursuant to an order of the court.

The court's ADR Registrar conducts mediations; convenes and chairs 'without prejudice' meetings, meetings of experts and case management conferences. Mediations and other ADR processes were conducted not only in Brisbane, but in centres across the State. The court's ADR service has been recognised internationally as providing visionary ADR access to justice.

The number of active pending matters was 414, and the number of new matters was 483. As noted above, 535 matters were finalised during the year representing a clearance rate of 110.8 percent.

Table 4: Clearance rate in planning and environment cases

Planning and Environment Court 2019-20						
				Clearance	Backlog Indicator	
				Rate *	From filing date	
	Lodged	Finalised	Active		% > 12 mths	% > 24 mths
Brisbane	396	451	342	113.9%	35.7%	19.0%
State Total	483	535	414	110.8%	34.8%	17.9%

*Clearance rate - finalisations/lodgments

Backlog Indicator: the number active defendants with proceedings older than the specified time.

Childrens Court of Queensland

The District Court judges appointed to the Childrens Court of Queensland determine some of the serious criminal charges brought against children. They also provide speedy access for the hearing of bail applications and sentence reviews, especially for young people being held on remand. They also determine appeals pursuant to section 117 of the *Child Safety Act 1999* and applications under the *Surrogacy Act 2010*.

The Children's Court of Queensland is a specialist jurisdiction established under the *Childrens Court Act 1992*. The President of the Childrens Court of Queensland is Judge Richards. There are presently 33 judges of the Court holding commissions under the Act available to sit as Childrens Court judges.

A separate annual report of the Childrens Court of Queensland is prepared under the *Childrens Court Act 1992* and further details of the Childrens Court can be found in that report.

Regional Centres

The court sits in Brisbane and the seven regional centres where 13 of the judges are based:

- Cairns
- Rockhampton
- Townsville
- Maroochydore
- Southport
- Ipswich
- Beenleigh

Judges also travel on circuit to other centres throughout the State and regional judges sit in Brisbane periodically during the year. At most circuit centres and at some regional centres the judges rely on such registry support as is available from staff of the Magistrates Courts' service.

Cairns

Judge Morzone QC

Judge Fantin

Judge Morzone QC and Judge Fantin were the resident judges in Cairns managing the court's lists there. This centre is also served by the Supreme Court's Far Northern Judge. The region includes Innisfail and Cape York. Both judges hold commissions in the Childrens Court and in the Planning and Environment Court. The judges undertook circuits in the Cairns region and elsewhere in the state.

Rockhampton

Judge Burnett AM

The resident judge in Rockhampton, Judge Burnett AM, who also holds a commission in the Childrens Court of Queensland, managed the court's Rockhampton lists. Rockhampton is also served by the Supreme Court's Central Judge. Judge Burnett AM undertook circuits in the region and elsewhere in the state. Some assistance was provided by judges on circuit from other centres.

Townsville

Judge Lynham

Judge Coker

Judge Lynham and Judge Coker were the resident judges during the year. Townsville is also served by the Supreme Court's Northern Judge. Judge Coker holds a commission in the Planning and Environment Court. Judge Lynham and Judge Coker hold commissions in the Childrens Court. They also undertake circuits in their region, principally to Bowen, Charters Towers and Hughenden. Some assistance was provided by judges on circuit from other centres.

Maroochydore

Judge Long SC

Judge Cash QC

Judge Long SC and Judge Cash QC hold commissions in the Planning and Environment Court and the Childrens Court.

Most of the work of the court at Maroochydore is undertaken by the resident judges, with a little assistance from other judges who visit on circuit. In addition to the usual work within the jurisdiction of the District Court, each of the resident judges sits as a Childrens Court judge and also deals with proceedings in the Planning and Environment Court.

The Maroochydore-based judges undertake much of the circuit work at Gympie, Kingaroy as well as assisting with Hervey Bay. The Kingaroy district includes the largely indigenous community of Cherbourg and the judges visit the nearby town of Murgon on circuit. Both judges undertake some circuit work elsewhere in the state.

Southport

Judge McGinness

Judge Kent QC

Judge Muir

Each of the three judges located at Southport hold a commissions as a Childrens Court judge and Judge Kent QC and Judge Muir hold Planning and Environment Court commissions. The judges from time to time perform circuit work at centres elsewhere in the State. Southport also receives judicial support from Brisbane as required.

Ipswich

Judge Horneman-Wren SC

Judge Lynch QC

Judge Horneman-Wren SC and Judge Lynch QC dealt with the Ipswich caseload. Judge Horneman-Wren and Judge Lynch hold commissions in the Childrens Court of Queensland, and Judge Horneman-Wren is also a Planning and Environment Court Judge. The judges undertook circuits to other centres as required.

Beenleigh

Judge Chowdhury

Judge Chowdhury is the resident judge in Beenleigh. The judge also conducted circuits in other centres. Considerable assistance was provided by judges on circuit from other centres. Judge Chowdhury also holds a commission in the Childrens Court of Queensland.

Circuit centres

Depending upon caseload, District Court jury trials may be held in 24 circuit centres (excluding those with a resident judge), and the judges may also travel to the 15 remote or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities throughout the state, for sentencing and some civil matters.

Judges sit in the court's appellate, criminal, civil and applications jurisdictions, as well as in the Planning and Environment Court and the Childrens Court of Queensland while on circuit.

The 39 centres (excluding those with a resident judge) where judges may sit on circuit during the year are: Aurukun; Bamaga; Bowen; Bundaberg; Charleville; Charters Towers; Cloncurry; Cooktown; Cunnamulla; Dalby; Doomadgee; Emerald; Gladstone; Goondiwindi; Gympie; Hervey Bay; Innisfail; Kingaroy; Kowanyama; Lockhart River; Longreach; Mackay; Maryborough; Mornington Island; Mount Isa; Murgon; Normanton; Palm Island; Pomppuraaw; Roma ; Stanthorpe; Toowoomba; Thursday Island; Warwick; Weipa/ Napranum; Woorabinda; Yarrabah.

Judges' committees

The membership of the judges' committees as at 30 June 2020, with the Chief Judge an ex officio member of each committee, was as follows:

Civil Procedure and Rules

Convenor: Judge Porter QC
Members: Judge Kent QC

Court Excellence

Convenor: Judge Horneman-Wren SC
Members: Judge Smith
Judge Rackemann
Judge Rafter SC
Judge Jones
Judge Reid
Judge Farr SC
Judge Morzone QC
Judge Sheridan
Judge Moynihan QC
Judge Kent QC

Criminal Law

Convenor: Judge Rafter SC
Members: Judge Clare SC
Judge Dick SC
Judge Farr SC
Judge Moynihan QC
Judge Kent QC
Judge Lynch QC
Judge Loury QC

Cultural Awareness

Convenor: Judge Muir
Members: Judge Everson
Judge McGinness
Judge Reid
Judge Kent QC

Conference and Social Education

Convenor: Judge Dick SC
Members: Judge Richards
Judge Rackemann
Judge Dearden
Judge Reid
Judge Moynihan QC

Salaries and Entitlements

Convenor: Judge Rackemann
Members: Judge Devereaux SC

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

Convenor: Judge Richards
Members: Judge Everson
Judge McGinness
Judge Reid
Judge Morzone QC
Judge Sheridan

Civil procedure committee

The Civil Procedure Committee is available to give advice and assistance in respect of the civil jurisdiction exercised by the court to the Chief Judge and the judges generally. It functions informally, typically meeting and communicating by email.

Advice is often provided in connection with the Chief Judge's formulating and presenting the views of the court about changes in legislation and regulations that are proposed by state or Commonwealth authorities or seem desirable.

Judge Rackemann and Judge Porter QC sit on the Rules Committee and are able to provide appropriate liaison to ensure that the views of the court are ascertained and given proper consideration.

Criminal law committee

The Criminal Law Committee advised the Chief Judge with respect to numerous law reform initiatives. These included changes to the criminal law in Queensland

The Chief Judge and Judge Richards met with representatives of Protect All Children Today (PACT) with respect to the support role played by PACT volunteers in the pre-recording of affected child witnesses' evidence under Division 4A of the Evidence Act 1977.

Judicial professional development committee

During the year under review -

- Judge Rafter SC represented the court on the Judicial Conference of Australia Governing Council
- Judge Dearden was a member of the USQ Law School Advisory Committee.
- Judge Muir represents the court on the National Judicial Council for Cultural Diversity. This important committee is concerned with the many aspects of cultural diversity which confronts judges in the modern Australian court.
- Judge Farr SC spent a week as "Judge in Residence" at Griffith University.
- Judge Porter QC was part of a volunteer delegation organised by the Queensland Bar Association to conduct legal training sessions at the Papua New Guinea Legal Training Institute.
- Judge Rackemann addressed a meeting of the United States conference of Chief Justices' held in Hawaii in February 2020

The continuing professional development of the judges was actively pursued during this year. The Standard for Judicial Professional Development in Australia was adopted and confirmed by the judges of this court soon after its adoption by the Council of Chief Judges in 2007. The judges are reminded frequently of the importance of undertaking continuing judicial professional development and of the Standard. There is a high standard of compliance with the Standard by the judges of the District Court.

All judges also presented papers or participated in seminars or conferences during the year. Details of the judges' judicial professional development involving overseas studies, seminars, programmes or conferences are published annually on the court website. Also, the court calendar is structured so that 2.5 days per annum are set aside for judicial professional development in banc. This time is especially important for the court – it is the only time that all of the court's judges are together, as 13 of the judges have permanent chambers in various parts of Queensland outside Brisbane.

The judges value the important support offered by the National Judicial College of Australia, as well as the assistance of the Australian Institute of Judicial Administration, the Judicial Conference of Australia and the Judicial Commission of NSW in furthering judicial professional development. All newly appointed judges benefit from the National Judicial Orientation program.

Office of the Executive Director

Supreme District and Land Courts Service

The Office of the Executive Director and Principal Registrar, Supreme District and Land Courts Service is responsible for the management and coordination of registry administration, as well as the provision of judicial support services for the District Court of Queensland.

Ms Julie Steel is the Executive Director and Principal Registrar, and is supported by executive, administrative and registry staff throughout Queensland.

Additionally, Ms Steel is an ex-officio member of the Incorporated Council of Law Reporting, and of the Legal Practitioners Admissions Board. She is also the chair of the Public Records Review Committee at Queensland State Archives, a member of the Supreme Court Library Committee, and regularly attends meetings of the Rules Committee.

Registry Services

Court registries are responsible for:

- receiving and sealing documents for filing and service
- providing procedural information about court processes and the progress of particular matters
- maintaining court records and ensuring that documents such as Verdict and Judgment Records are created and distributed to give effect to orders of the court
- organising resources to enable matters to progress through the system and hearings to proceed, and
- performing all necessary administrative work associated with the criminal and civil jurisdictions of the court.

There are permanent District Court registries at Brisbane, Cairns, Rockhampton and Townsville. Registrars at those centres have the responsibility of determining certain applications without the necessity for judicial involvement, such as default judgments and warrants to enforce the court's civil orders.

Further registries with resident judges are located at Beenleigh, Ipswich, Maroochydore and Southport, and 24 other centres in Queensland are visited on circuit. Local Magistrates Courts registry staff perform the registry duties at those times.

Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic required a range of strategies to enable registry services to continue.

The absence of electronic files and associated processes exacerbated the challenges presented by COVID-19. While efforts were made to enable staff generally to work from home when so directed by the government, most front line staff were unable to do so.

Staff at all levels were instrumental in developing and implementing innovative strategies to minimise the risk to staff and others from COVID-19 without ceasing the business of the court. Strategies ranged from diverting phone lines to staff working from home and implementing a drop box process for the lodgement of documents in Brisbane to conducting conferences and meetings by various electronic means.

In March 2020, the first Principal Registrar's approval to accept certain documents for electronic filing pursuant to rule 967(3) of the *Uniform Civil Procedure Rules 1999* was issued. In May 2020, a directive was issued to all staff that most documents should be accepted for filing with electronic as well as manual signatures. It is anticipated that these changes will endure post pandemic and will be important steps in achieving electronic files in the near future.

The period when Queensland was at Stage 3 of COVID restrictions meant jury trials were initially suspended during March 2020. However, with the guidance of Chief Judge O'Brien and various senior judges, and an enormous collaborative effort, we were well placed to resume jury trials across Queensland in advance of most of Australia's other jurisdictions. This involved resolving a plethora of

practical and conceptual issues and engagement from a multiplicity of areas including the Department of Justice and Attorney-General's Facilities Services, staff from the Courts' own Information and Courts' Technology team, Department of Corrective Services and Public Health Officers. Staff at all levels across the State raised some of the more important issues and came up with the best solutions.

The level of collegiality from all relevant stakeholders resulted in jury trials re-commencing in the District Court at Brisbane on 22 June 2020. Our ability to resume jury trials so quickly - which has been tested and proven at the time of writing this report - is one of our most impressive achievements in these difficult times.

Queensland Intermediary Scheme (QIS) Pilot Program

In response to recommendations by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, the Queensland Government provided funding to undertake a pilot program using intermediaries to assist witnesses with communication difficulties to give evidence in child sexual offence prosecutions.

A witness intermediary is an independent, impartial officer of the court with professional credentials and skills to facilitate communication between a vulnerable witness and others in the criminal justice process. The witness intermediary will provide practical strategies to get the most reliable evidence from witnesses in child sexual offence matters. Witness intermediaries will be available to provide assistance to facilitate communication with children under 16 years, people with impairment of the mind, and people who have difficulty communicating.

Legislation to support the implementation of the QIS was introduced in Parliament during November 2019 and it is expected the legislation will be debated in September 2020. The project is in the planning phase, with commencement of the pilot anticipated no earlier than April 2021. Debbie Jones was appointed Implementation Director of the program and commenced in that role on 22 June 2020.

Registry workloads

Across the state, there were 7,580 criminal lodgements during 2019-20, a decrease of 3.3% compared to 2018-19, when 7,838 were received.

The absence of jury trials as a result of COVID-19 meant those trials before the District Court decreased from 627 during 2018-19 to 461 in 2019-20. The average length of those trials increased from 3.1 days to 3.4 days.

Report on Government Services (RoGS) civil lodgements decreased by 4.6%, from 4,452 in 2018-19 to 4,247 during 2019-20.

Court Network volunteers

Court Network's volunteers again provided a range of support services to court users via outreach and support services in Brisbane, Cairns and Townsville, the Victim Support Unit (VSU) in Brisbane, Gympie, Ipswich and Sunshine Coast, and the Domestic Violence reception desks in Beenleigh, Brisbane, Ipswich and Southport.

The volunteers provide court users with non-legal information, practical and emotional support, and advocacy and referrals to enable them to access justice and navigate the court system. They also play a role in ensuring their contribution with clients adds to the function of the courts and assists court staff where possible.

During 2019-20, volunteers assisted 10,802 court users through the Brisbane Information Kiosk, 2,610 court users through the Brisbane Supreme and District court Networker service, 146 in Cairns and a further 190 in Townsville Supreme and District Courts.

The VSU provides coordinated cross-jurisdictional support for adult victims in the criminal justice system. During the year, more than 918 VSU clients were assisted with approximately 3,335 hours of service provided.

Court Network also assists with the rostering and facilitation of a Justice of the Peace service in the Brisbane Supreme and District Courts. During 2019-20, that service provided 325 volunteer hours and assisted 465 clients with 1,405 documents.

COVID-19 led to severe disruptions to Court Network's service provision throughout 2020. All volunteer services were suspended in March 2020 and staff commenced working from home. A positive outcome was the ability to explore alternative service delivery options. Court Network subsequently commenced a telephone service manned by volunteers from their homes that services Victoria and Queensland. This state-wide service in Queensland is growing each week and can support court users from any

location, at any point in time during their engagement with the court system. To ensure its ongoing support for Queensland Courts, Court Network is continuing to focus on the development of this service to complement face to face services and enable service delivery to continue regardless of any future implications and fragility within the community.

Protect all Children Today (PACT) Inc.

PACT is a registered charity that supports child victims and witnesses as they give evidence in court.

PACT helps children and their families understand the legal processes and accompanies children as they review their original police statements, ensuring children focus and concentrate during this important time. PACT workers educate and inform the children on the importance of each stage in the process, and are next to the child as they give evidence whether in a pre-recording room or the court.

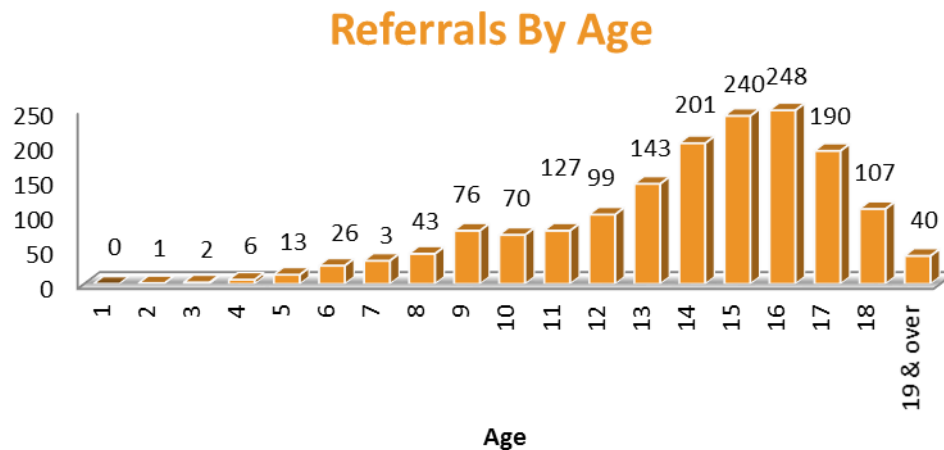
As an independent and impartial organisation, PACT is able to support children to give their best evidence, ensuring the children are educated, informed, calmed and reassured throughout the process.

The majority of children supported are aged between 3 and 18, although the organisation does support people aged over 19 where they have high-needs or are unable to find a support person of their own.

During 2019-20, PACT supported 1,611 children, bringing the total number of children supported since PACT was established to nearly 26,000.

This support is provided throughout Queensland by over 100 trained volunteers, who travelled over 40,990 kilometres, made 1,336 telephone calls and spent over 4,000 hours with children and their families during 2019-20. With volunteers based throughout rural and regional areas, PACT can offer support state-wide.

Approximately 60% of the cases during 2019-20 involved sexual offences and 20% were related to assault, including domestic violence.



Acknowledgements

I am extremely proud of the way registry staff responded and continue to respond to the challenges of COVID-19. Their ongoing enthusiasm, commitment and professionalism in discharging their duties, managing workloads and innovating to do so are, without doubt, some of the most significant assets of the Court.

The degree of support and assistance that we have also received from officers of the Department of Justice and Attorney-General this year has also been particularly notable and appreciated. Too many people to name individually have made timely and significant contributions which have been essential in allowing us to continue doing our part in enabling the work of the Court to continue.

The forbearance, support and assistance of legal practitioners and judges, particularly in the face of the difficulties which sometimes arise in providing registry services, is also greatly appreciated. Their willingness to engage with the registry to continue and improve services is equally appreciated.

Related organisations

Supreme Court Library Queensland

Supreme Court Library Queensland (SCLQ) was established under statute to serve the administration of justice in Queensland through provision of legal information services to the Queensland judiciary, legal profession and public. As the primary legal information provider for the state's judiciary and legal profession, the library provides a comprehensive suite of services including reference, research and document delivery, training and support, and publication of the official unreported decisions of Queensland courts and tribunals, together with a variety of current awareness services reporting the latest developments in Queensland law. All of these services are freely available to Queensland's judges and their associates across the state.

The library maintains print collections in several provincial courthouses in addition to the main library collection in Brisbane at the QEII Courts of Law. It also continues to service the judges' library collection on level 15 of the QEII building by maintaining print subscription services and processing new acquisitions. In 2019–20 the library's combined print collection comprised over 160,000 items, with the library purchasing 243 new monographs during the year, and maintaining almost 300 print subscriptions.

For members of the judiciary their statewide desktop access to an expanding collection of over 1000 online resources available via the library's Judicial Virtual Library (JVL) is their most comprehensive, current and reliable source of legal information. In 2019–20 the library catalogue enabled access to more than 65,000 online full text titles, with 705 new records added to the catalogue during the year. During 2015–16 the library negotiated expanded access rights for many library customers to a selection of the most popular online publications as part of its Virtual Legal Library (VLL) offering to the legal profession. This ground breaking and highly valued service was accessible to 744 eligible Queensland legal practitioners by the end of June 2020, while another 253 practitioners not normally eligible for access were provided with temporary emergency pandemic access from 7 May 2020.

As the publishing arm of the Queensland courts, the library has maintained its commitment to timely publication of the official version of full text unreported judgments from Queensland courts and tribunals. Most decisions are published online within an hour of being handed down, making the SCLQ website the primary and most current and authoritative access point for Queensland case law. In 2019–20 the library published over 3000 new decisions from Queensland courts and tribunals, as well as expanding the publicly available case law with the addition of historical decisions of the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission and judgments of the Industrial Court of Queensland for the period 2000 to 2009. Of the new decisions published, 276 of them were from the District Court and 13 were from the Planning and Environment Court. In addition 16 District Court pre-trial rulings were published in various places. By the end of June 2020 the total number of full text Queensland decisions available from the library website was over 64,000. The number of public sentencing remarks the library made available on its website increased substantially during the year, as a result of the adoption by the courts of the recommendations of the library's Sentencing Remarks Subcommittee, chaired by the Hon Justice Helen Bowskill.

The library is also responsible for provision and maintenance of the Queensland Sentencing Information Service (QGIS), and use of the service continues to be high, with over 725,500 page views in 2019–20. During that year, more than 6,800 new sentencing remarks transcripts were added to the database, increasing the number of available transcripts in QGIS to over 88,000. By year's end there were 804 subscriptions to QGIS by sole practitioners, law firms and small public sector agencies or business units (in addition to the 'corporate' subscriptions of major criminal justice sector agencies such as the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, Legal Aid Queensland and Queensland Police Service, which provide access to many individuals employed by them). QGIS is relied upon by the prosecution, defence and judiciary to promote consistency and fairness in sentencing criminal offenders and is available to all judges.

The library's websites are the primary means of accessing its information resources and services for the majority of its customers. In 2019–20 more than 6.6 million page views were recorded from the SCLQ public website, JVL, VLL and library catalogue combined. Specialist legal research tools developed by the library, including the Uniform Civil Procedure Rules Bulletin, comprise part of the wide range of legal content available to the judiciary via the library's websites. In all, CaseLaw services (including the official unreported judgments collection) recorded more than 4.5 million page views over the year.

The library provides a range of current awareness services to judges, including the *Judicial Daily Update* service, a daily news and current awareness newsletter tailored specifically for the Queensland judiciary. It also publishes and distributes the *Queensland Legal Updater* (QLU), a weekly email bulletin designed to update legal professionals on changes to legislation and developments in case law relevant

to legal practice in Queensland. Together, the judicial current awareness services and QLU recorded over 126,000 views during the year.

Throughout the year the library's skilled and experienced research librarians continued to assist the judiciary and legal profession with navigating the legal research tools within the library's print and online collections. The team responded to over 7,100 information enquiries (10% higher than the previous year), and almost 22,000 documents were supplied in response to these queries (up 13% on 2018–19). During 2019–20, the library provided the judiciary with legal research training on request. As the official member library of the Bar Association of Queensland and the Queensland Law Society, the library services the information needs of legal practitioners across the state.

The library's legal heritage and education programs are designed to foster broad appreciation of Queensland's legal heritage and to promote an understanding of the Queensland justice system and its role in society. Highlights during 2019–20 included:

- Over 4,500 visitors participated in the popular schools education program, with over 1,400 participants in judges' or magistrates' information sessions and over 2,600 students witnessing the law in action by observing court proceedings. This was a 37% decrease on 2018–19 due to schools cancelling excursions in early 2020 and the library suspending its on premises education program from 26 March 2020 in response to the coronavirus pandemic. However, during the suspension of the education program 202 students participated in online research training sessions conducted remotely by library staff.
- A new exhibition, *Graphic justice: pictures worth 1000 words*, was installed in the Sir Harry Gibbs Legal Heritage Centre in May 2020 but was unable to be opened to the public at that time due to the social distancing restrictions associated with the pandemic. An online version of that exhibition was launched in May 2020 with the physical exhibition opening to the public in July 2020.
- The exhibition within the main library public space *Next witness*, paintings by Julie Fragar, continued until September 2019, with an artist panel discussion chaired by the Hon Justice Thomas Bradley in August 2019.
- Two Selden Society lectures were held in the second half of 2019. The 2020 lecture program was suspended from April 2020 due to the pandemic restrictions on large gatherings.
- There were a number of legal heritage displays within the main library public space over the course of the year—*Moving north: Townsville triumphant* (September to November 2019), *Celebrate! Queensland legal ceremonies* (December 2019 to March 2020) and *Out of the centre* (installed June 2020). The display *Moving north: Townsville triumphant* was also installed as an ongoing exhibition in the library premises in Townsville.
- The *Queensland Legal Yearbook 2018* reviewed the year's legal events and statistics, and contained speeches by members of the judiciary in 2018.

Looking ahead to 2020–21, there will be a continued focus by the library on providing a high level of support to Queensland's busy judges. We will continue to support adoption by judges of the 'go anywhere' electronic versions of popular legal commentaries and textbooks designed to be downloaded to tablets and other mobile devices, as well as providing training and support in identifying, locating and making more effective and efficient use of the range of print, electronic and online resources available to the judiciary via the JVL. The former was facilitated by provision of new iPad tablet devices to all judges during the latter part of 2019. We look forward to increased use of the VLL service by eligible Queensland legal practitioners, and to redeveloped SCLQ CaseLaw services and websites. Together these initiatives will contribute to improved legal information services for the Queensland judiciary, legal profession and public.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Practice Directions

The following Practice Directions were issued by the Chief Judge during the year and are available on the Queensland Courts website, www.courts.qld.gov.au.

District Court of Queensland

Table 5: District Court practice directions

Number	Description	Date issued
No. 4 of 2019	Change of Name – Bugden Legal to Bugden Allen Lawyers	22 July 2019
No. 5 of 2019	Change of Name – Buckland Allen Criminal Lawyers Pty Ltd to Allen & Searing Criminal Lawyers Pty Ltd	22 July 2019
No. 6 of 2019	Change of Name – Harris Law changed to Resolve Estate Law	7 August 2019
No. 7 of 2019	Designation of Court Holidays – Registry – 23 December 2019 to 3 January 2020	15 August 2019
No. 8 of 2019	Evidence Act – Division 4A Evidence of Affected Children	16 August 2019
No. 9 of 2019	Disposal of Charges of Summary Offences – Sections 651 and 652, <i>Criminal Code</i>	16 August 2019
No. 10 of 2019	Submissions by Representatives of Community Justice Groups in the Sentencing of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Persons	16 August 2019
No. 11 of 2019	Change of Name: SMS Law	26 August 2019
No. 12 of 2019	Change of Name: Sparke Helmore Lawyers	13 September 2019
No. 13 of 2019	Change of Name: Keir Steele Waldon Lawyers	1 October 2019
No. 14 of 2019	Change of Name: Kingsley Lawson Lawyers	7 November 2019
No. 15 of 2020	Change of Name: McNamara Law	8 November 2019
No. 1 of 2020	Change of Name: Crilly Lawyers P/L to Perspective Law P/L	28 January 2020
No. 2 of 2020	Commercial List: District Court (supersedes Practice Direction No. 4 of 2016)	10 February 2020
No. 3 of 2020	Use of Technology for the Efficient Management of Documents in Litigation (supersedes Practice Direction No. 2 of 2011)	10 February 2020

No. 4 of 2020	Change of Name: Australink Alliance Lawyers & Migration Consultants changed to Forest Lake Law Practice.	9 March 2020
---------------	--	--------------

Appendix 2: District Court associates as at 30 June 2020

Lewis Radford	Associate to His Honour Chief Judge KJ O'Brien
Krystelle Kolarski	Associate to His Honour Judge PE Smith
Hannah Goodman	Associate to Her Honour Judge D Richards
Grace Hicks	Associate to Her Honour Judge JM Dick SC
Kathryn Frost	Associate to His Honour Judge ME Rackemann
Claudia Richardson	Associate to His Honour Judge IFM Dearden
Lucinda Clark	Associate to His Honour Judge AJ Rafter SC
Mackenzie Bray	Associate to His Honour Judge GJ Koppenol
Amanda Kost-Ryan	Associate to Her Honour Judge LJ Clare SC
Matthew Hales	Associate to His Honour Judge WG Everson
Kira Larwill	Associate to His Honour Judge BG Devereaux SC
Molly D'Arcy	Associate to Her Honour Judge KM McGinness (Southport)
Rachael Gough	Associate to His Honour Judge RS Jones
Raziq Qasimi	Associate to His Honour Judge DA Reid
Liam Hanley	Associate to His Honour Judge GP Long SC (Maroochydore)
Hannah McNaught	Associate to His Honour Judge BW Farr SC
Felicity Wood	Associate to His Honour Judge AA Horneman-Wren SC (Ipswich)
Polly McKinnon	Associate to His Honour Judge DP Morzone QC (Cairns)
Samuel O'Neill	Associate to His Honour Judge MJ Burnett AM (Rockhampton)
Madeleine Jensen	Associate to Her Honour Judge SC Sheridan
Seamus McManus	Associate to His Honour Judge A Moynihan QC
Daniel Barker	Associate to His Honour Judge DR Kent QC (Southport)
Henry Coventry	Associate to His Honour Judge MC Chowdhury (Beenleigh)
Nicola Murray	Associate to Her Honour Judge CM Muir (Southport)
Janita Chiv	Associate to Her Honour Judge NJ Kefford
Sinead Fernandes	Associate to His Honour Judge DR Lynch QC (Ipswich)
Lucy Watson	Associate to His Honour Judge GP Lynham (Townsville)
Mitchell Locke	Associate to His Honour Judge BT Porter QC
Georgia Kelly	Associate to Her Honour Judge JM Rosengren
Mary Parker	Associate to Her Honour Judge T Fantin (Cairns)
Emily Hazzard	Associate to His Honour Judge M Williamson QC
Samantha Harvey	Associate to His Honour Judge J McG Coker (Townsville)
Julia Atkinson	Associate to His Honour Judge N Jarro
Matilda McLennan-Bird	Associate to His Honour Judge G Cash QC (Maroochydore)
Kurt McDonald	Associate to His Honour Judge J Allen QC (QCAT)
Christopher Coates	Associate to Her Honour Judge V Loury QC
Lydia Cowan-Dillon	Associate to His Honour Judge K Barlow QC
Kyle Kinsella	Associate to His Honour Judge M Byrne QC