



Opening of upgraded Bowen Courthouse by the Honourable the Attorney-General Tuesday 19 December 2006, 11:30am

**The Hon P de Jersey AC
Chief Justice of Queensland**

Attorney-General, Chief Magistrate, your Honours, Mr Mayor, local member, Elders, Director-General, ladies and gentlemen.

I am very pleased to have the opportunity to be present today, and to express my delight that the people of this region now enjoy such an excellent court facility. While this distinguished courthouse dates from 1881, it now boasts 21st century facilities.

Bowen was an important court centre from the early years of the State. Indeed, when the complement of Supreme Court Judges was in 1874 increased to four, the legislation stipulated one must reside and do duty in Bowen. That led to the appointment, as Northern Judge, of Edmund Sheppard, and he was followed in due course by Pope Cooper – each stationed in Bowen.

Bowen remained the centre for the Northern Judge for 15 years, until moved to Townsville in 1899. That move followed the vastly increased population of that part of the State, with the extensive gold discoveries. Ironically, the Supreme Court and the Northern Judge consequently moved from this very fine structure, which had been completed in 1881, into the comparatively unadorned original wooden Townsville court on Cleveland Terrace, with the added irony that had in a previous life in fact been the Bowen School of Arts.

Bowen remained a circuit town until the reestablishment of the District Court in 1959. From then to the present, Bowen has remained a substantial District Court centre. Magistrates continue to sit here a number of days each month.



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That judicial officers do not have to sit in the Bowen courthouse every day, is testimony to one thing only, and that is, the stability, social cohesion and moral fibre of the people of the region.

Our government's injection of \$4 million into the upgrading of this working courthouse – a courthouse dramatically less busy than dare I point out than those of the suburbs of Sydney and Melbourne – reflects a view that a courthouse is much more than a collection of court rooms. A courthouse has a significance which transcends even the high significance of the work accomplished in the courtroom, and that is, in symbolizing maintenance and respect for that great lynchpin of civil order, the rule of law, of which the independent third branch of government is effectively the custodian.

And even beyond that, a courthouse should be a focus of great community pride and spirit, like other centres of civic activity, for example, council chambers. It is unsurprising our governments have seen fit to construct courthouses over the decades, over the centuries of Queensland history, of considerable grandeur, courthouses which inspire the people, not only for the dependable quality of the work carried out within, but as embodiments of community esteem. This courthouse, I believe, epitomizes that phenomenon.

I warmly congratulate the government on this fine initiative. The people of Bowen, and their neighbours, now take pride in a courthouse of inspiringly palatial proportion; and, more practically, a courthouse which, especially for its technological capacity, ensures accessible 21st century justice.

I am delighted to be present in this wonderful part of the State today, and privileged to share your enthusiasm, ladies and gentlemen, for this outstanding redevelopment.
