



## **MAGISTRATES COURT OF QUEENSLAND**

### **Public Forum Establishment of a Richlands Murri Court 5 November 2008**

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#### **Judge Brendan Butler AM SC Chief Magistrate**

I acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land upon which the court stands. The traditional owners cared for this land over thousands of years and that rich cultural heritage is maintained by the indigenous elders of today. I acknowledge the wisdom of the elders past present and future.

Let me welcome the Elders and respected persons present today in particular I acknowledge Uncle Albert Holt and Uncle Alan Hamilton. I would especially like to welcome and thank all of you who have given of your time and made the effort to be present here today to hear about Murri Courts and discuss the wonderful idea of a Murri Court for Richlands. Also let me acknowledge Magistrate Errol Wessling who is instrumental in promoting this concept of establishing a Murri Court here at Richlands Courthouse.

The first Murri court was implemented in Brisbane In August 2002 by Chief Magistrate Diane Fingleton and Deputy Chief Magistrate Brian Hine. That was six short years ago, yet 18 June this year our 13<sup>th</sup> Murri Court was launched in St George. I am soon to go to Mackay to open another new Murri Court. It is wonderful that now

indigenous Elders throughout Queensland sit with magistrates in this innovative court.

I am very proud of what has been achieved in that short time.

The strength of the Murri Court process lies in the involvement of the Elders and respected persons who sit on the court and the support the Community Justice Groups provide to the work of the court.

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. It's not about lighter sentences but about sentences that are more meaningful to the offenders. The sentence is delivered by the magistrate so those elders who elect to participate in the court need to have no concern that they will be required to impose penalties upon the indigenous offenders. What the elders bring to the court is a very positive contribution.

These outcomes are achieved because the Elders and respected persons:

1. advise the magistrate about cultural issues
2. assists the defendant understand the court process, and
3. assists the magistrate to decide on a sentence that is most appropriate.

The participation of the Elders and respected persons helps get at the cause of the criminal behaviour and breaks down the disengagement that indigenous people have had with the courts. The problem solving focus of the Murri Court helps offenders undertake rehabilitation and stop their offending behaviour.

The establishment of a Murri Court at Richlands has the potential to forge a link from the court to the local indigenous community. Ultimately it can contribute to the betterment of indigenous people in the Richlands area and through that benefit the whole community.

We have a number of people present who later will be able to answer questions you have about what might be involved in your engaging in this process. In particular Uncle Albert and Uncle Alan will be able to speak from their own experience. Please listen to the very good DVD on the Court and the other speakers and then feel free to ask all of us on the panel any questions you might have about the process.

Thank you again for being here tonight.