



**MAGISTRATES
COURT OF
QUEENSLAND**

**Official Opening of the Murri Court
Charters Towers
Tuesday 16 February 2010**

**Judge Brendan Butler AM SC
Chief Magistrate**

At the outset, I acknowledge the Giabal (Guy-a-bull) and Jarowair (Jadd-o-wa) people, the traditional custodians of the land on which this court stands. The traditional owners have cared for and been part of this land for thousands of years. That rich cultural heritage is preserved in the wisdom of the elders past and present and informs our Murri Court process today.

Thank you to:
The Honourable Cameron Dick MP, Attorney-General and Minister for Justice
Murri Court Elders
Magistrate Bruce Schemioneck
Magistrate Kay Ryan
Paul Marschke, Executive Director, Magistrates Courts
Ladies and Gentlemen

I am very proud and privileged to be here with you today – to celebrate the launch of the Toowoomba Murri Court.

I'd like to particularly thank Uncle Darby McCarthy for the Welcome to Country. (Uncle Brian Tobane can't attend due to illness.) It is a privilege to be here and to be so warmly welcomed.

I especially acknowledge the elders present. This is your day. Today the Court and the Government recognise, here in your community, that you rightfully sit as respected members of this important Court in our legal system.

The Toowoomba Murri Court has been operating for some months but today we celebrate its formal launch.

The number of Murri Courts throughout the state has steadily increased since the first Murri Court opened its doors in Brisbane in August 2002; there are now 17, a reflection of the growing numbers of Elders, Magistrates and Registrars supporting this initiative.

I am proud to say the Murri Courts are an initiative commenced almost a decade ago by the Queensland Magistrates.

It was the Magistrates who decided they could improve justice outcomes for Indigenous people in Queensland by seeking the advice of Elders. Magistrates every day see the best and worst of what can happen in people's lives. As magistrates we are saddened to see the over representation of indigenous people appearing before our courts. This is one area where the Murri court can make a difference.

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. What the Elders bring to the court is a different but very positive contribution.

They :

1. advise the magistrate about cultural issues
2. assist the defendant understand the court process, and
3. provide the magistrate with information and advice to assist the magistrate decide on the most appropriate sentence.

The strength of the Murri Court process lies in the involvement of the Elders who sit on the court.

Mr Attorney General, I am delighted that the Queensland Government is committed to supporting the Murri Courts in Queensland. I thank you for your support.

I also thank Magistrate Ryan for her active role in the establishment of this Murri Court. Thanks also to Magistrate Schemioneck, the Toowoomba Co-ordinating Magistrate, for the support he has given this project.

I especially thank the members of the Toowoomba Justice Group.

The Murri Court process importantly acknowledges and respects the wisdom and skill of the Elders who participate in the Court. My special thanks go to the Elders who give so freely of their time to make this Court a success.

Let me assure you that success of this Court is very important to the Magistrates. Through this Murri Court, **we**, the magistrates, the Elders, and Justice Group members, can **together** work to ensure the Toowoomba legal system meets the cultural needs of Indigenous people.

I look forward to the Toowoomba Murri Court strengthening the partnership between the Magistrates Court and the local Indigenous community in the coming months and years.

Thank you.