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MEDIA RELEASE

NSW Criminal Courts Statistics 1995

There have been some significant changes in the profile of offences dealt with by the NSW Criminal Courts, according to a new report released today by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research.

Between 1994 and 1995 the Higher Criminal Courts experienced a 15 per cent decrease in the number of criminal charges finalized.

There were big decreases in the number of sexual assault charges (down 30%), drug offences (down 25 per cent), and theft offences (down 13%).

Over the same period the Local Court experienced big increases in the number of breaches of orders (up 15%), PCA offences (up 10%), property damage offences (up 9%), larceny and assault offences (both up 5%).

The Children's Court also experienced some significant changes in the profile of cases coming before it between 1994 and 1995.

These changes included a 15 per cent increase in appearances for offences against the person, a 63 per cent increase in appearances for firearms and weapons offences, and a 25 per cent increase in appearances for offensive behaviour.

Against these upward trends, the Children's Court experienced an 18 per cent decrease in appearances for robbery/extortion, a 28 per cent decrease in appearances for fraud and a 10 per cent decrease in appearances for unlawful possession of property.

There were only slight changes in court delays between 1994 and 1995.

In the Local Courts, the median delay for defended cases where the accused person was acquitted of all charges was down by five days from 87 days in 1994 to 82 days in 1995, a decrease of six per cent.

In the Higher Criminal Courts, the median delay from arrest to committal for persons held in custody awaiting trial but eventually acquitted of all charges was down by five days from 84 days in 1994 to 79 days in 1995, a decrease of seven per cent.

For the same class of case the median delay from committal to outcome rose by four days from 179 days in 1994 to 183 days in 1995, an increase of two per cent.

Commenting on the trends in court appearances the Director of the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, cautioned that they should not be read as indicative of changes in the level of crime in NSW.

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'Firearms and weapons offences and offensive behaviour, for example, are nearly always discovered by the police rather than reported to them. The increase in Children's Court appearances for these offences therefore probably reflects increased policing activity rather than increased crime committed by juveniles' he said.

'Nor does the 15 per cent decrease in the number of criminal cases finalized by the Higher Criminal Courts reflect a drop in crime. In fact there was actually a slight increase (0.2%) between 1994 and 1995 in the number of new criminal cases registered by the Higher Criminal Courts'.

'The changing offence profile of the courts is also influenced by factors other than crime', he said.

'Since the Director of Public Prosecutions took responsibility for prosecution in committal proceedings a significant number of cases previously dealt with by the Higher Criminal Courts have been dealt with by Local Courts'.

'This has caused the number of cases in certain categories of offence, such as sexual and theft-related offences, to decrease in the Higher Criminal Courts and increase in the Local Courts.'

'The slight increase in delay for persons remanded in custody but eventually acquitted of all charges is a matter of somewhat greater concern, especially against a backdrop of rising trial registrations and falling trial disposals'.

'However it should be remembered that in the Higher Criminal Courts, 86 per cent of those eventually acquitted of all charges are released on bail while awaiting trial.'

'The delay between committal and outcome for persons released on bail and eventually acquitted of all charges fell by five per cent between 1994 and 1995'.

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