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MEDIA RELEASE

Key Trends in Crime and Justice 1996

A higher proportion of convicted offenders are going to prison and the most serious offenders are going to prison for longer, according to the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics Report on Key Trends in Crime and Justice.

The report shows that, between July 1991 and June 1996 in New South Wales the percentage of custodial sentences imposed on convicted male offenders has risen by 10 per cent in the Local Court, 11 per cent in the District Court and 15 per cent in the Children's Court.

Over the same period the percentage of convicted offenders sent to prison by the Supreme Court remained stable but the average term of imprisonment imposed by Supreme Court judges rose by 73 per cent. The Supreme Court only deals with the most serious criminal offences, such as murder.

The increase in the percentage of persons sent to prison and the length of some prison terms has not led to a large growth in the size of the NSW adult prison population. Between July 1991 and June 1996, the sentenced prisoner population rose only by about 5 per cent.

One of the reasons for the small growth in adult prison numbers was the marked decline in the number of new criminal cases registered in each level of the criminal court system (other than the Children's Court). New criminal case registrations fell by about 9 per cent in the Local Courts, 22 per cent in the District Criminal Court and 39 per cent in the Supreme Court.

The Children's Court experienced a 12 per cent increase in new cases registered.

The drop in criminal case registrations in the adult criminal court jurisdictions has been accompanied by a marked reduction in criminal case delays for defended cases (i.e. cases in which the accused pleads 'not guilty' to one or more charges).

Median delays for defended cases in the local Court have fallen by about 22 per cent

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