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MEDIA RELEASE

NSW Criminal Courts Statistics 1999

The latest court statistics reveal a significant increase in the overall number of criminal cases coming before the NSW Local Court and change in the mix of trial and sentence cases in the District Court.

Figures released today by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research reveal that the number of criminal cases dealt with by the NSW Local Court rose by 13 per cent, from 117,053 cases in 1998 to 132,625 cases in 1999.

There were notable increases in court appearances for carrying knives in a public place (up more than 500%), driving (up 18%), and drug offences (up 14%).

Despite the increase in Local Court workload, delays in bringing matters to a hearing in the Local Court remained steady or fell slightly.

In the District Court, the number of new trial registrations (i.e. cases where the accused pleads not guilty) declined by 14 per cent between 1998 and 1999 while the number of new sentence registrations (i.e. cases where the accused pleads guilty) rose by 17 per cent over the same period.

Despite a drop in the number of trial cases there were significant increases in trial court delay in the Higher Criminal Courts.

The median delay from committal to outcome showed increases of 15 per cent for persons on bail eventually acquitted of all charges and 22 per cent for those found guilty of at least one charge.

Against this, the median delay from committal to outcome for persons held on remand who were eventually acquitted of all charges fell by 25 per cent. However the median delay between arrest and committal increased both for defendants on bail and defendants remanded in custody.

The Director of the Bureau, Dr Don Weatherburn, attributed the growth in Local Court cases and the fall in District Court cases to the combined effects of increased policing and a 'centralised committal scheme' introduced by the Government to reduce the workload of the NSW District Court.

'The centralised committal scheme was designed to remove matters from the District Court which might more properly be dealt with in the Local Court', he said.

'It was also designed to increase the likelihood that defendants sent to the District Court would plead guilty rather than go to trial. Both objectives have been met and the result will be a substantial saving in public resources'.

'The growth in delay for trial cases is obviously a matter of concern. However reforms identified by the Bureau in its recent study of trial court delay should be of assistance in devising effective strategies for dealing with the problem'.

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