



Release date: 8 May 1998

## MEDIA RELEASE

### Key Trends in Crime and Justice 1997

The NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research today released its annual report on crime and criminal justice in New South Wales. (The trends in crime were reported last week and will not be repeated here).

Amongst the significant criminal justice trends over the last two years noted in the report, the most salient have been:

#### Local and Children's Courts

- An eight per cent increase in the number of new cases registered in the Local Courts.
- A 12 per cent increase in the number of new cases registered in Children's Courts.
- An increase in the percentage of Local Court criminal cases where the accused pleaded 'not guilty' (up about 10 per cent for males and about 13 per cent for females).
- A six per cent decrease in the proportion of criminal cases where the accused person was legally represented.
- An eight per cent increase in the proportion of criminal cases dealt with by the Local Courts where bail was refused.

#### District and Supreme Courts

- A 15 per cent increase in the percentage of males dealt with by the District Court who pleaded 'not guilty'.
- An 11 per cent increase in the average length of the minimum/fixed term prison sentence imposed upon male offenders convicted in the District Court.
- A doubling of the median delay from committal to case finalization for cases proceeding to trial in the Supreme Court.

#### Corrections

- An 11 per cent increase in the number of sentenced prisoner receptions, including fine defaulters.
- A nine per cent increase in the number of prisoners being held on remand awaiting trial.
- A 33 per cent increase in the number of fine defaulters in custody.
- An eight per cent increase in the number of periodic detainees.

Commenting on the upward trend in fine defaulters the Director of the Bureau, Dr Don Weatherburn, said that it should not be taken as evidence that the Government's recent initiatives in this area had failed.

"The figures in this report cover the last two years. The new fine enforcement system did not come into effect until January this year".

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“It will be some time before we know whether the new fine enforcement system has been effective in cutting the number of fine defaulters in prison”.

According to Dr Weatherburn the increase in Local and Children’s Court registrations, coupled with the increased tendency for people in the Local and District Court to plead ‘not guilty’ will increase pressure on judicial and court resources.

“The current growth in sentenced prisoner receptions, prison sentence length and prisoners on remand, on the other hand, if it continues, will place upward pressure on the NSW prison population”.

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