



COURT AND TRIBUNAL SERVICES

Providing an equitable and just legal system for the community and the resolution of matters in an expeditious manner

Administrative Decisions Tribunal

Acting Registrar: Anne O'Connell

- Reviews administrative decisions made by public bodies or officials where permitted by legislation.
- Resolves grievances relating to:
 - disciplinary proceedings relating to certain professions;
 - equal opportunity complaints under the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1977*; and
 - disputes under the *Retail Leases Act 1994*.

Compensation Court and Dust Diseases Tribunal

Principal Courts Administrator: Giulia Inga

- The Compensation Court resolves disputes arising under *Workers Compensation Act 1987* and the *Workplace Injury Management and Workers Compensation Act 1998* and other matters involving compensation for work related injury or disease.
- The Dust Diseases Tribunal of NSW has exclusive jurisdiction to hear and determine claims by persons injured by exposure to asbestos or suffering from other dust related conditions.

District Court

Principal Courts Administrator: Claude Wotton

- Serves as the intermediate court in NSW and is the largest trial court in Australia.
- Has an appellate jurisdiction.
- Deals with all offences, except treason, piracy and murder in its criminal jurisdiction.
- Has an unlimited civil jurisdiction in relation to motor vehicle accidents and up to \$750,000 for general actions.
- Deals with claims for equitable recovery of money or damages up to \$750,000, and applications under the *Defacto Relationships Act*, the *Family Provisions Act* and the *Testator Family Maintenance and Guardianship of Infants Act* up to \$250,000.

Industrial Relations Commission

Principal Registrar: Tim McGrath

- Conciliates and arbitrates to resolve industrial disputes.
- Makes industrial awards and approves enterprise agreements to set conditions of employment and wages.
- Decides claims of unfair dismissal.
- Hears prosecutions under various industrial laws (including the more serious breaches of Occupational Health and Safety legislation) and deals with civil matters under those laws.

Land and Environment Court

Registrar: Megan Greenwood

- Deals with matters of civil enforcement and summary criminal enforcement in regard to environmental planning and protection.
- Hears and determines appeals against building and development applications, land valuations, compensation claims for land resumption, and claims and disputes arising under the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983*.

Local Courts

Acting Director: Peter Ryan

- Deals with committal hearings, the majority of criminal and summary prosecutions, civil claims matters (up to \$40,000), applications for Apprehended Violence Orders and some family law matters.
- Specialist Children's Courts hear juvenile prosecutions (where offenders are under 18 years) and deal with care matters involving young people under 16 years.
- Specialist Coroner's courts investigate deaths and serious fires to establish the likely cause of the death or fire.

Supreme Court

Chief Executive Officer and Principal Registrar:
Nerida Johnston

- Serves as the superior court of general jurisdiction in the State.
- Hears criminal trials of the most serious nature.
- Has unlimited jurisdiction in civil disputes.
- Has appellate jurisdiction in criminal and civil matters.

Administrative Decisions Tribunal

The Administrative Decisions Tribunal (ADT) uses a variety of dispute resolution options to resolve disputes. It seeks to liaise closely with unrepresented parties, and office renovations are nearing completion which will provide an improved physical environment for clients with disabilities. Regional client needs are met

through country sittings, in some cases assigning country judicial officers to hear cases, and through remote conferencing.

Goal: Promote the earliest, most effective and efficient resolution of criminal matters and civil disputes.

The ADT commenced operations on 6 October 1998 with the Equal Opportunity Division, the Legal Services Division and the General Division. There were 245 matters transferred to the ADT from existing jurisdictions at that time. In January 1999, the Community Services Division commenced within the ADT, with 166 matters transferred. The Retail Leases Division commenced in March 1999. There were no transferred matters.

A total of 570 new applications for reviews were filed with the ADT during the year, and 639 applications finalised. Around 62 per cent of the matters disposed of were less than six months old. It is anticipated that the time frame for disposal

will decrease as the last of the transferred matters from the old tribunals is finalised.

The ADT has also developed practice notes to increase the number of matters which are resolved by alternative dispute resolution in the Freedom of Information and Retail Leases areas of its operations.

Goal: Continuously improve our services and increase satisfaction among our diverse clients.

During the first full year of operation, the ADT conducted a client survey to identify opportunities to improve client service.

As a result of feedback from the survey, more appropriate interview rooms are now provided for use by clients and new signage has been installed. Other areas for improvement include providing community education about the ADT, particularly for people from non-English speaking backgrounds and Aboriginal people, providing information on the services available to assist parties in the ADT, and improving the availability of written information about the

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ADT. These matters will form the core of client service initiatives for the coming year.

The Year Ahead

The key priorities for the Administrative Decisions Tribunal for the coming year are to:

- develop an integrated information technology system;
- educate the community about the ADT, particularly minority racial and ethnic groups;
- establish user groups for all jurisdictional areas of the ADT; and
- review the Registry structure.

Compensation Court and Dust Diseases Tribunal

Goal: Promote the earliest, most effective and efficient resolution of criminal matters and civil disputes.

The Compensation Court disposed of more cases over a shorter period of time this year and reduced the average time from filing of the application to a hearing from 45 to 42 weeks.

The most significant recent legislative reform impacting on the resolution of disputes by the Court has been the removal of restrictions on settlements by way of commutation of weekly payment claims. Since 1 August 1998, parties can seek the approval of the Court to a commutation settlement without first having to seek the approval of the WorkCover Authority. This has resulted in a sharp rise in the resolution rate of Court proceedings. This increased resolution rate is one of the primary reasons for a decline in the pending caseload of the Court since 1998.

The Tribunal continued to expeditiously dispose of cases requiring an urgent hearing.

The Dust Diseases Tribunal continued to expeditiously dispose of Tribunal cases requiring an urgent hearing and to systematically hear cross claims severed from the main case. Legislative changes

introduced in December 1998, including the removal of the limitation period for the filing of a statement of claim and the preservation of general damages claims following the death of a Plaintiff, have not as yet had a significant impact upon the Tribunal's work.

Goal: Continuously improve our services and increase satisfaction among our diverse clients.

The Compensation Court's Practitioner Forum was held for the first time in Wollongong this year. Feedback from practitioners and other Court users identified the need for additional and better sound proofed conference rooms. In response to this feedback, an additional conference room was provided and sound proofing improved in all conference rooms.

Forums were also held in Sydney and Newcastle and proved effective in gaining feedback from the profession about Registry services in general, and discussing procedural and listing issues relating to the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games. To coincide with the Olympics, the Court fixed a three week variable vacation which does not reduce the amount of hearing time available throughout the year. A number of other initiatives were developed and implemented in response to issues raised including a more effective procedure for disposal of consent matters in the Newcastle Registrar's list and revised medical panel application forms.

Other client service achievements for the Compensation Court include:

- determining time standards for the completion of cases;
- completing a general review of the Compensation Court Rules, Practice Notes, Procedural Guides and Forms, with the aim of facilitating the earlier resolution of cases;
- relocating the Medical Section of the Court to new premises in the southern Sydney central business district, improving the overall access by workers to the Court and its medical panels, as well as assisting in their travelling with better access to rail and bus services;
- improving the signage at the Court's Newcastle operations, making access to and use of these premises easier for clients; and

- expanding the Court's Internet homepage, making more information about the Court available to the community at large.

The implementation of an automated Registry computer system, *Amairgen*, at the Dust Diseases Tribunal this year has improved the management of information within the Registry. *Amairgen* allows for the scanning of all pleadings into a database and the viewing of the scanned documents in the Registry and in the courtroom. The previous manual listing function has also been automated on *Amairgen*, freeing up staff to attend to other tasks. The various system modules contain easily accessible information about the Tribunal's cases, improving the handling of enquiries by members of the legal profession and other stakeholders, the allocation of hearing dates by Judges and others and the management of subpoenaed documents in the Registry and in the Registrar's court.

A survey of the users of the Court's registries (Sydney, Parramatta, Newcastle and Wollongong) and the Tribunal Registry was conducted during the year. While the survey identified positive levels of satisfaction with services provided, specific areas, which were largely Court accommodation related, were identified for improvement. In response to this feedback, as well as feedback provided from the Court Practitioner Forums, the Court commenced building related works to improve public facilities.

Other client service achievements for both the Court and Tribunal include:

- publishing protocols for the use of video courtrooms by parties in proceedings before each court, which make it easier and more efficient for parties to use this facility;
- upgrading file servers across the Court's network and implementing standby file servers and Help Desk software to enable better monitoring of support calls and faster fixes for hardware and software problems; and
- publishing selected full text unreported judgments on the Internet, in addition to the ongoing publication of selected edited

judgments of the Court and Tribunal, which also appear in the NSW Compensation Court Reports.

The Year Ahead

The key priorities for the Compensation Court for the coming year are to:

- continue to dispose of cases expeditiously and maximise available resources through the ongoing review and implementation of effective listing strategies;
- develop and implement procedures to identify cases listed for hearing involving clients with special needs to ensure that their needs are appropriately catered for;
- review emergency procedures at remote locations to ensure that effective emergency evacuation is available for people with disabilities;
- improve the availability of information about the Court by producing relevant and useful written material about its operations in community languages; and
- provide additional measures for handling complaints and receiving feedback from clients and stakeholders.

The key priority for the Dust Diseases Tribunal in the coming year is to develop and progressively implement the additional phases of the *Amairgen* computer system, which provide for an electronic (paperless) courtroom, establish a public inquiry system and allow the electronic lodgment of documents.

Joint priorities for the Court and the Tribunal in the coming year are to:

- commence planning for the introduction of electronic lodgement of document filing and associated changes;
- audit the information technology network infrastructure in the Court's Local and Wide Area Networks and implement recommendations arising from the audit; and
- review the use of the video link facilities installed in the John Maddison Tower in order to determine, among other things,



benefits obtained and whether it would be cost effective to fit additional courtrooms with this facility.

District Court of NSW

The District Court is the intermediate Court in the NSW court system. It is the largest trial Court in Australia and has an appellate jurisdiction.

Goal: Promote the earliest, most effective and efficient resolution of criminal matters and civil disputes.

Overall, the District Court was able to maintain a pending caseload of around 12,000 actions this year, with the annual incoming work matching the outgoing work. However, there has been a marked increase (9 per cent) in the number of new actions being registered, with no real disparity in the disposal rate. This increase is no doubt due to the extension of the Court's jurisdiction, which has not only created more work in numbers but also in complexity.

The District Court continues to adopt the objectives and goals outlined in the *Strategic Plan* presented by the Chief Judge in 1995. This plan is currently being reviewed by the Court, with the view to updating it to meet the new challenges facing the Court.

Case management is fully operational in the Court's civil lists. One of the goals of case management is to achieve the disposition of the vast majority of actions within 12 months of commencement. The Court increased its disposal rate by 14 per cent over last year from 49 per cent to 56 per cent.

Over 90 per cent of the 3,077 civil matters transferred from the Supreme Court to the District Court following its increase in jurisdiction in 1997 had been finalised by the end of December 1999. These matters were placed on a special track with judicial resources specifically allocated to deal with them. The remaining 10 per cent of matters have been amalgamated with general case management list.

There was a 16.2 per cent decrease in the number of new criminal trials registered at the District Court this year. This is most likely due to the introduction of the *Centralised Committal Pilot*. The Pilot commenced in Sydney in April 1998

and expanded to Sydney West from the beginning of 1999. As a result, the number of new committals for trial in Sydney and Sydney West reduced overall by 21 per cent in 1999–2000 compared to 1998–99. This reduction has enabled the Court to take a far more active approach in the management of trials, including:

- insisting on matters going to an earlier hearing;
- ensuring adjournments are for short periods only; and
- introducing more date certainty into the process.

The Court also participated in a review of criminal listing practices in conjunction with its major stakeholders, including the examination of alternative approaches to the management of its criminal business.

The Court has continued with variable judicial vacations so that with the exception of two weeks during the Christmas/New Year period, the Court sits all year. This, coupled with financial enhancements provided to the Court by the Government, and redirecting the recurrent arbitration funding, has made it possible to provide an Acting Judge Scheme.

Goal: Continuously improve our services and increase satisfaction among our diverse clients.

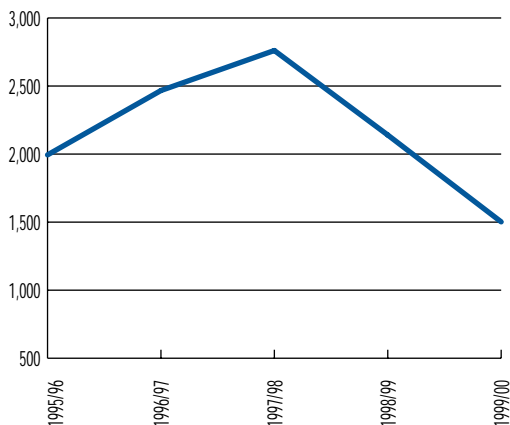
The Court has conducted a *Registry User Survey* during the year and has implemented an ongoing Client Feedback system, as a means of identifying its clients' needs as well as fostering and improving its client service delivery.

The Court has also maintained its *Ad Hoc Committee*. As a result of its initiatives:

- the filing of certain documents in civil actions have been eliminated;
- a trial has commenced for the direct input of results from the courtroom to the computer database;
- the retention period for exhibits and subpoenaed documents has been shortened; and
- the duplicate recording of information in the Judges' Notebooks have been eliminated.

GRAPH 1

District Court – Criminal Matters On Hand



Other achievements for the court include:

- developing a criminal exhibits database, as well as a criminal listing database; and
- developing a pilot program for the electronic lodgement of documents.

The Year Ahead

The key priorities for the District Court for the coming year are to:

- lead the review process which has already commenced into criminal listing practices, with the aim of reducing waiting time and improving hearing date certainty;
- closely monitor the situation developing in the civil jurisdiction where there has been a growing increase in the number of new registrations;
- continue to review customer service delivery by implementing quality management principles, in line with the outcomes of the feedback received from our clients; and
- maintain the joint working party reviewing the Local Court GLC system, with the view for its common use within the criminal jurisdictions of both the District Court and Local Court on a State-wide basis.

Industrial Relations Commission

The Industrial Relations Commission (IRC) has a broad range of powers in industrial matters,

including the settlement of industrial disputes, the making of awards, setting wages and conditions, the hearing of matters arising from Occupational Health and Safety legislation, and the hearing of claims relating to dismissal from employment.

Goal: Promote the earliest, most effective and efficient resolution of criminal matters and civil disputes.

The Industrial Registry files matters to be dealt with by the Industrial Relations Commission, the Industrial Relations Commission in Court Session, the Chief Industrial Magistrate and the Industrial Registrar. This year, the overall number of matters filed in the Registry decreased 0.6 per cent this year, with 6,789 matters filed compared to 6,828 in 1998–99.

Applications for relief from alleged unfair dismissal decreased this year, reflecting the impact of changes to regulations which restricted categories of applicants and an increased awareness within the industrial relations community about the legislation. As a consequence, the number of unfair dismissal claims that were resolved fell 26.6 per cent this year to 3,518.

The median time for resolution of disputes increased 7.3 per cent to 133 days, compared with 124 days in 1998–99. Industrial disputes continued to retain a priority in the matters coming before the Commission. These matters are usually urgent and require an almost immediate response from the Commission, as the impact of an industrial dispute upon the public can be severe.

Goal: Continuously improve our services and increase satisfaction among our diverse clients.

The IRC introduced changes to procedures for dealing with unfair contracts during the year. The aim of these changes is to reduce the period of time from lodgement to conciliation and simplify the requirements for the filing of evidence to reduce costs and time. Similarly, changes to practices in unfair dismissal cases, including changes to the method of allocation of matters, were introduced as a trial to ascertain whether waiting times can be further reduced. The procedures include a new application form, drafted in such a matter as to avoid common problems experienced by applicants and the



Anthony Flemming, Lydia d'Souza and Lisa Gava from the Industrial Relations Commission. The Commission's premises have been extensively refurbished, allowing lodgement of process before the Industrial Relations Commission and the Commission in Court Session at the same counter area.

Commission. An opportunity for filing a defence is included, aimed at narrowing the issues prior to mandatory conciliation.

The Commission's premises have been extensively refurbished, allowing lodgement of process before the Industrial Relations Commission and the Commission in Court Session at the same counter area. Other improvements to accommodation and facilities include:

- installing telephone systems to facilitate access to interpreters;
- building three private interview rooms;
- modifying access to all levels of the Commission's premises to improve access for persons with disabilities; and
- relocating the court of the Chief Industrial Magistrate to the Downing Centre.

There has been greater use of technology by the IRC this year to facilitate the publication of the *Industrial Gazette* and the earlier dissemination of important industrial information, such as variations to rates of pay and conditions of employment. A specific software application has also been developed to allow awards to be filed in electronic format.

The IRC's Users Groups continued to meet regularly during the year to discuss procedural reforms relating to unfair dismissal applications, unfair contracts, Occupational Health and Safety prosecutions, appeals and the evidence of expert witnesses. The groups are broad based and representative of the industrial community. It was particularly intended that the cross-section of the industrial community invited to attend was as widely drawn as possible. This approach has already resulted in the implementation of procedural reform relating to unfair contracts and unfair dismissals.

The process of integrating the infrastructure of the former Industrial Relations Court with that of the Industrial Relations Commission has been finalised, with staff from both Registries co-located and a single counter area now accepting process for all purposes of the *Industrial Relations Act 1996*. The finalisation of the restructure of the two organisations into a single unit has been substantially completed.

The Year Ahead

The key priorities for the Industrial Relations Commission in the coming year are to:

- reduce delays;
- continue to improve the Registry's computer systems to improve the effectiveness of case management and improve the accuracy of statistical data;
- provide all judgments in median neutral citation; and
- review settlement procedures to ensure that industrial information is available to the industrial community as quickly as possible.

Land and Environment Court

The Land and Environment Court has an appellate and a review jurisdiction in relation to planning, building and environmental matters. Jurisdiction is exercised by reference to the nature of the subject matter of the application. This may involve matters that have an impact on community interest as well as matters of Government policy.

Goal: Promote the earliest, most effective and efficient resolution of criminal matters and civil disputes.

The Land and Environment Court maintained its proactive role in case management during the year, streamlining the progress of cases.

Nevertheless, at the end of the financial year, there were 1,367 matters on hand, compared to 1,349 for the previous year.

This year, 79 per cent of matters falling within the classes one, two and three of the Court's jurisdiction were disposed of within six months. This falls short of the Court's time standard to dispose of 95 per cent of these matters within six months. In the Court's criminal jurisdiction, 87 per cent of prosecutions were completed within eight months.

With the permanent appointment of a sixth judge to the Court, the judicial officers have been able to concentrate on the civil remedies, judicial review and summary prosecution areas of the Court's jurisdiction. This has resulted in a decrease in matters on hand in these areas.

Goal: Continuously improve our services and increase satisfaction among our diverse clients.

A new file tracking and management system was implemented at the Land and Environment Court during the year which has incorporated existing "stand alone" databases. This has improved client services by streamlining listing and diary functions, facilitating records for research and statistical purposes, and improving the efficiency of data entry.

A pilot program for the electronic filing of documents is underway. The primary objective of the pilot is to remove the requirement for solicitors to physically lodge documents with the Court and for the Court to dispense with, as far as possible, the requirement to keep a hard copy of the file of court documents.

The Year Ahead

The key priorities for the Land and Environment Court for the coming year are to:

- improve client service;
- reduce the number of matters on hand particularly in classes one and three of the Court's jurisdiction;

- encourage the use of conciliation conferences as well as mediation as a means of dispute resolution;
- encourage the use of video conferencing, particularly from remote locations; and
- expand on electronic document filing and interchange from the initial pilot program to not only include the receipt of documents electronically, but to be able to have them made available at hearings by way of computer terminal.

Local Courts

Local Courts serve as the court of general access in NSW. More than 90 per cent of people who ever have to attend a court in NSW attend a local court.

Goal: Promote the earliest, most effective and efficient resolution of criminal matters and civil disputes.

The criminal caseload for Local Courts has been increasing steadily over recent years. This year, there were 266,769 new matters, an increase of 0.27 per cent and 267,368 finalised matters, an increase of 0.32 per cent. The State-wide median waiting time to list a defended matter was 14 weeks, compared to 13 weeks over the last three years.

There has been a decline in workload in the civil claims jurisdiction once again this year. This has been a continuing trend since 1995–96, with a

[Ian Peebles, Acting as Chamber Magistrate, interviews members of the public seeking information about matters such as domestic violence, debt recovery, dividing fences and rehearings of criminal matters.](#)





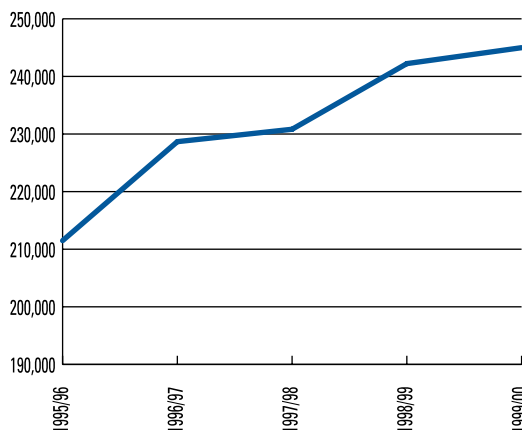
total reduction of 24 per cent of matters finalised in the Small Claims Division and 29 per cent in the General Division since that time. The lower number of matters proceeding to hearing reflects improved case management and the use of diversionary procedures for civil claims, such as providing the parties with access to specialist assessors.

The overall decline in civil claims lodgements was not evenly distributed across the State, with the volume of lodgements at the larger metropolitan registries (and related processing time) remaining high. Significant backlogs for processing of civil claims matters have been experienced at the Downing Centre Civil Claims Registry. In response to this problem, a Quality Team this year trialed a “transportability of work” project which involved sending Downing Centre processing work to a number of other, low volume courts across the State. This project has been very successful and has almost eliminated the backlog. This practice will be extended to other high volume courts.

A joint Local Courts/Community Justice Centres *Memorandum of Understanding* is designed to increase the number of personal violence and small claims matters which are referred to Community Justice Centres for alternate dispute resolution. This will help to ensure that the members of the public are aware of and can access the most appropriate option to resolve their particular dispute. This should also have a positive impact on court waiting times over the longer term.

GRAPH 2

Local Courts – New Criminal Matters



Goal: Continuously improve our services and increase satisfaction among our diverse clients.

A number of initiatives have been implemented during the year in Local Courts across the State to improve services for current and potential clients. As part of this process, Local Courts conducted their second State-wide client survey. This provided baseline client satisfaction data and highlighted priority areas for client service improvements to be incorporated into business planning and the development of client service projects.

Overall satisfaction ratings showed a “good” outcome (options were *poor, acceptable, good and very good*), with higher rankings for those areas related to staff performance such as the quality of service and assistance from staff. Results confirm the need to focus future efforts on areas such as signage, court safety and security, facilities at court (particularly for clients with special needs such as parents of young children and people with a disability) and the quality and availability of information to assist people to understand court process and procedures.

The majority of medium-large Local Courts also now run Court User forums which involve other agencies and individuals in examining ways that court operations and interagency processes and procedures can be streamlined to provide more efficient and effective services. Court User Forums also provide a venue where specific issues such as improved court safety and security or court support to vulnerable clients can be discussed and service improvement strategies developed.

There has been a further expansion in outreach services provided by Local Courts. These involve a regular timetable of visits by court staff to isolated or remote communities or to venues other than the court. These services are designed to meet the needs of clients who face barriers in directly accessing the Local Court.

State-wide Audits of all courts were conducted last year to identify the physical barriers for people with a disability who need to access the Local Court. A number of Local Courts are now participating in a *Flexible Service Delivery* project to trial a range of service delivery initiatives to ensure that our services are more accessible and responsive to the needs of clients with a physical, intellectual or psychiatric disability.

The *Client Service Training Program* has continued into its second year and has been well received by staff. This program focuses on communication skills, conflict resolution and effective complaint management. Evaluations have indicated that staff who have attended believe they have a greater capacity to deal with the often complex interactions which can occur in courts. Staff have also reported that the program has helped them to more clearly define areas of service delivery where they would benefit from additional information and skills development. As a result, many Local Courts staff have accessed a range of specialist client service training, focusing on areas such as cross cultural communication, working in teams, and strategies for improving service delivery to Aboriginal communities and clients with an intellectual disability.

Domestic Violence standards have been written and will be implemented this year following a State-wide training program for staff. The standards are designed to ensure that victims of violence are aware of their rights and the services available at Local Courts to assist them in obtaining appropriate protection and support services. Local Courts consulted extensively with domestic violence service providers and client advocates in the development of the *Domestic Violence Standards and Guidelines*. This process has helped to clarify roles and responsibilities and promoted a collaborative approach to service improvement.

Local Courts have conducted a number of pilots during the year to expand the use of telephone services to access legal information and assistance from a Chamber Magistrate or other court staff. The trials were conducted at a number of high volume courts in the metropolitan area. Following the success of the trials, telephone access will be expanded to all courts where there is a significant demand for Chamber Magistrate services. This should reduce waiting times and improve services for clients still needing to attend in person (for example domestic violence complainants), and it is also expected to improve access for residents in remote and isolated areas.

A number of working parties have been formed to implement the recommendations from the Chamber Review conducted last year. One of

these teams will build on the success of the telephone Chamber Service by examining strategies which will improve intake, assessment and appointment processes so as to manage demand more effectively in metropolitan areas. Another group is developing client service standards for Chamber services to ensure the public is aware of the type, extent and quality of services which they can expect. Another team is looking at mechanisms which will formalise and enhance the level of professional support to staff in rural areas.

Local Courts and the District Court collaborated on a trial project to identify the best model for integrating Local and District Court registries. The project aim is to provide a more coordinated and efficient service to the public, and to provide staff with enhanced career development and career satisfaction opportunities. Following the trial of different models at a number of locations a preferred model has been identified and will be progressively implemented across the registries.

The Year Ahead

The key priorities for Local Courts for the coming year are to:

- convene a peak stakeholders group to examine priority service delivery and communication issues;
- work with key stakeholders and staff to develop a Court Charter which will clarify the rights of court users;
- develop consultation, communication and client service improvement strategies to be further incorporated in all Regional and Local Action Plans to ensure that service delivery is responsive to local needs and reflects community resources;
- conduct State-wide interagency workshops about the new Domestic Violence Standards to ensure that staff have the skills and knowledge to effectively work with other agencies to implement these standards;
- continue to work at the corporate, regional and local levels to develop more effective partnerships with the Magistracy;
- develop strategic alliances with key agencies and business centres to improve the



integration and effectiveness of work processes and service delivery; and

- provide management development training on flexible service delivery to enhance the ability of supervisory and management staff to implement or support their staff to implement new client service initiatives.

Supreme Court

Goal: Promote the earliest, most effective and efficient resolution of criminal matters and civil disputes.

On 31 January 2000, the Chief Justice announced time standards for completion of criminal trials, and civil and criminal appeals, as part of a package of reforms to ensure that litigation is conducted as efficiently and expeditiously as possible.

The first reports of performance against these standards will be for the calendar year 2000. The Chief Justice has noted that these standards can only be attained by cooperation between the legal profession and the judiciary, and that measurement of performance against these standards measures the delivery of justice, not just by the Court, but by all those associated, separately but inter-dependently, with the process of litigation. The Registry's contribution will be to provide administration support to the Court to allow it to provide just, quick and cheap resolution of cases for litigants and the community, and to measure outcomes.

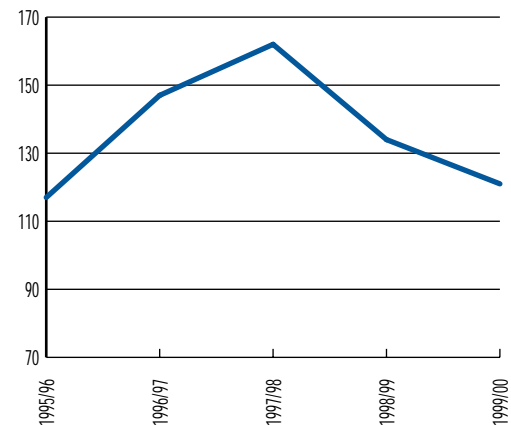
Time standards for civil cases will be announced when the Court's computer-based case management systems are enhanced to provide the required monitoring and measurement for the thousands of civil cases filed each year. The Department is providing ongoing assistance to the Court in the technical development of the required systems for this work.

This year, median waiting times for criminal trials have been reduced for cases where the accused is in custody and have reduced for cases where the accused is on bail. For cases in the court of Criminal Appeals, there has also been a reduction in the time from when parties are ready to proceed until hearing. This is despite an increase in lodgements.

The Court has previously reported on waiting

GRAPH 3

Supreme Court – Criminal Matters On Hand



times for civil cases to be heard once case management is completed. The significant improvements made over the last two years for civil cases have been maintained and apply to all matters, regardless of the length or complexity of the case. For all cases, once ready to proceed to hearing, the time taken for a hearing date to be allocated is less than two months.

Waiting times for cases in the Equity Division vary according to the type of case and length of hearing, but have generally improved over the last year. As at June 2000, waiting times for general Equity matters prepared for hearing was between nine and 10 months, compared with 12 and 14 months at June 1999.

There have been continued improvements in the waiting times for cases in the Court of Appeal. Delays for standard appeals was 14 months as at June 2000. For shorter appeals the delay was six months and for long appeals the delay was 17 months.

The Registry will assist the judiciary with strategic planning to improve waiting times in all areas of the Supreme Court in the coming year.

The Court and its Registry continue to promote the use of court-annexed mediation, as well as providing external facilities for mediation and early neutral evaluation. The promotion of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) forms a routine part of case management that aims to assist litigants to achieve earlier resolution of their dispute, with greater flexibility in outcomes and at less cost than a fully litigated court case. ADR is incorporated into case management

options, especially for suitable equity, commercial, professional negligence, possession and contentious probate cases. Six of the Court's Registrars are trained in mediation techniques. The use of arbitration was extended to equity proceedings during the year through legislation so that suitable matters can take advantage of this faster and cheaper form of dispute resolution.

Goal: Continuously improve our services and increase satisfaction among our diverse clients.

Over 19,000 probate applications were lodged with the Court this year. Grants were generally made within two days of receipt and fully prepared and posted within a further four days. This high level of service compares very favourably with similar jurisdictions in Australia and overseas and has been maintained for 11 years. This work involving wills and estates is the most common form of interaction between the general community and the Supreme Court.

The Registry surveyed people attending the Court during July 1999 to establish the needs of its clients and to help determine priorities for improvement programs for Registry services and Court facilities. The results of the survey will serve as a benchmark against which the results of future surveys can be compared. While the 1999 survey showed a reasonable level of public satisfaction with services and facilities, it also identified information leaflets, promotion of language services and provision of facilities for babies, parents and small children as the main areas for improvement. The survey also revealed significant support among Registry users for electronic Registry services and a later closing time.

The first steps towards establishing a Registry Users' Group were taken this year to enable consultation with and participation of internal and external clients to assist in strategic planning of Registry services. Nominations have been sought from and provided by the professional associations whose members comprise the majority of Registry users for membership of the Registry Users Group.

The *Technology in the Courtroom Project* was launched during the year. This pilot project implements commercially available technologies in a courtroom environment. These include video link facilities, computerised document

management, in-court Internet access and transcript production via remote monitoring of proceedings (in conjunction with Reporting Services Branch). The pilot is expected to continue into 2001–02 following an evaluation report.

The Year Ahead

The key priorities of the Supreme Court for the coming year are to:

- complete the Supreme Court Registry staff restructure and establish performance plans that are linked to the Registry's Business Plan;
- progress the development of computerised management reporting systems and subsequent determination of time standards for civil cases;
- progress development of policies and strategies for introduction of electronic document lodgement;
- implement the Registry communication plan; and
- complete the Registry refurbishment.

The Technology in the Courtroom Project was launched this year to implement commercially available technologies in a courtroom environment. These include video link facilities, computerised document management, in-court Internet access and transcript production via remote monitoring of proceedings.

