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Historical role of JPs in justice administration continues

The historical and contemporary work undertaken by Justices of the Peace (JPs) to support the administration of justice in Queensland has been highlighted at a conference in Bundaberg.

Queensland Supreme Court Judge and outgoing President of the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal (QCAT) Justice Alan Wilson said JPs in Queensland had an important practical role within the community, continuing a tradition of carrying out a wide range of administrative duties including some judicial functions.

In his keynote address to the Queensland Justices Association annual State Conference in Bundaberg today, Justice Wilson said JPs had a long and honourable history tracing back seven centuries, when they were first called “keepers” of the peace, and their role had not diminished since then.

“The work of their forebears was based on the view that decent members of the community, who were not lawyers, should be able to administer justice and be given the power to do so,” he said.

“While that role diminished somewhat in the years since then, their importance is once again under the spotlight with JPs now involved in helping settle civil disputes as part of a trial program initiated by the Queensland Government.”

Justice Wilson said JPs taking part in QCAT’s Justice of the Peace Pilot Program was seeing them hear and decide large numbers of civil matters within QCAT’s largest jurisdiction, minor civil disputes.

“The success of the six-month trial program since its launch in June is an exciting expansion for the role of JPs that has seen more than 1000 matters dealt with by those sitting on two-person panels hearing disputes up to \$5000,” he said.

“There are now 110 JPs appointed to the trial who have been hearing up to five minor civil disputes a day in Brisbane, Southport, Maroochydore, Townsville and Ipswich.

“These hearings cover a wide range of minor civil disputes coming before QCAT including disagreements over rent and other residential tenancy matters, claims about damage arising from motor vehicle accidents, repairs for motor vehicle defects, disputes related to fences, minor debts, consumer and trade issues.

“It’s an innovative program that’s helping deliver dispute resolution services throughout Queensland while also recognising the significant, voluntary contributions JPs provide and giving them a chance to improve, develop and expand their role.

“The program also aims to reduce the time and costs associated with finalising minor civil dispute applications and help free up QCAT adjudicators, judicial registrars and magistrates who can then deal with more complex matters.”

He said the program was a major initiative building on QCAT's success to date in providing fair, quick, and informal dispute resolution services to the community and part of the Queensland Government's investment to revitalise front-line justice services in Queensland.

- **ENDS** -

Contact: T: 07 3234 0597 M: 0400 674 778 E: QCAT.mediaenquiries@justice.qld.gov.au.