

# Media Release

**Jaclyn Symes MLC**

Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Attorney-General

Minister for Emergency Services



Friday, 29 July 2022

## **KOORI COURT OFFICIALLY OPENS IN WODONGA**

North East Aboriginal Victorians will no longer have to travel hours outside their community to access culturally appropriate justice, with the official opening of the Wodonga Koori Court.

Attorney-General Jaclyn Symes opened the Court today – the fourteenth of its kind in Victoria. It will mean locals from Wodonga and surrounding area will no longer need to travel to Shepparton, Melbourne or other locations to access Koori Courts.

Koori Courts involve Aboriginal Elders and Respected Persons in the court process and seek to avoid the process being intimidating and alienating. An Elder or Respected Person provides cultural advice to the magistrate and encourages the accused to reflect on the experiences that led to their court appearance.

This means people appearing before the court can discuss underlying issues that contribute to their offending behaviour in a culturally sensitive forum.

The environment within a Koori Court is less formal than other courts, with the accused, their families, Aboriginal Elders or Respected Persons, and Koori Court Officers able to contribute directly to the discussion.

Koori Court magistrates sentence offenders in accordance with the same requirements that apply in other Victorian courts.

To appear before the Koori Court, a person must be of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, plead guilty, and consent to having the case heard in the Koori Court.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the Victorian Koori Courts, which were first established as a division of the Magistrates' Court in 2002. As an initiative of the Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement, Koori Courts contribute to efforts to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal people in the criminal justice system.

More than 70 Aboriginal Elders and Respected Persons are involved with Koori Courts. The courts also employ around 15 Koori Court Officers, making a significant contribution to the employment of Aboriginal staff across Court Services Victoria.

### **Quotes attributable to Attorney-General Jaclyn Symes**

*"In the 20 years they have been around, Koori Courts have played a major role in delivering better outcomes for Aboriginal people and have improved engagement with local Aboriginal communities."*

*"It's fantastic to see the Koori Court model being rolled out in Wodonga – it will be a huge benefit to Aboriginal Victorians in the North East."*