

Queensland drug court could return, with alcohol also in the mix



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The Palaszczuk government is looking to reinstate the drug court in Queensland and considering whether to extend it to people whose offending is related to alcohol use.

In 2012, [the Newman government stopped funding](#) the Murri, special circumstances and drug courts, saving \$35.7 million over four years.



The Queensland government is considering whether to extend a revamped drug court to alcohol-related offenders. Photo: iStock

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At the time, community legal groups such as the Queensland Law Society and Sisters Inside [decried the move](#).

But then-attorney-general Jarrod Bleijie said the decisions were not

easy but were necessary to return Queensland to a stronger fiscal position.

Fairfax Media can reveal the government is considering whether a new-look drug court would accept offenders with alcohol problems.

The Department of Justice and Attorney-General has recently finalised work on a review to support the reinstatement of the drug court in Queensland.



Former Attorney-General Jarrod Bleijie defended the closures in 2012. Photo: Glenn Hunt

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"One of the many options considered as part of the review was the acceptance onto the drug court program of offenders whose offending is primarily linked to their alcohol use rather than their illicit drug use, consistent with drug court programs operating in jurisdictions such as Victoria and New Zealand," a department spokesman said.

The government recently advertised a tender for "alcohol monitoring equipment".

It stated the department was considering introducing systems to support alcohol monitoring for some court-mandated clients but that the program was still subject to funding approval.

The spokesman said the QTenders document was a request for information, seeking details about manufacturers and costs to inform options to be considered by the government.

"A procurement process would only be undertaken if the government decides this should form part of a future Queensland program," the spokesman said.

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Before the drug court was scrapped under the Newman government, it only referred clients with illicit drug use, not those with alcohol-related offending.

The drug court aimed to help offenders in Queensland overcome their drug dependence and criminal behaviour with supervised rehabilitation.

The Palaszczuk government reintroduced the Murri courts in 2016, following an election commitment to reinstate specialist courts and diversionary programs.

Fairfax Media asked for a copy of the Queensland Courts review into the reinstatement of the drug court but was told it was still under consideration.

Community Legal Centres Queensland director James Farrell said he "absolutely" supported the reintroduction of the drug court.

"It's important that we recognise the cause and not only the consequences of criminal offending," Mr Farrell said.

"It's clear the policy makers and the criminal justice system are focusing on individuals and the causes of their offending by addressing the underlying causes rather than taking a punitive approach.

"Evidence shows the community will be more safe."

Mr Farrell said reintroducing the drug court was an election commitment but the government should be commended for taking its time and using an evidence-based model to redesign the court to make sure it was effective.

Queensland Law Society immediate past president Bill Potts said many people who came before the courts had poly-substance abuse including alcohol, and he supported extending the eligibility to include alcohol.

"Addictive behaviour across all forms needs to be treated if the court is to achieve its purpose, which is not merely punishment but to deal with issues causing criminality," Mr Potts said.

"Very rarely do people present with one type of addiction.

"...To exclude one half of the problem seems to be short-sighted."

Mr Potts said when the drug court was first introduced it only dealt with a narrow range of drug users, was expensive, time consuming and had limited success.

"What we need is a drug court that actually deals with more people, but is rehabilitation-heavy, rather than using the court as a weekly monitoring factory, which it was before," he said.

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