



Regional Criminal Jury Trials

STATEMENT FROM THE CHIEF JUSTICE OF THE SUPREME COURT AND CHIEF JUDGE OF THE COUNTY COURT

Friday, 19 March, 2021

The Supreme Court and the County Court (the Courts) are pleased to announce that criminal jury trials will progressively resume in regional courts across Victoria in the coming months.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, regional courts have remained open. Numerous regional Supreme and County Court pre-trial hearings, pleas, and appeals were conducted using remote technology. This enabled the regional work of the Supreme and County Courts to continue, while minimising the number of people in court buildings in line with public health restrictions, and giving priority to Magistrates' Court matters that required in-person hearings.

Following an assessment of all regional court locations where Supreme and County Court matters are held, to determine capacity to hold criminal jury trials under COVID-safe conditions, works are now underway at the following locations:

- Geelong
- Ballarat
- Shepparton
- La Trobe Valley (Morwell)
- Warrnambool

Works will also commence shortly in Mildura and Wodonga.

These works will enable jurors and other participants in criminal trials to be physically distanced, by extending jury boxes and moving the location of existing furniture. The Courts will apply similar processes employed in the COVID-safe resumption of criminal jury trials in Melbourne, adapted to local conditions.

The plans ensure public health requirements are met while addressing the needs of regional communities in accessing all Victorian courts.

The Courts have already begun to resume in-person hearings in non-jury criminal and civil matters in several regional court locations where Supreme and County court matters are heard.

The process of listing individual cases is ongoing and the Courts will be engaging with the profession and other court users as arrangements are finalised at each location.

Quotes from Chief Justice Anne Ferguson and Chief Judge Peter Kidd:

"We are so pleased to be able to return to regional courts for the conduct of criminal jury trials and other matters."

"Our Courts serve the whole of the State and it is important to us to return to sitting in as many regional courts as possible, as soon as we can, consistent with COVID-Safe practices."

"We thank all of those who are helping to make this possible and thank regional communities for their patience as the work rolls out."

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