



Brad Hazzard MP

Attorney General Minister for Justice

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FUNDING BOOST ENSURES TRIALS GO AHEAD

Attorney General Brad Hazzard has welcomed the Federal Government's response to State Government calls for additional funds for lengthy and expensive Commonwealth criminal cases.

"The Federal Government has heard the message from the State Government and the legal profession and provided an extra \$5.2 million nationwide for legal aid," Mr Hazzard said.

"This will ensure these lengthy and expensive Commonwealth criminal cases underway or imminently underway will be funded for this financial year.

"Last night, the Board of Legal Aid NSW reversed policy changes it had reluctantly made last December after funding for these Commonwealth criminal matters had been exhausted for the current financial year.

"This means trials on Commonwealth criminal matters such as people trafficking, child pornography, drug importation and terrorism can now go ahead with legal representation," Mr Hazzard said.

If defendants had not been provided with legal representation it was anticipated that the District Court would have refused to proceed with the trials, in line with the High Court decision in Dietrich.

"Staying these trials would have caused additional trauma for victims and dozens of accused people being housed indefinitely, at huge cost, in NSW correctional centres," Mr Hazzard said.

"The Federal Attorney General George Brandis has ensured that the problems for NSW have been recognised and interim measures taken to ensure the wheels of justice continue to turn.

"Our state courts and our hard working judges can now get on with the job and ensure that important prosecutions brought by the police and Federal agencies can be dealt with in an appropriate way.

"NSW is extremely grateful for the assistance of the Federal Attorney General but it is now necessary that serious discussions take place with the Commonwealth Government to ensure that the worth of the legal aid system is recognised and funding is guaranteed into the future," Mr Hazzard said.

"A stop-start funding regime is not in the interests of the justice system."