

The Crime Research Centre at the University of Western Australia today released its report on Crime and Justice Statistics for Western Australia: 1998.

The report comments on and details: general crime trends; differences in rates of crime in different parts of Perth and Western Australia; trends in arrests and other police and court activities. One feature that emerges from the analysis of the data concerns driving offences. These offences constituted 39% of offences dealt with in the Court of Petty Sessions. The single largest group of driving offences concerned driving under suspension. As the report notes:

The implementation of the Fines Enforcement scheme appears to be having a significant impact throughout the entire criminal justice system in WA. When introduced in 1995, the scheme's aims were to increase the proportion of fines paid, minimise enforcement actions and ensure that fine defaulters did not go to prison. Although some of these aims were achieved, such as increased compliance and the diversion of fine-defaulters from prison, there is now a growing body of evidence to show that some of these effects were short-lived and that other, possibly unforeseen, effects are placing the criminal justice system under considerable pressure.

For example, fine defaulters are now 'reappearing' in prison reception statistics. In 1996, there were only 175 prison receptions for fine default. However, in 1997, this number almost doubled to 334 receptions and, by 1998, receptions for fine default increased to 509 cases. In the community corrections sector, fine defaulters have also impacted on work and developments orders (WDOs). The number of

WDOs served on offenders in 1998 (2,880 orders) was more than double those served in 1997 (1,311), and of these, most were served on Aboriginal offenders.

The Director of the Crime Research Centre, Professor Richard Harding, stated:

This Report is something of a landmark, being the tenth occasion upon which the Centre has published its annual Crime and Justice Statistics Report. When the Centre was established in 1989, it was agreed that one of its core tasks would be to bring together, collate, analyse and publish annually the disparate crime and justice statistics available in Western Australia. This enables long-term trends to be identified and should serve to enhance the quality of debate and decision-making about criminal justice policy matters generally.