
Executive Summary

This publication presents statistics on criminal matters dealt with by the Victorian Higher (Supreme and County) Courts for the five years from 2001/02 to 2005/06. Statistics on caseflow, types of matters finalised in the Higher Courts, sentences imposed and lengths of sentences imposed are included in this publication. Chapter 8 presents more detailed statistics on 35 individual offence types. This chapter assumes a degree of technical expertise on the part of the reader. Readers are advised that any interpretation of these statistics must take into account a number of issues relating to the way these statistics have been collected and compiled. These issues are set out in the introduction and appendix A.

The main features in the Higher Court case flows over the five years were:

- The total number of committal hearings in the Magistrates' Court increased by 16% over the period, as did the number of defendants who were committed to the County and Supreme Courts, from 2,299 defendants in 2001/02 to 2,671 in 2005/06.
- The proportion of defendants who reserved their plea increases from 34% to 39%, those who pleaded not guilty remained stable at between 22% of defendants in 2001/0 to 24% in 2005/06, while the proportion of guilty pleas fell from 44% to 37%.
- The total number of defendants sentenced increased by 14% over the period, from 1,759 in 2001/02 to 2,012 in 2005/06. Just over 95% of defendants were sentenced in the County Court, and 5% in the Supreme Court.
- The number of female defendants decreased in 2005/06 to the lowest number in the five years with 208, whilst the proportion of male and female defendants sentenced remained stable over the period, with male defendants accounting for approximately 87% of defendants.
- The number of defendants aged 40 to 59 increased over the period by 37.5%.

The main features in the type of matters sentenced in the Higher Courts over the five years were:

- Over half the defendants who were sentenced in the Higher Courts had a principal proven offence that was an offence against the person. In the Supreme Court this group accounted for over 80% of all sentenced defendants, while in the County Court over 47% of defendants were sentenced for an offence against the person.

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- The number of assault and cultivate, manufacture and trafficking a drug a dependence offences increased over the five years. In 2001/02 there were 358 defendants sentenced for assault and 178 for cultivating, manufacturing and trafficking a drug of dependence in the Higher Courts, compared with 419 and 320 respectively in 2005/06. This represents an increase of 17% for assault and 80% for the drugs offences.
 - The number of robbery offences decreased over the five years. In 2001/02 there were 403 defendants sentenced for robbery compared with 225 in 2005/06. This represents a decrease of 44%.

The main features in the type of sentences imposed in the Higher Courts over the five years were:

- Overall, the number of defendants sentenced to imprisonment increased from 758 in 2001/02 to 892 in 2005/06, an increase of 9%.
- A term of imprisonment was imposed in 39% to 45% of matters sentenced in the County Court, and in 73% to 83% of matters sentenced in the Supreme Court.
- The proportion of defendants who received a suspended sentence increased in the County Court from 29% in 2001/02 to 34% in 2005/06. In the Supreme Court suspended sentences increased in the four years to 2004/05 before decreasing to the lowest proportion over the period in 2005/06 with 7%.
- The proportion of defendants sentenced to a community based order remained stable in the range of 9% to 11%.

The main features of the lengths of imprisonment sentences imposed over the period were:

- The average period of imprisonment increased for:
 - rape offences from 48 months in 2001/02, to 59 months in 2005/06, a 23% increase;
 - homicide offences from 117 months in 2001/02, to 142 months in 2005/06, a 21% increase; and
 - Abduction/kidnapping offences from 28 months in 2001/02 to 40 months in 2005/06, a 43% increase.
- The average period of imprisonment remained stable for:
 - sex (non rape) offences at between 33 and 38 months; and
 - Assault offences at between 28 and 31 months.