Queensland moves closer to a fairer justice system

The Queensland Government has put together a working party to consider possible solutions to correcting wrongful convictions in the State, following consultation between State Attorney General Mr Kerry Shine and members of the Griffith University Innocence Project.

The group which includes high ranking members of the Attorney General's office, the Health Department and the office of the Commissioner of Police will make recommendations to consider retention, testing and access to DNA product and the secondary appeal process.

The Attorney General, who referred convicted child killer Graham Stafford's second petition for pardon to the Court of Appeal last week, established the group after calls by the Innocence Project for an overhaul of policies and procedures for DNA evidence in this state.

Innocence Project co-founder and prominent defence lawyer Chris Nyst said DNA could play an important role in the justice process.

"It’s clear from international studies and developments DNA evidence can be a most valuable tool in exposing and correcting wrongful convictions," Mr Nyst said.

“Already 215 exonerations have occurred in the United States through DNA innocence testing.

"However, there needs to be checks and balances put in place to ensure use of DNA in criminal proceedings in this State is transparent and that DNA innocence testing is available in cases where it can demonstrate a wrongful conviction."

The decision by the State Government to consider implementing policies and procedures for the post-conviction review of DNA-based wrongful conviction cases could make Queensland the leading State in Australia in relation to the use of DNA evidence, Mr Nyst said.

Innocence Project Director Lynne Weathered said the working party was a positive step in improving Australia's justice system.

"To date Australia has been lagging behind the rest of the western world in relation to this issue but the establishment of the working party shows a mature and appropriate response by the Attorney General," Ms Weathered said.

"There is no reason to deny DNA innocence testing that could show a wrongful conviction."

"No one wins by having the wrong person in prison."

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