MEDIA RELEASE

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REFORM OF FORUM SENTENCING

The Government is reforming the Forum Sentencing program to increase victim participation, Attorney General Greg Smith SC announced today.

Forum Sentencing brings together offenders, victims and others affected by a crime with a facilitator to discuss what happened and the harm caused by the offence and to devise an ‘intervention plan’ for the offender.

A report by the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, released today, backed up its earlier finding that there was a lack of evidence showing that participation in Forum Sentencing reduces reoffending.

“This government is committed to programs which help offenders go straight and reduce the likelihood of them committing further crimes,” Mr Smith said.

“However, BOCSAR also found that victims of crime who participated in a forum usually found it a positive experience. The satisfaction of victims of crime with a just outcome is a worthwhile objective.”

The Department of Attorney General and Justice is currently changing the way the program will be run to boost victim participation. It is also proposing to broaden eligibility criteria to open up the program to people accused of minor offences.

Forum Sentencing will continue to be available in the current 13 centres across the state.

At the same time, program delivery will be centralised, freeing up resources to be redirected to two new programs – Youth on Track and Life on Track - which have a clear focus on reducing re-offending.

“Forum Sentencing was introduced by the former Government as a restorative justice initiative. We are returning to its original purpose,” Mr Smith said.

“This is a win-win outcome. The new operating model for Forum Sentencing allows the government to provide more benefits for victims of crime, while also delivering two new programs targeting reoffending behaviour.”

Details remain to be finalised, but the changes are expected to take effect from early 2014. Consultation with affected staff and union representatives are ongoing.