



## **Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service Co-operative Ltd.**

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### **Media Release**

## **Put Election sentencing promises on hold!**

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Who ever wins the State Election on Saturday has committed tax payers to dramatic increases in the number of people in prison.

“Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS) urges the major parties to agree to a moratorium on the introduction of all initiatives which will boost the number of people in jail or create longer sentences” said Frank Guivarra the CEO of VALS.

The moratorium should be called to allow for a parliamentary inquiry into the cost benefit of all these measures. In the heated environment of an election campaign there is little sober consideration of the real economic and social costs of longer jail terms.

The ALP contributed significantly to the boost in prison numbers before the election with its plan to abolish suspended sentencing. VALS very conservative estimate was that it would add \$50-60 million to expenditure on prisons with no reduction in the reoffending rate likely. Victorian Council of Social Services estimated that the change would add \$100 million.

The Liberals promise to match this and then go further. During the election campaign we have had new tougher penalties announced by the Liberals with the introduction of mandatory minimum sentences and the promise of anti social behaviour laws which again will have a spin off of more people being jailed for longer.

The ALP have added to the prison bill further with new tougher penalties for people carrying weapons.

“Tougher sentences have a negligible effect on crime rates and community safety. They are an expensive substitute for effective rehabilitation and prevention strategies” said Mr Guivarra.

The people we imprison are usually disproportionately the poor, early school leavers people with mentally illness and Aboriginal people.

Tougher laws introduced by both sides of politics over the last 15 years have fuelled a huge increase in our prison population. This election campaign promises to throw more resources in the same direction. It is about time to review this issue. A parliamentary committee provides an opportunity to reconsider the facts.

Further Comment contact Frank Guivarra CEO Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service