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### **MEDIA RELEASE**

#### **Victims Groups still barking up the wrong tree: Increasing Dependence on Prisons takes us back to Victorian times**

**9<sup>th</sup> October 2006**

VALS congratulated the State Government for opening new Koori courts but criticised the Government's harsh sentencing policies and pandering to victims groups who continue to lobby for harsher sentences.

Since the Bracks State Government was elected in 1999 the number of people in gaol has increased from around 3000 to over 4000.

The prison rate (number of adults in prison per 100,000 adults) has increases from 73.8 per 100,000 in 1999 to 94 in 2005. Victoria has not locked up its citizens at this rate since 1901. Some critics of the Government have accused them of being soft on crime.

The State Government continues to embrace harsher sentencing policies which have contributed to the huge increase in prison numbers, imprisonment rates and length of sentences which has occurred over two terms of the State Labour government. This continues a trend established during the Kennet Government years. In 1992 the rate of imprisonment was 50 people per 100,000 adults. (Source :Sentencing Advisory Council, 2006)

Not satisfied with the rapid growth in prison numbers and imprisonment rates and the Government abolition of suspended sentences victims groups are set to put a new ambit claim to the government.

Before they ague for still harsher sentencing policies the victims groups should take a look at the facts. Harsher sentencing does not reduce the number of victims or reduce crime rates. A harsher sentence is a 'feel good' policy for people who want someone else to 'feel bad' for longer. It is a return towards an old testament value set that believes in taking an eye for an eye. More compassionate people are interested in flexible sentencing, rehabilitation and crime prevention rather than harsher sentences.

Victims deserve to be heard but their calls for harsher sentences are a mistake. Harsher sentences are more expensive for all Victorians and they don't reduce the number of victims or the crime rate. Victims should be calling for flexibility in sentencing and crime prevention.