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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Put people first: Victim Support Service calls for 'victim focused' justice system

This week the Victim Support Service (VSS) released its response to the State Government's consultation paper, "*Transforming Criminal Justice: Putting People First*".

VSS Chief Executive Julian Roffe said that, for many victims, their needs and experiences are not well understood or met by criminal justice agencies.

"Our submission focuses on a range of reforms to improve how the rights of victims are upheld by the criminal justice system," Mr Roffe said.

"If victims feel part of the system, and are actively engaged in decision-making, they are more likely to feel that justice has been served".

"A key tension, flagged by the consultation paper, is how to provide justice through a more efficient process, but at the same time ensuring that all parties to the crime, including victims, are actively encouraged to have their say".

"Whilst we welcome the State Government's commitment to efficiency, we are concerned that efficiency considerations will be used as the overarching indicators of a more victim-focused criminal justice system when, in fact, victims' rights enshrined in legislation remain largely overlooked."

"We see this clearly with Victim Impact Statements. At present, no data is kept on how often they are presented by victims, which is an issue in itself, and what research there is suggests that they are received in only about 3% of cases in the Magistrates Court. The clear implication is that victim participation falls well short of what it could be".

Mr Roffe said that serious consideration should be given to procedural mechanisms that could better integrate and engage victims in the justice process.

"The right for victims to be consulted on conditions of bail, the prosecution process, and sentencing, under the declaration of principles governing the treatment of victims, must be strengthened. Failing to do so will only further isolate victims from the justice system".

The full submission is available at: <http://www.victimsa.org/files/transforming-criminal-justice--submission-to-agd-%28march-2015%29.pdf>

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