



MEDIA RELEASE

Hon. John Hatzistergos MLC
Attorney General
Minister for Industrial Relations

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CIRCLE SENTENCING PROGRAM TO EXPAND

NSW Attorney General John Hatzistergos today announced the Circle Sentencing program will be expanded.

Mr Hatzistergos said the program was now being rolled out to Nambucca, bringing the total number of locations where the Aboriginal justice program operates to 10.

As he travelled to Kempsey, on the Mid-North Coast, to observe a circle sentence taking place, Mr Hatzistergos also said the program was being adjusted to ensure it meets its key objective of reducing re-offending.

“Circle sentencing is an innovative program for Aboriginal offenders, which involves respected community members in the sentencing and rehabilitation process,” said Mr Hatzistergos.

“However, as we continue to roll it out across the State it is important that the program meets all the objectives it was set up to achieve.”

Last year an evaluation of the program by the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research found it had a limited impact on re-offending among participants.

Mr Hatzistergos said the program was now being adjusted to:

- Increase the number of offenders referred to the program by setting targets and monitoring each location.
- Improve follow up of offenders after sentencing by increasing access to rehabilitation and support to be provided by Corrective Service and Health departments.
- Improve training and support for elders involved in the circles.

Aboriginal Affairs Minister Paul Lynch said circle sentences are conducted in a less formal setting than conventional courts. Elders discuss the impact of the crime with the offender and help the magistrate to determine an appropriate sentence.

“While the sentences are generally similar in severity to those imposed by conventional courts, facing a panel of respected Elders can have a profound impact on Aboriginal offenders,” Mr Lynch said.

On Wednesday, a circle was convened in Kempsey to sentence a man charged with assault and malicious damage.

Local Duty MLC Kayee Griffin said she was delighted the program was being expanded on the Mid-North Coast.

“In the past year we have seen an increase in referrals to the Kempsey program which reflects the confidence the court and the local Aboriginal community have in the process,” said Ms Griffin.