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GOVERNMENT AGREES TO CROSS BORDER JUSTICE SCHEME

Attorney-General Michael Atkinson says the Government will establish a new agreement with the governments of Western Australia and the Northern Territory to address the complications of cross-border justice in our remote communities.

The agreement covers an area of the State that includes the A.P.Y. Lands, Western Australia's Ngaanyatjarra Lands and the central east and south of the Northern Territory.

The area comprises around 476,500 square kilometres and 7,900 people.

Mr Atkinson says the intention of the agreement through a **Cross-Border Justice Scheme** is to recognise the common cultural and social bonds and mobility of the traditional Aboriginal people in the region and to overcome the difficulties inherent in dealing with three different jurisdictions.

“Existing State and Commonwealth laws place some constraints on police in their pursuit, arrest, transport and charging of alleged offenders in the cross-border region,” Mr Atkinson says.

“Anecdotal reports from police suggest the investigation of many minor offences is not pursued owing to the expense and time obtaining an extradition warrant to a court authorised to hear the charge. If that is true then it is not in the interests of justice and needs to be addressed.”

When the Cross-Border Justice Scheme is in effect it will allow:

- Cross-border magistrates to deal with charges from all three jurisdictions;
- Police to take a person from one jurisdiction to another to conduct investigations and to take the person before a magistrate more expeditiously;
- Police to make arrests and investigate offences in the cross-border region;
- Correctional Services Officers to act on behalf of all correctional services in the region and provide for the enforcement of community-based orders; and
- Prisoners from the region to serve their sentences in any of the jurisdictions.

Mr Atkinson says he is confident that the communities in the cross-border region will see the benefit of the scheme.

“It will improve the response times in dealing with common offences in the region, such as domestic violence and substance abuse.

“It will also allow police to cross over State borders and bring offenders before the courts more quickly, which should give the community greater confidence in the justice system,” he says.