

COMMUNIQUE

Outcomes of Victoria and New South Wales Government Officials' Meeting on Cross-Border Issues

On Friday 17 August 2007, the New South Wales Chief Executives' Committee and the Victorian State Co-ordination and Management Council met in Albury. This is a unique meeting of the most senior public servants in the NSW and Victorian Governments to drive resolution of cross-border issues.

This is the second time this group has met. Progress since its meeting in June 2006 includes:

- the introduction of reciprocal policies for school enrolments across borders and development of protocols for the exchange of student information across borders;
- joint tourism promotion through the launch of the Brand Murray marketing campaign;
- border bridge strategy ensuring cooperation in the maintenance of border bridges and creation of new border crossings;
- signing of a Memorandum of Understanding on Management of Cross Border Emergency Pest and Disease Outbreaks;
- the resolution of matters relating to drug detection; and
- streamlining recognition of legal professional practice.

This meeting is part of a broader framework of intergovernmental forums through which States and Territories are working to address inconsistencies arising from the interaction of different jurisdictional regimes. Initiatives undertaken in these forums also help to address some of the long-standing concerns raised by those working and living on the border, including:

- Council for the Australian Federation (CAF) signed a declaration in February 2007 to enhance mutual recognition arrangements for 22 occupations in six priority trade areas, meaning people with trade qualifications will be able to move freely around Australia, without undergoing additional testing and registration processes.
- Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed to a single national scheme for the accreditation and registration of health professionals and to a national assessment process for International Medical Graduates to ensure appropriate standards in qualifications and training.
- CAF agreed to harmonise key areas of workers compensation and occupational health and safety schemes to reduce the paperwork for businesses operating across jurisdictions.
- CAF requested that work be undertaken by the end of 2007 on the feasibility of mutual recognition of drivers' licenses and vehicle registration by States and Territories.

Today's meeting was productive and informed by discussions with local representatives who raised common problems by communities and businesses along the border, including the need for:

Better integrated health service: The meeting noted the NSW and Victorian Governments' commitment to the establishment of an integrated health service in Albury-Wodonga. The legal status of the new entity (Health Albury Wodonga) has been

clarified together with the steps required to establish it in law. A transition plan has been prepared including proposals relating to the composition and appointment of the Board. A major services planning exercise is being commissioned for Health Albury Wodonga to recommend a configuration of services across both campuses post-integration. Agencies in both States have been asked to consult with the local community about the transition plan.

More consistent transport regulations: Different transport rules and arrangements affect those regularly crossing the border. The meeting agreed that work would be undertaken to reduce inconsistencies in approach to driver fatigue (subject to national reforms), load restraints (particularly for hay bales), transport of livestock and licensing of driving instructors.

Better coordinated policing: The meeting agreed that a NSW/Victoria Working Group will be established to develop and formalise arrangements for joint police patrols, joint police custody facilities on the border and to explore options for the development of joint policing facilities in border areas. The Working Group will also seek to formalise police diving search and recovery operations in the Murray River. NSW and Victoria will also explore bilateral options for improving the administration of justice in the extradition of offenders from border areas. This may include reference to the Ministerial Council for Police and Emergency Management- Police (MCPEMA) to address any national issues.

Closer collaboration on justice issues: The meeting endorsed work into the feasibility of cross-border sharing of offender programs and treatment services and noted that Victoria will adopt model legislation to allow for formal transfer of community based supervision orders (other than parole). The meeting also agreed that a more consistent approach nationally to the process for issuing extraterritorial warrants deserved consideration by Commonwealth, State and Territory Attorneys-General and recognising medical powers of attorney should be further considered by Commonwealth, State and Attorneys-General and Health Ministers. Progress has also been achieved on cross-border investigative powers, interstate fine enforcement and shared court facilities.

Better planning along the Murray: The meeting agreed to accelerate the current initiative between State planning authorities to develop a common regional land use approach, supported by actions under the NSW State Plan and a joint economic study via detailed consultation with local government and community leaders. The meeting expects to see a final report in mid-2008.

Cooperative work controlling fruit fly: NSW and Victoria have been instrumental in developing a national strategy to controlling fruit fly outbreaks. Given the significant increase in fruit fly outbreaks in the area surrounding Albury-Wodonga since 2002/03, NSW will consider a request from Victoria for a joint program in the Albury-Wodonga area to inform residents and surrounding horticulture industries how to better control fruit fly.

There was a commitment from the meeting to greater communication and feedback with local government representatives and Members of Parliament.

The Victorian State Co-ordination and Management Council and the New South Wales Chief Executives' Committee agreed to meet again in 12 months to review action and assess priorities for future action.