

Parliamentary Inquiry into strategies to prevent and reduce criminal activity in Queensland

Crime Inquiry 2014
Submission 036

Together Queensland Submission by
Capricornia Correctional Centre members

Background

Any review of strategies to reduce and prevent criminal activity must also consider the important role Queensland Corrective Services plays in this endeavour.

According to the *Report on Government Services 2014*, Corrective services “aim to provide a safe, secure and humane custodial environment and an effective community corrections environment in which prisoners and offenders are effectively managed, commensurate with their needs and the risks they pose to the community. Additionally, corrective services aim to reduce the risk of re-offending by providing services and program interventions that address the causes of offending, maximise the chances of successful reintegration into the community and encourage offenders to adopt a law - abiding way of life.”¹ (emphasis added)

This submission calls on the inquiry to consider the negative impacts recent changes in Correctional Centres have had on the ability to achieve these goals.

Centre Profile

The current profile of Capricornia Correctional Centre is as follows:

Location: Bruce Highway Rockhampton

Current Centre Population: 477

Sections

Secure:

Build Capacity: 330

Current Population: 358

Residential:

Queensland Government. *Report on Government Services 2014*. Released 29 January 2014. Vol C, Chap 8 at 8.1. http://www.pc.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0015/132324/rogs-2014-volumec-chapter8.pdf

Build Capacity: 102

Current Population: 119

Changes introduced since March 2012

The following changes have been introduced in the centre:

- Reductions in prisoner out of cell time from 11 hours a day to 10 hours a day
- Industries has gone from 7 days a week to 4 days a week with split shifts on those days.

Effect of changes on security within the centre and to the Queensland community

These changes have had the resulting effects on security:

There has been a marked increase in incidents and injuries in the centre since the changes to the numbers in the prison resulting in overcrowding including offender on staff assaults and offender on offender assaults. For instance in the last few weeks there has been an officer assault related to the doubling up and 3 offender on offender assaults directly related to the doubling up of prisoners. This will be evident from the recording of incidents by Custodial Corrections Officers and this rise in incidents remains at a heightened level.

In one case an officer was informing a prisoner that he was to be doubled up and the result was the prisoner assaulting the officer. In another case was on night shift where 2 prisoners got into a fight over one snoring and the other watching television late at night. Another case was a prisoner laying down in front of the Supervisors office in protest of doubling up then assaulting another prisoner when he was sent to the unit. Another case was a prisoner at night calling on the intercom that he had been assaulted by his cellmate due to his smell and use of the television.

The increase in injuries in the centre is documented. One reason for this is that assaults are being listed as workplace injuries being those that occur in the prison. This is the case when there are no witnesses and the prisoner does not wish to place charges or admit that he was assaulted.

The pressure to place unknown prisoners into cells together is sometimes a lottery as there is not enough information or time to assess them properly for the best placement.

It is vital to the running of the centre that the assessment and intelligence gained is done on prisoners and the suitability assessed to ensure or minimise the risk of assaults and incidents when the need for doubling up of prisoners occurs.

This has led to an increased workload and more stress on the front line staff as they are trying to rotate the prisoners to reduce incidents. Some of the offenders are known to staff but circumstances and allegiances can change between prisoners and any new intelligence about the prisoner usually comes down the day after placement.

The changes to the workshops have resulted in a significant drop in revenue and customer base. The prisoners are no longer going to the workshops 7 days a week and therefore reducing their boredom and

lessening their chance of gaining skills and employment on the outside. The same can be said for the reduced programs on offer in education now.

Loss of the dog squad at night is a direct risk to escape and to the safety of staff on a night shift. If an incident occurs at night then the dog squad officer can no longer respond and assist. In Capricornia Correctional Centre's case this officer would also patrol and assist the Capricornia Farm. The farm only recently had 2 'lifers' escape from the farm. This resulted in all the 'lifers' on the farms being sent back to secure facilities.

This is a significant risk to the community.

Conclusion

Together members employed at the Capricornia Correctional Centre are of the opinion that the Queensland Government's strategy of the increasing incarceration of offenders and the overcrowding of the Centre has decreased the effectiveness of Prisoner rehabilitation and increased the likelihood of reoffending.

This along with the reduction in programmes and employment has also significantly increased the level of serious incidents and assaults of prisoner on officer and prisoner on prisoner.

The impacts have serious and long-term implications for prisoners, staff and their families.

The impacts also have significant and cost effectiveness implications for the State and the local community as follows but not limited to:

Cost of sick leave and Workcover QLD premiums to the taxpayer when Custodial Correctional Officers are injured at work

- Medical costs associated with prisoner injury due to increase in assaults
- Cost of lengthening incarceration due to charges arising from offences of prisoners
- Cost of increased reoffending and return to incarceration due to the lack of rehabilitation programmes preparing prisoners to re-enter the community
- Cost to local businesses who no longer have prison industry supplying goods and knock on effect to local employment
- Cost and risk to safety of the community due to increase in escapes and perimeter breaches

Recommendations

The Together members of Capricornia Correctional Centre recommend the following to the Committee for consideration:

- Increase unlock time to 11 hours a day as this would give more opportunity for out of cell time activities like use of phone, launder clothes, interact with other offenders, employment, exercise and study.
- Reintroduce programs and other activities designed to rehabilitate prisoners.
- More time for consideration of placement and information on the new receptions arriving to the centre.
- More autonomy for individual centres. Every centre is different with its own problems and solutions yet we have a Brisbane centric approach to corrections. What works in Brisbane does not mean it is the best solution for the rest of the state.
- Empowering the front line staff with enhanced breaching and disciplinary options. The breaching guidelines now are unwieldy, full of red tape and perversely act as an incentive to staff to not breach offenders. The previous breaching guidelines were used extensively, now staff believe the current ones are too much on behalf of the offenders.
- A proper and true recidivism rate to properly assess how corrections is going. The current rate of 30% is hard to believe for anyone actually working in corrections. This percentage is obviously much higher but the way the department determines what actually constitutes a recidivist prisoner is flawed and would not pass the general public test.