

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

Crime Inquiry 2014
Submission 037

Together Queensland Submission by
Capricornia Correctional Centre Farm 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 Farm is as follows:

Location: Bruce Highway Rockhampton.

Current Centre Population: 96

Sections

Low Security

Build Capacity 96

Current Population 96

¹ 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

Changes introduced since March 2012

The following changes have been introduced in the centre:

- Closure of industries: The centre's dairy has been closed along with all other farm associated work.
- Abolition of the Food Services Supervisor:
- Farm prisoner numbers are maintained at full capacity to minimise overcrowding in the main centre.
- An increase in "bed capacity":
- The abolition of dog squad during hours of darkness.
- Changes to the Breach of Discipline process.

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

These changes have had the resulting effects on security:

- Closure of industries: This leaves prisoners with no meaningful activity to fill their time. This leads to large numbers of idle prisoners within the accommodation units. The staffing model was designed to reflect the majority of prisoners at work. Also the abolition of the dairy resulted in the loss of three staff from our work unit which has impacted on our safety and security as they formed part of our staffing model.
- Abolition of the Food Services Supervisor: This has led to prisoners now conducting the roles that a staff member used to do. An example is receipt and dispatch of goods. This involves the unsupervised receiving and signing for goods from service providers (members of the public) and has also "culled" another staff member from our workforce. Prisoners conducting this role have regular unsupervised contact with members of the public. Human nature dictates that over time relationships are formed which in turn creates a security risk.
- Farm prisoner numbers are maintained at full capacity to minimise overcrowding in the main centre:
These changes have led to stretched workloads for staff and the inability for staff to effectively conduct their own duties. The overcrowding has led to a heightened level of unruly and disrespectful behaviour from prisoners mainly due to the lack of meaningful activity. Structured routines have been disrupted by the fact that staff are constantly trying to manage the numbers. Examples of this are prisoners could only participate in leisure activities AFTER work hours but now we allow it all day in an attempt to occupy prisoners. This then "displaces" prisoner numbers which results in lack of supervision by an overstretched minimal staffing model.

- An increase in “bed capacity”: Management have deemed that the new farm capacity is 108 plus 24 work camp (total 132) The only ability to house those additional prisoners is on mattresses/stretchers on the floor of the common room.
- The abolition of dog squad during hours of darkness: This has led to an increase in vehicles on our perimeter after dark and has removed any deterrent to vehicles entering the reserve. The only available response to incident after dark is the deployment of the perimeter response vehicle which, if deployed, is after the event.
- Changes to the Breach of Discipline process: Changes that have occurred in this process make it a task that most staff would rather not complete. It is a lengthy electronic process which has little consequence for bad behaviour. This then leads to no deterrence for bad behaviour. Supervisors are regularly told to manage their prisoners on the farm rather than breach them but the reality of this is there are little other options available and an apparent lack of understanding by managers.

Conclusion

Together members employed at the Capricornia Correctional Centre Farm 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.

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

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 increase 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 Farm recommend the following to the Committee for consideration:

- Maintaining bed capacity at 96 (the build capacity of the centre)
- Reintroduce programs and other activities designed to rehabilitate prisoners.
- Reintroduce industries particularly those that are that are farm related.

- The return of night shift dog squad to act as “first response” during incidents and act as deterrent to those considering entering the reserve out of hours.
- Appropriate resourcing/restaffing of the food services section.
- Better and more thorough assessment of prisoners considered for low custody placement.
- Reduce the level of red tape attached to the breach process or introduce other solutions to disciplinary action for staff to consider.