

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

Together Queensland Submission by  
Lotus Glen 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.*”<sup>1</sup> (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 Lotus Glen Correctional Centre is as follows:

Location:	Mareeba
Current Centre Population:	Approx 700
	Lotus Glen Farm 130

## Sections

Secure:

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<sup>1</sup> 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](http://www.pc.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0015/132324/rogs-2014-volumec-chapter8.pdf)

Build Capacity      580                      Current Population                      600 (20 plus on mattresses).  
Currently Construction has begun to free up another 76 beds at this centre. As there are already 20 prisoners sleeping on the ground, this will leave 50 beds available for the future. The G20 summit in Cairns is expected to empty the watch house and with current government policy, the jail will reach capacity by the end of September this year. Because of the failure not to fit the extra bunks in the cells will result on the Centre having mattresses on the ground for prisoners to sleep on, increasing the risk to staff if an incident was to occur in these cells.

Residential:

Build Capacity      96                      Current Population                      96

### **Changes introduced since March 2012**

The following changes have been introduced in the centre:

- 120 jobs abolished across the state impacting on the centre,
- Conversion of Trade Instructors and Activities Officers from continuous shift workers to non-continuous and day workers to avoid paying the 28.5% Aggregated Shift Allowance
- Changes in the shift duration from 12 hours per shift to 11 hours per shift for a significant number of general duties custodial officers
- Reductions in amounts paid to staff who are injured at work and receipt of workers compensation
- job security
- poor wage rises have all lead to low morale in Corrections
- Prior to this occurring the department was well aware that jail populations were about to increase at a rate never before seen and we now have record amount of prisoners in jail today.

Very little planning has occurred throughout this increase in prisoner population, which has led to double up of prisoners in most centres. That with the reduction of employment and the introduction of no smoking in jails has seen incidents triple.

The department tabled a document as part of a dispute D/2013/125 before the Queensland Industrial relations Commission. This was an attempt to satisfy the QIRC that they had taken appropriate steps.

The following points have been seen to contradict that document:

- Staffing - A decision to force staff on leave has placed an increase risk to all persons in centres regularly. On the first day that this was introduced 30 overtime shifts occurred in one centre. Night shifts, which are minimum staffed, constantly run short placing

Centres at risk, increasing fatigue on staff. The ability to adequately staff during response to natural disasters saw COEP's utilised.

- Prisoner Employment – Unemployment of prisoners at this centre is around 70 percent. When the 10 hour structured day was announced, management were informed of their own research which indicated that a young unemployed prisoner was 9 times more likely to cause violence in jail. The prisoners that were employed, had their shifts halved since the introduction of this policy. Employment has even been reduced in the Tailor shop. Prisoner violence has increased and major policy of no smoking and the knowledge that prisoner numbers were going to increase. Of these increases, short term prisoners of up to 6 months have tripled. These prisoners do not get jobs or very little programs due to their sentence being short.
- Prisoner Management – when overcrowding started to occur, a genuine effort was made by management to appropriately double up prisoners. As the increases in prisoners and the constant shuffling continued, the effort could not be maintained. It has reached a point where prisoners are moved and 'we keep our fingers crossed'. This has resulted in increases in incidents including threats against staff, offensive behaviour and major disturbances. The amount of time in dealing with these during a shift impacts greatly.

This is exemplified by it taking longer to lock away prisoners due to medication, still moving prisoners, feeding etc. Sport has been increased due to the lack of employment which now includes times during musters when all prisoner movement is normally stopped.

- Infrastructure – Department has been unable to move quickly enough in some instances due to financial restraints. Other times Prison Officers have had to take industrial action in opening areas. Even after this had been identified management stated that they needed time to plan on how money was to be diverted.
- Smoking – A decision to ban smoking was discussed at the end of 2013 at a state consultative level (ACC). The decision that this would be not only difficult to be brought in, but common sense would have suggested with the overcrowding of prisoners that this would also be dangerous. The government then made an announcement a couple of days after this meeting that the smoking ban would go ahead, citing staff health as one of the main reasons. The amount of assaults since that decision would suggest that staff health has suffered much more than secondary cigarette smoke and there is evidence to suggest that the smoking ban on prisoners has little affect on their health as they will continue to smoke when released due to boredom. This issue affects the many prisoners who suffer from Mental Health issues and withdrawal from drugs.
- Prisoners at risk – overcrowding also causes prisoners to stress, along with the no smoking policy, many prisoners were placed at risk on observations on a daily basis. This placed resources on centres safety units to overflow to where prisoner behaviour is managed, in the Detention Unit. Therefore prisoners became aware that they would not be segregated for long, if at all, due to this area being full of prisoners who were stressed from overcrowding and smoking related issues. There has been a noticeable

decline in prisoner attitude towards officers, placing even further risk to staff of violent, abusive behaviour.

- Incident reporting – members have noticed how the interpretation of incidents, especially threats against staff, are now being interpreted as offensive behaviour. We believe this is a deliberate attempt to downgrade or misinterpret what is actually occurring in centres. Many examples have been tabled to management. Other incidents like major disturbances, do not even get titled, just the individual incidents. Many of these violent episodes have also been tabled.
- Medication – With the increase to the number of prisoners that are moved around during the day, medication for prisoners cannot be kept up in the time allocated. This has to be caught up with after lockdown, increasing the risk to members unlocking many cells at night. If prisoners health needs are not being met it can make life much more difficult for the Correctional. In an extreme situation it could be the cause of many behavioural problems from prisoners.
- Transferring of Townsville prisoners – these prisoners have been moved to our Centre due to the Government policy changes. Many of these prisoners come from cultural areas dissimilar to this area, which has resulted in violence between these prisoners. A fight which resulted in 15 to 20 prisoners resulted.

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

These changes have had the resulting negative effects on security.

The most notable change is with respect to prisoner behaviour. The result of a more violent workplace is evident from the amount of prisoners going onto observations due to a Notification of Concern being raised. Lotus Glen prior to the affects of the above, had around 8 to 10 prisoners on observation. We now have around 20.

The flow on effects of this is that there are no authorised cells for this use, except for our Detention Unit (no hanging points).

This means prisoners who are normally segregated for behavioural reasons do not get placed there, or if they do, it is not for long periods, as there is no room. So the prisoners become more disruptive and incidents occur, which are normally violent.

This has had a detrimental effect on the centre. Members believe that statistics have also been altered to show a different picture. For example if a prisoner makes threats, verbally or physically to officers, this is classified as Threatening Behaviour. Recently this has now been classified as Offensive Behaviour. An Officer was struck in the head by a prisoner several times and was classified as Offensive. Also, a large group of prisoners (15 to 20) became involved in a fight. This was also classified as Offensive Behaviour, when it should have been a Major Disturbance.

The Government is seen by Membership to have driven the cost cutting, overcrowding and smoking bans. A question that needs to be answered is why they made these decisions in full knowledge that violence was more than likely going to increase at our centre.

## **Conclusion**

Together Members at Lotus Glen Correctional Centre, believe the Government is to have driven the cost cutting, overcrowding and smoking bans. A question that needs to be answered is why they made these decisions in full knowledge of what was going to occur. Prisoners with sentences of less than 6 months have tripled in this Centre.

These prisoners will only receive minimum program, no employment, so will be spend most of their day learning only to reoffend again.

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 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 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 Lotus Glen Correctional Centre recommend the following to the Committee for consideration:

- Increase unlock time to 11 hours a day
- Increase work programs designed to keep prisoners focused while incarcerated, which would also help in their rehabilitation process
- A specific area needs to be allocated so that the prisoners that are taking up cells as of 'concern' so that prisoners with inappropriate behaviour can be dealt with accordingly