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



Crime Inquiry 2014 Submission 039

Together Queensland Submission by Wolston 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 Wolston Correctional Centre is as follows:

Location:		Wolsto	on correctional centre	
Current Centre Population:		724		
Sections				
Secure: Build Capacity	300		Current Population	374

¹ Queensland Government. *Report on Government Services 2014*. Released 29 January 2014. Vol C, Chap 8 at 8.1. http:// 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:

- There has been reductions in prisoner out of cell time from 11 hours a day to 10 hours a day. This
 has been exacerbated due to the increase in secure from 50 prisoners a unit to over 60 per unit,
 prisoner are locked down during the middle of the day for an 1 1/2 hours to alleviate the pressure
 of tension building up in the units
- Changes in industries have meant a reduction in available work for all the prisoners, which puts tension on remaining prisoners in accommodation area.

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

These changes have had the resulting effects on security:

- A significant impact on Custodial Correctional Officers and other staff members health, safety and well-being including incidents of assault. There has been a resulting increase in sick leave with Wolston currently experiencing the highest sick rate that has been recorded since the centre opened in 15 years and the highest amount of sick leave in any centre in the state.
- A significant impact on prisoner health, safety and well-being including incidents of assault and we have up to now recorded the same amount of incidents in the last 6 months as we have recorded in 12 months prior to that. Together members believe this is a direct result of the increase prisoner numbers and resulting overcrowding by doubling up of prisoners at Wolston.
- The impact and effectiveness of the Governments strategies on prisoner rehabilitation or lack therefore is evident. Rehabilitation is non-existent and there isn't space for all the programs that need to be run for effective rehabilitation programs to occur.
- There has been and continue to be an impact of changes to the Centre on the escape or likelihood of prisoner escapes. Security was decreased under the previous Labor Government and there is no constant vehicle patrols any more of perimeter, this has not been fixed since the new LNP Government has been in office.
- Over compliance and red tape has negatively affected the ability for correctional managers and supervisors to do their basic job. Correctional managers and supervisors are under extreme pressure about paper work than actually doing duties that help both staff and prisoners. Supervisors do not even get the opportunity to supervise effectively with 80% percent of their job is compliance and paper work, meaning experienced supervisors virtually never get to see their staff and never get in the unit to deal with prisoners or problems.

Conclusion

Together members employed at the Wolston 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 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 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 Wolston Correctional Centre recommend the following to the Committee for consideration:

- Increase unlock time to 11 hours a day
- Reintroduce programs and other activities design to rehabilitate prisoners.
- Review the issue of over-compliance within correctional centres
- Address the issue of over managed jails, with many managers with hardly any work load to do
- Ensure the same mandatory jail time for assaulting prison officers as police and emergency workers
- Build more prisons to avoid overcrowding and double up, better forward thinking by the department when it comes to prisoner numbers increasing.
- Remove court ordered parole as 80% of new receptions to a centre are court order patrol returns
- Provide Correctional Officers at the lowest level the necessary authority and tools to manage prisoner behaviour including increasing powers in in relation to breaches, offensive behaviour assaultive , drug & gang related activity.