

The Research Director
Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Inquiry on strategies to prevent and reduce criminal activity in Queensland

SUBMISSION
to the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee

Firstly I would like to thank the Legal Affairs & Community Safety Committee for the opportunity to provide a written submission regarding Strategies to prevent and reduce criminal activity in Queensland, secondly my apologies for having to cancel appointments to make my submission in person, at short notice due to work commitments.

Having spent time as a prisoner in Australian prisons and Dutch prisons and experienced 2 totally different approaches to prisoner management, I consider that I have a decidedly unique perspective to offer. Most of my figures that I will quote are from memory of prison related stats' noted due to my interest in prison reform, so will be unsubstantiated and may be dated as the information has been obtained over an 18 year period since my release from prison, but having said that I am confident the figures accurately reflect the stats' at the time.

To begin with, I would like to comment on the benefits of education in the prison system. This has been shown to be of benefit in England where the focus of the prison system (in some prisons) changed after the Strangeways riots in the early 1990's.

In general the education standard of Australia's Prison population is substantially below that of the non-prison population of Australia. In fact the correlation between education and life's opportunities is graphically demonstrated by the literacy & numeracy standards of inmates compared to the general population. Figures from memory are; in the general population, the figure of 20% suffers from poor Literacy & Numeracy Standards, in Prison the figure is closer to 80%. Clearly this shows a solid link, to lack of education therefore limiting the window to live a productive life free from crime.

It is my firm belief that if the prison system were to focus on education, as an avenue to improving the life skills of prisoners, would see a marked reduction in recidivism. The last I heard Australia had the 3rd highest recidivism rate in the world; (the Kiwis knocked us out of the #2 spot). Where in Holland when I was there (1995-1996) their recidivism rate was the 4 lowest in the world, from memory Denmark had the lowest. A high recidivist rate is an indication that the prison system is not working. In many European Prisons the focus is on Rehabilitation not Punishment. For most people the fact of having their Liberty removed is all the punishment needed, from that point the focus should be on rehabilitation. Also in Holland they are currently closing 16 prisons due to lack of need, surely this is an example of a prison system that has had spectacular success.

In the Strangeways prison they have turned around their system, where the inmates are not only treated more humanly than pre-riots of the 1990s, but for example the inmates working in the kitchen are overseen by their equivalent of TAFE teachers. What this has done is given the

opportunity to gain qualifications that not only are recognised in the community, but are accepted by industry. With open days held to show prospective employers around and give them a chance to talk to inmates, particularly ones nearing the end of their sentence, has increased the prisoners chances of gaining meaningful employment on their release from jail, which reduces the need to commit crime to survive.

To end the education part of this submission, my own observations of the educational opportunities in the Victorian prison system where I served my time (1994-1995). Although there were options to partake in education, there were limited positions available, and therefore it required a certain motivation on behalf of the prisoners to be involved. There needs to be a focus on encouraging participation with virtually no limitation on numbers. A Carrot and Stick approach would probably be the best way to attack the motivation. For example in Holland for prisoners that refused to partake in the work program, had restrictions on time out of their cells.

The second area where good improvements to crime within the community could be improved would be to give serious consideration to the body of evidence that has been generated in Portugal since the 'Decriminalization of the Use of Recreational Drugs' in 2001. There is now 13 years of data that has shown some unexpected benefits, a massive reduction in the cost of the emergency generated health issues. A reduction in actual use of Drugs compared to the rest of Europe, (this was unexpected & contrary to the nee Sayers expectations). Keep in mind that Portugal still has the trafficking in recreational drugs as illegal.

The third area is less likely to show large reductions in crime within the community, as it is the Governments recent crack down on the so called "Criminal Motorcycle Gangs". With figures that show crime by Club members below 1%, the amount of money being spent in this area is disproportionate to the crimes committed. With the recent misconduct brought to light in NSW at the ICAC hearings the money would be better off spent in strengthening the CCCs ability to investigate misconduct not weaken its ability. One of the worst aspects of this 'crack down' is the laws that can take away a participants right to earn a living in his chosen profession.

#1 being Tow-Truck Driver, from memory back in the 1980s in Victoria the government of the day introduced "Allocated Towing" this resulted in the overnight end to the Tow-Truck Wars, a few years later NSW & SA followed suit. This is a system that has proven to work in 3 states. It requires no action other than adopting the legislation in Queensland. The problem is clearly the current Queensland legislation is flawed when compared to other Australian States systems that have been proven to work over many years. To criminalize or prevent Club members from undertaking lawful work because the Queensland system has not been updated to a system that has been proven to work, is in my mind bordering on criminal behaviour by successive Queensland legislatures.

#2 The Tattoo industry, changes that can prevent a person working at a craft that he or she has practiced for many years, based on accusations of criminal activity with no proof that the individuals have partaken in any of the alleged crimes, IE; money laundering, if there is actual evidence of these crimes then, arrest the perpetrators and put them through the court system.

#3 Motor Mechanics, 4 years of an Apprenticeship, and countless years of post trade up skilling, and you can't work in a legal industry? Again if there is evidence of wrong doing, arrest the perpetrators and let the courts deal with them.

For 113 years of Federation virtually every election campaign has seen a call by one party or another to "Get Tough on Crime" with the 3rd highest recidivism rate in the western world it is abundantly clear that getting tough on crime is not working. It is time to "Get Smart on Crime". Instead of looking to America for inspiration on how to run a prison system, a country that locks up so many of its citizens that no one will ever take the highest recidivist rate in the world off them ever, we should be looking to the likes of Denmark, Sweden, The Netherlands, countries with low reoffending rates, countries that are closing prisons down not suffering overcrowding prisons that bring about their own unique problems.

Thank you again for the opportunity to contribute to this necessary discussion. Also feel free to contact me with any questions, or further ideas on how to cut the recidivist rate & therefore the crime rate within the Queensland community.

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