



Speech by

Hon. TOM BARTON

MEMBER FOR WATERFORD

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Out-stations Program for Aboriginal Offenders

Hon. T. A. BARTON (Waterford—ALP) (Minister for Police and Corrective Services) (9.52 a.m.), by leave: Last week I attended the Aboriginal Coordinating Council in Cairns. During discussions with Aboriginal leaders, I said we had to look at creative ways of reducing the disproportionately high number of indigenous inmates in the State's jails. One of the ideas I raised was to use the out-stations program as the first option for young, non-violent, first-time offenders.

Currently, out-stations are used as a final step in the rehabilitation process after offenders have served time in institutions. At the out-stations, offenders are placed under the responsibility of community elders and leaders to complete their parole period. The program, if you like, is a specialised parole process.

As I made clear to the Aboriginal Coordinating Council, I was floating the idea of out-stations as a point of discussion. Certainly, more work has to be done on the concept before it could even be considered a firm proposal. However, I must say I have been overwhelmed by the positive response about my out-station idea. The member for Nicklin, Peter Wellington, and Opposition Justice spokesman and member for Warwick, Lawrence Springborg, both gave qualified support to the out-station idea. On ABC radio, the member for Nicklin said he would like to see it trialled when the concept is fully developed. I agree and I thank him for his considered response to the idea. Also on ABC radio last week, the member for Warwick said the out-station idea had merit and that jailing some offenders can be counterproductive. He went on to further say—

"But I'm not opposed to the principle of taking non-violent or non-sexual offenders out of our jails and leaving our jails for people that have caused or conducted serious crimes and are of a general threat to our community. I mean I don't have a problem with that."

This type of bipartisan support for such a worthwhile aim has to be applauded, and I am sure that the member for Broadwater, Allan Grice, supports his shadow Cabinet colleague, as does the rest of the House. Far too often in this House, both sides attack each other just for the sake of opposing the other's policy position. It is pleasing to see these differences put aside, especially when it involves the touchy issue of offender rehabilitation and prison sentence management.

As we develop the out-station idea further and others aimed at reducing the number of non-violent, non-sexual offenders from spending time in our jails, I look forward to consulting further on these issues and look forward to the continued support of the coalition and the member for Nicklin.
