



Speech by

Hon. TOM BARTON

MEMBER FOR WATERFORD

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Corrective Services Portfolio

Hon. T. A. BARTON (Waterford—ALP) (Minister for Police and Corrective Services) (9.56 a.m.), by leave: The Labor Party went to the 1998 State election with clear-cut commitments in regard to the Corrective Services portfolio. Firstly, we promised to provide prison officers with \$1m worth of basic equipment. When I was shadow Minister, I toured the State and visited the various correctional centres and the feedback from the staff was consistent throughout Queensland. They were sick of the knee-jerk punitive action from the coalition Government and were crying out for the tools to do their job properly. They wanted two-way radios that worked. They wanted more bulletproof vests. They wanted surveillance cameras that actually took pictures. They wanted firearms and batons so that they could defend themselves in emergent situations.

The other major shortfall that I found during my visits was that there was barely enough staff to maintain minimum security in our prison system. After two years of cutting costs and sacking people, the prison system was on its knees and morale was at rock bottom. That is why the Labor Party promised an extra 50 prison officers above and beyond the normal increases planned.

Prison officers expressed concerns that the coalition planned to sell off the infrastructure at both the privately run prisons of Arthur Gorrie and Borallon in order to fund their extravagant election promises. The coalition had promised to build a replacement Rockhampton Correctional Centre, but had planned to make this facility a privately run and owned centre. When I heard these coalition plans I made it clear that we would not be selling off any prison assets, nor allowing a privately owned and run prison at Rockhampton, or anywhere else.

There were three clear-cut commitments made by the Labor Party during the election campaign: the extra \$1m of basic equipment, the extra 50 prison officers, and the commitment to abolish the coalition's privatisation plans. I am pleased to tell the House that we have already delivered on these three commitments. All the correctional centres throughout the State are receiving their final instalment of basic equipment as part of the \$1m allocated to meet equipment shortfalls.

Last Friday, I attended the graduation of 70 prison officers, some of whom were the remainder of the 50 extra officers promised by Labor. One of the first tasks that I undertook on becoming Minister was to halt the plans to sell the Borallon and Arthur Gorrie Correctional Centres and to start the planning for the new replacement Rockhampton facility. I am pleased to tell the House the new Rockhampton Correctional Centre will be Government owned and run—as it should have been all along.

But there is more. Even apart from meeting these key election commitments, we have funded and introduced six passive alert, or sniffer, dogs into our correctional centres. These dogs and their trainers have already had tremendous results in detecting contraband and have even been loaned to Australian Customs and the Queensland Police Service to help them with drug-related investigations. On top of that, we are trialling new drug detection machines and funding is available to buy five of these new machines.

Overall, with the extra staff, the sniffer dogs, and the new drug detection machines, Queensland Corrections has achieved wonderful results in its crackdown on drugs in prison. In the past 10 months, officers have carried out more than 160 drug busts involving the detection of illicit drugs and utensils. We are training new prison officers at record rates. On top of the 70 who graduated last week, there will

be about 260 more officers being trained this year, who will graduate soon. We have carried out a complete review of the corrections system. This House passed legislation some weeks ago which will see the Queensland Corrective Services Commission and Queensland Corrections wound up. The new Department of Corrective Services will commence operation on Saturday, 1 May 1999.

As I told the House yesterday, we have already delivered one of our major election commitments in police, and now I am proud to say that we have delivered all our major commitments in the corrective services area. Barely 10 months into the first term of the Beattie Government, prison officers are safer, better equipped; communities are safer; there are less drugs in prisons; and we achieved all of this without having to sell off the family silver.
