



Speech by

Robert Messenger

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

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DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIVE SERVICES, DOG SQUAD

Mr MESSENGER (Burnett—NPA) (10.04 pm): As shadow corrective services minister, I have recently completed a number of visits to jails and a series of meetings with some very experienced members of the Prison Officers Association. The warnings, wisdom and commonsense of the POA are being arrogantly ignored by this government. The best example I have seen of this arrogance is the manner in which Minister Spence is proposing to manage change within the Queensland Corrective Services dog squad.

The Corrective Services dog squad has served this state with distinction. The 19 officers and two supervisors are the 'go to people' if an emergency situation arises. They are highly trained, dedicated professionals who will act as a team or as an individual and have, on numerous occasions, stopped prisoners escaping, protected the lives of the public, rescued hostages and prevented drugs from entering our prisons.

I have been alerted through the Prison Officers Association of Queensland and have been briefed personally at length by very experienced officers about the dangerous and harmful changes to the dog squad that have been proposed by this government. Minister Spence proposes to introduce the following changes in February next year: all positions in the dog squad being spilled, all dog handlers will lose their positions and will have to reapply for jobs at static positions when they are formed, drug detection dogs will have multiple handlers, and the central kennelling of drug dogs will be introduced as opposed to home care by handlers. This is cost cutting at its worst.

According to the Prison Officers Association, those changes will make the indications of drug dogs less reliable, diminish the operational capacity and capability of the dog squad and has underestimated the importance of a central training area. It has also left experienced, loyal and dedicated staff unsure of their job security before Christmas. The Police Service Dog Squad will not implement the same operational management practices that are being proposed for the prison dog squad. If its not good enough for the Police Service, then why should it be good enough for Queensland Corrective Services?

This is a shoddy, cost-cutting exercise by this government, which is desperate for cash. The situation in our jails is best summarised by John Mulholland, the Secretary of the Prison Officers Association, who said that there are only two reasons his members arrive home safely to their families: good luck and the goodwill of prisoners.

The Prison Officers Association of Queensland has a membership of approximately 800 prison guards. Even though that membership represents at least 50 per cent of the guards employed by this government, the minister for corrective services, Minister Spence, strangely and inexplicably refuses to officially acknowledge or even talk to them.

Time expired.