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## REPORT CJC visit Hunter Correctional Centre

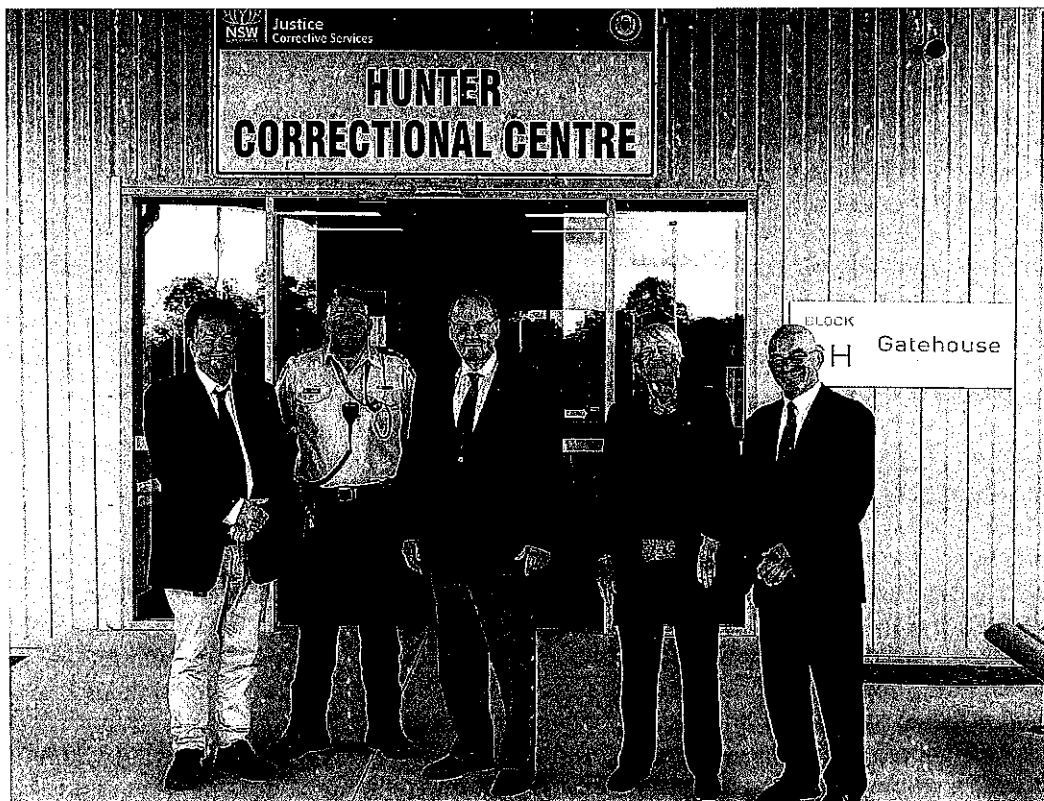
Cessnock Rapid Build Dormitory prison.

Assistant Commissioner Luke Grant & Community Justice Coalition Visit

Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> May 2018

*Draft Observations (to be checked with Luke Grant and Richard Heycock)*

The Community Justice Coalition represented by John Dowd, Elizabeth Evatt and Brett Collins was invited by Commissioner Peter Severin during a meeting on March 26 to visit the Hunter Correctional Centre. It is one of the two Rapid Build Dormitory prisons, which is to be the subject of a Parliamentary Inquiry.



### Official Schedule

- **10.30am – 11.00am**  
Arrival, Meet and Greet with the Governor Richard Heycock and members of the Management Team. Light Refreshments in the Conference Room, within the Admin Building.
- **11.00am – 1.00pm**  
Tour of the Centre, accompanied by Governor Richard Heycock, FM Security Mark Knight, Manager of Industries Seamus Mullen & Education Services Co-ordinator Kerin Neely

The tour will encompass all areas of the Jail, to include Industries, Programmes and Education Area, Justice Health Clinic, Accommodation POD's and AVL Suite.

- **1.00pm - onwards**

Lunch will be provided in the Conference Room within the Administration Building.

Upon arrival, visitors are invited to park in the car park immediately to the front of the Centre. There is a space clearly marked Assistant Commissioner and three spaces to the right of the AC space will be vacant.

#### CJC Notes

We went into the administration block and talked in the conference room.

Richard said he was previously governor at Balund-a (Tabulam) which was renowned for its innovative style. He was brought in to do something different to other prisons especially for Indigenous prisoners.

There are currently 235 staff at Hunter Correctional Centre, including 170 custodial staff, CSI industries, BSI education and TAFE educators, looking after 359 prisoners. It has capacity for 400 prisoners. The shift arrangement is different to other prisons with two twelve hour shifts that allows prisoners to be longer out of the dormitories, to use the outside areas. It wasn't clear that this arrangement was permanent.

The prison is divided into four pods each with four 25 person dormitories. A and B pods are higher security, while C and D are lower security.

It has been open since early February 2018. Many prisoners stated that they were told to get onto the transport trucks and were given no choice regarding the move. Some were classified as C2's in Nowra ready for day leave so the move to maximum security Hunter meant they lost their relaxed living conditions. Instead of half day visits in normal prison clothes they had less than an hour visits, had to strip naked, have intrusive genital searches and dress in white overalls. They complained that they had lost personal possessions during the transfers. They said that the complaint procedure was not working effectively and their complaints were not being handled properly. Family complaints were not being addressed.

The governor said that Hunter prisoners were on protection from other prisoners, whereas the Wellington dormitory prison was mainstream.

There are 200 prisoners in industries and 100 in therapeutic programs, arts, music, domestic violence and addiction programs. The oval is open, there is an activities section with exercise bikes, although we did not see them.

#### Education programs:

These are provided by BSI and TAFE in a classroom section.

We dropped in on a group under instruction from a TAFE educator. They were doing business management. It was not the first choice for some, but all appeared to be engaged.

A computer course was also being taught.

There were rooms for music, equipped with guitars and an art room.

#### Sport and recreation:

We spoke to some of the prisoners in the recreation outdoor area called the oval. The grass area had been trampled to bare soil. It seemed that all prisoners in the one pod of 100 people from four dormitories were assembled in the space.

There are four phones on the oval and two phones in each dormitory. There weren't any people in queues for access. The time for each call remained limited at six minutes as with all NSW prisons.

There was no boxing bag however some fixed exercise equipment was ordered.

Many said that they were happy with the prison, but complained about other prisoners snoring in the dormitories. When asked if they felt unsafe to go to sleep with many others around them, they said they could sort that out amongst themselves.

#### Services

In the area between the pods called Central Support we saw a billiard room, a multi-faith prayer space, 2 General Libraries with very limited books, each with two red computers.

These facilities can be accessed between 6am and 9pm.

#### Sleeping quarters

The pod system has twenty-five prisoners held together in a dormitory with each prisoner's space divided by partitions rather than walls. The pods and their internal structures were mostly prefabricated. This is what enabled the facility to be built quickly. Instead of cells with solid walls, there are 25 cubicles with partitions of shoulder height linked together, within a larger enclosed space.

Prisoners are allowed to move about freely. During the night they can use the six communal toilets, sit at the tables, access the fridge and microwaves. They can also use an outdoor area, enclosed by a mesh fence until lights out at 9 pm.

We visited a pod and looked at the individual "cubicles." Privacy has been an issue for some. It has been decided to provide a vinyl curtain which can be fixed across the opening, to provide greater privacy. There were many personal items scattered around, especially food supplements, sauces etc. Lockable storage was under the bed.

The 1.1inch screen in each cubicle was demonstrated to us by a prisoner. It has no keyboard although we were assured that a Bluetooth one will be supplied. At the moment it gives them access to their personal information and mainstream

entertainment. It provides the choice of TV and radio programs, information on the prisoner's visits, phone and financial accounts. Prisoners are provided with hearing devices, but a number decide to purchase better quality headphones, which are available to them.

Prisoners can make phone calls on phones right up to 9 pm. Some said they appreciated they "can call the kids to say goodnight."

There is a refrigerator, a microwave (which still needs a dedicated space), a sandwich press, and hot water urn available to prisoners. There are tables and stools for meals. Prisoners provide their own utensils. We were told there would be another fridge. The one there was filled with bread and other food.

In the outdoor area there are no seats. We were told that they need to install security mesh across the top for security, and then they will provide benches, maybe tables, basketball net, etc.

Prisoners were generally happy with the accommodation although everyone agreed that they would prefer to have the privacy of their own normal cells where they could relax and behave without others' observation. Snoring was an issue for many. They all knew who the snorers were. The noise of a cough could be heard in the whole dormitory. A sharp step on the concrete floor reverberated in the steel/concrete area. The same problem was mentioned in the Central Support area through which all prisoners had to pass.

No-one expressed concern about risk of attack in the night, but there was social pressure to respond in front of others. No protocol for moving pods without written complaint was mentioned. They liked to go outdoors and see the stars – some for the first time in decades. The six shower/toilet rooms were well designed and appeared easy to keep clean. The prisoners have access to them during the night.

#### Industries

200 prisoners are working in industries. There were two shifts of four hours a day starting at 6.30am.

We visited an area for teaching preliminary woodwork skills (TAFE). We also visited an area where they were making and covering foam mattresses for use in the prison system. It appeared to be well run.

We visited an area where light engineering was being conducted, building sections for other prisons, welding and stamping steel plate sections.

Pay ranged from level 4 at \$25 to level 6 at \$70 working for 6 hours a day, five days a week.

#### Visiting area

The visiting area allowed 30 prisoners at a time and happens on Saturday or Sunday only. It had a series of tables and chairs fixed to the floor, and an area in the open air for when the weather was good.

Prisoners said that they were only getting effectively 45 minutes visiting time, and those who were previously in low security said they were being strip searched and lost previous half day visits.

Some families had to make long journeys to get there. We took this up with the Governor who said that they were planning to extend the visiting hours and there is flexibility for people who travelled long distances.

#### Official Visitor Chris Bult

We met the Official Visitor Chris Bult.

He reports four times a year to the Commissioner, and twice a year to the Inspector of Prisons and the Minister.

Prisoners can approach him, or ask for a private discussion. He said access to the doctor was a current problem as the doctor comes only once every two months. Chris was attending an Inmate Development Committee meeting that afternoon.

#### Overall

The impression is that the place is light and airy, with plenty of open space. It is new, and presents that appearance. We could not enquire too deeply into the provision of education, which may need further consideration.

We then returned to the conference room and had a debrief with Luke and the Governor.

#### Computers in Cells

Luke said that in September the current contract for phones ends and the changeover to the digital system begins, working with Telstra and GTL.

GTL will supply purpose built devices. At first they will be part of the telephone network, but will be extended to other uses later.

He mentioned that in Wales, UK they were co-developing programs,

He mentioned Olaf Nielsen, and MindSpot which provides online mental health support, as the sort of services that would be available for prisoners.

Luke said that 500 Samsung tablets had been acquired, similar to those used in Virgin airlines, for prisoners who had legal cases to prepare. They had a large hard drive.

