

CVCU Response to Questions on Notice from the Select Committee**Select Committee on the Closure or Downsizing of Corrective Services NSW Facilities****Supplementary questions on notice from the Committee****Clarence Valley Community Unions**

1. What lessons should the Government learn from the Grafton Correction Centre downsizing exercise?
2. Is your organisation aware of any involvement or advocacy from the Minister for the North Coast on behalf of Grafton during the Correction Centre downsizing?
3. Has your organisation had any contact with the Minister for the North Coast regarding the Correction Centre downsizing?
4. What involvement do you think the Minister for the North Coast should have had regarding the Grafton Correction Centre downsizing?
5. Has your organisation had any contact with the Deputy Premier regarding the Correction Centre downsizing?
6. What involvement do you think the Deputy Premier should have had regarding the Grafton Correction Centre downsizing?
7. Many submissions to the inquiry talk about a failure of communication and consultation by the Government. What does your organisation consider to be the level of communication and consultation required in an exercise such as the downsizing of the Grafton Correction Centre?
8. Your submission provides some detail on the need for Community Impact Statements. Do you think a Community Impact Statement should be publicly available and in what circumstances do you think they should not be made public?
9. Are you aware of any Rural Impact Statement being completed for the Grafton Correction Centre downsizing? Do you think the Rural Impact Statement completed for the Grafton Correction Centre downsizing should be made public?
10. Can you detail the types of services and skill-sets that are now being lost to the Grafton community because of the downsizing of the correction centre? (For example hairdressers, teachers, nurses)

Answers**1. What lessons should the Government learn from the Grafton Correction Centre downsizing exercise?**

There are two main points I feel are paramount in answering this question, Consultation and Community Impact statements.

1. Consult.

I think this campaign to Save Grafton Gaol has really demonstrated the need for Governments to consult with the affected parties. Right from the very start when the decision was released, the Unions call as was ours from Clarence Valley Community Unions (CVCU) was to hit the pause button, sit down and talk. We can fix this, we can achieve all that you want to achieve and if not we will help you close it. I think the public anger, media coverage and now this upper house enquiry is the result of a distinct lack of consultation. All of this could have been avoided if there had of been proper consultation.

2. Community Impact statements

The public anger and lack of consultation around the decision to close Grafton Gaol has illustrated the importance of a formalised community impact assessment. As I referred to in my original written submission, and as argued by Unions NSW, I believe proper consultation should occur in the form of community impact statements.

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The Community Impact statements would/should involve extensive consultation with all community members and consider the broad impact that a decision around the closure of a gaol has on the community in which it is situated.

2. Is your organisation aware of any involvement or advocacy from the Minister for the North Coast on behalf of Grafton during the Correction Centre downsizing?

3. Has your organisation had any contact with the Minister for the North Coast regarding the Correction Centre downsizing?

Questions 2 and 3 can be answered together.

Firstly, the minister for the North Coast was contacted on Saturday 7 July 2012 and advised of our concerns and his assistance was requested. The request was for the pause button to be pressed and to talk.

I am not aware of any advocacy from the Minister for the North Coast in respect of this. There was certainly no media reports to my knowledge.

4. What involvement do you think the Minister for the North Coast should have had regarding the Grafton Correction Centre downsizing?

The Minister for the North Coast should have been a central figure in this decision. Why have a minister for the North Coast and not have this person as a central figure in any decision of the magnitude of this one.

There was no information or evidence that the Minister for the North Coast's communicated with the Minister of Justice to any degree on this decision. There is also no evidence or information of any communication or collaboration between these two departments aimed at ensuring the best outcome for the region. I believe that communication/colaboration between these two departments and public statements demonstrating this would have been appropriate.

As stated in our evidence the wages cut alone from Grafton Gaol is in the vicinity of 8 million dollars and with economist estimating that every dollar coming into a community should be times by a factor of between 5 and 7, this is a huge economic loss not just for Grafton but for the region as a whole.

The presentation by Terry Watson which was tendered during our evidence clearly dictates that this North Coast area is a high needs area and we cannot afford an economic hit of these proportions.

5. Has your organisation had any contact with the Deputy Premier regarding the Correction Centre downsizing?

6. What involvement do you think the Deputy Premier should have had regarding the Grafton Correction Centre downsizing?

Questions 5 and 6 can be answered together.

The Deputy Premier was actually the acting Premier at the time this decision was released, and was at the meeting on Friday 6 July 2012 between the Minister for Corrective Service The Honourable Greg Smith and representatives from Unions and the Grafton Community.

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Request were made from both community and union representatives that the proposed downsizing be put on hold to allow all parties to come up with a workable proposal as an alternative to the closure of Grafton Gaol. The Minister for Corrective Services refused to consider any other proposal as did the acting Premier.

Of note the Deputy Premier walked out of the meeting before it was complete.

The Deputy Premier was also invited to attend the Community Rally in Grafton on Tuesday 10 July 2012 through his office where he could have addressed the community to explain the rationale behind the decision. The Deputy Premier declined to attend citing other commitments.

I thought the National Party represented the people of the bush.

In answering Questions 2 to 6 it appears that there is some blame being apportioned to members of Parliament. This is not the aim of CVCU we are not playing the blame game. We would like this decision to downsize Grafton Gaol Reversed.

7. Many submissions to the Inquiry talk about a failure of communication and consultation by the Government. What does your organisation consider to be the level of communication and consultation required in an exercise such as the downsizing of the Grafton Correction Centre?

It came out during evidence in Grafton that it takes 5 years of planning to construct and commission a new Gaol, why then is it that we can announce we are closing one and within 2 weeks expect that it be completed and shut or down sized. I think this says it all.

Cuts of this magnitude run deep in communities like ours, therefore the level of communication and consultation should be proportionate.

The written submission of behalf of CVCU outlines our stance on this subject. It may sound like I am repeating myself but I believe the use of community impact statements would provide the appropriate level of communication and consultation with affected parties.

Surely Governments would be better able to make rational and reasonable decisions, with properly completed community impact statements, providing details on the real impact of such decisions on various sections of the affected communities/regions.

8. Your submission provides some detail on the need for Community Impact Statements. Do you think a Community Impact Statement should be publicly available and in what circumstances do you think they should not be made public?

Yes they should and in all circumstance. We are a Democracy, are we not. It is important that the community has access to this information.

And yes it should be a matter of public record so that the community can assess the merits by which a decision has been made. This would ensure transparency in Government Decisions and the methodology they are applying to these decisions.

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Currently Rural Communities Impact Statements that are made to Cabinet for major proposed changes to government agencies in rural NSW are not made public. As a consequence, I and others have speculated as to whether these statements have been conducted and to what level of detail they are completed in.

9. Are you aware of any Rural Impact Statement being completed for the Grafton Correction Centre downsizing? Do you think the Rural Impact Statement completed for the Grafton Correction Centre downsizing should be made public?

We are certainly not aware that any rural impact statement was completed, there have been no discussions or rumours of any impact statement being completed. If one has been completed firstly I'd be interested in the date it was completed and yes, it should be a matter of public record so that the community can assess the merits of the impact statement.

Through conversations I have had I can confirm that Clarence Valley Community Unions, Unions NSW and the Public Sector Association were not consulted for the purposes of a rural impact statement. I also believe our local Mayor and business council were not consulted for the purposes of a rural impact statement

10. Can you detail the types of services and skill-sets that are now being lost to the Grafton community because of the downsizing of the correction centre? (For example hairdressers, teachers, nurses)

In our oral evidence, information was provided in this area.

I believe that Grafton will see a number of prison officers and ex-employees of the gaol move out of the area. As a result we will lose their expertise, as well as that of their partners. At this time it is difficult to know exactly what skills will be lost. I believe that time will tell this story for us. I do believe however, that this loss will be significant.

COMMENT:

In evidence we were questioned about the Aboriginal Legal Service supporting the decisions. An article appeared in the Daily Examiner Newspaper on 9 August 2012, I think supports the oral evidence we gave and provides further detail on the effects this decision is having.



Tony King

Chairperson CVCU

9 February 2013