



Grafton Chamber of Commerce and Industry

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Grafton's Great!

30 January 2013

To the Chair

Select Committee on the Closure or

Downsizing of Corrective Services NSW Facilities.

Grafton Chamber of Commerce and Industry Response to Select Committee on the Closure or Downsizing of Corrective Services NSW Facilities

Supplementary questions on notice from the Committee to Grafton Chamber of Commerce and Industry

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

That a decision that will have such an obvious and major impact on a rural, regional or community needs:

- Communication with all relevant and affected parties/representatives
- Consultation and Trust
- Identify likely impacts of the decision
- Investigate options, particularly where affecting Lower Social Economic areas
- If the decision ultimately is to close, that remedial plans be in operation before the closure, to assist transition and economic survival.

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?

No, there was no official discussion, advocacy or direct contact with the Community by the Minister for the North Coast that the Grafton Chamber of Commerce and Industry is aware of.

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

The Chair of the Grafton Chamber of Commerce and Industry had an unofficial telephone call with the Minister re his concerns on the issue.

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

The Minister for North Coast, the Local Member(s) and all relevant Ministers should have been consulted prior to the decision and action taken.

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

A delegation from Grafton Community (Mayor, Chamber, Prison Officers) attended Sydney where the Deputy Minister introduced the group to the Minister for Correctional Services, and left the room prior to the meeting. Outside of this brief contact there was no official discussion, advocacy or direct contact with the Community by the Deputy Premier that the Grafton Chamber of Commerce and Industry is aware of.

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

As Leader of the National Party, a rural interest political party, it was felt the Nationals and the Deputy Premier should have been more involved, more aware of the wider implications, more concerned and actively advocating on behalf of the community.

In addition it was the Deputy Premier who introduced to Parliament (some years earlier) a Bill requiring all such decisions to have a Rural Impact Statement, and should have advocated at the least for this to take place prior to decisions or actions being taken in this matter.

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?

We repeat that a decision that will have such an obvious and major impact on a rural, regional or community needs:

- Communication with all relevant and affected parties/representatives
- Consultation and Trust
- Identify likely impacts of the decision
- Investigate options, particularly where affecting Lower Social Economic areas
- If the decision ultimately is to close, that remedial plans be in operation before the closure, to assist transition and economic survival.

A Chamber member who is a regular member and attendee of the local Correction Services Advisory Group was only informed of these plans a week prior to the actual decision was acted upon and only at the same time as the media and community became aware of the decision. This means the “advisory group” was only a body in name and was little more than a Government/community token activity.

8. On page 2 of your submission you detail how a business lost \$3,000 per week directly due to the closure of the Correction Centre. Can you please provide other examples and case studies of the impact on local businesses of the decision to down-size the correction centre?

Part of this loss of income began three years ago when Gaol contracts for meat, fruit and veges and other supplies were sourced outside of town and limiting the provision of supplies and support to smaller amounts. Some businesses that retained some limited income included cigarettes (\$3000), prison buy ups (\$1-2,000 per annum), visitors meals (loss of income and staff member from weekends). We understand that electrical and some minor repairs were carried out using local businesses. Vehicles serviced, and similar maintenance would normally be provided locally.

The Grafton Chamber of Commerce and Industry is not financially able, nor sufficiently staffed, to offer anything more than feedback and anecdotal evidence on this matter. Statistics would be available through the ABS or Clarence Valley Council.

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?

No, the Minister was asked in Sydney, and he informed us there wasn't one. If there was one, yes, it should be made public. At no time are we aware of the Chamber or Council being asked by the State Government for information on the impact of this decision prior to the decision or actions being taken.

10. There were impacts on businesses in communities other than Grafton. Can you provide some examples of the impact on business further afield to Grafton?

The question posed is beyond the scope of the Grafton Chamber of Commerce and Industry to have empirical knowledge, although anecdotally, we would expect "staff" families to be living in and around the Grafton within a 1 hour radius. These people would live and spend locally and without work or faced with a loss of income would change their spending habits. Some may have to relocate for work purposes. Without a survey or consultant investigation this situation cannot be quantified.

The Grafton Chamber of Commerce and Industry would welcome being employed by the State Government, or receive a Grant to survey and consult if these details are needed by the Select Committee.

11. Your submission raises concern at the number of businesses that have closed during this year. How many businesses have closed or reduced their activity due to the downsizing of the Correction Centre?

The Grafton Chamber of Commerce and Industry reiterates that the closure of the Grafton Correctional Centre is in a line of recent economic and government impacts affecting our community. We have recently had two years of floods in January, preceded by a nationwide drought. The Timber industry has been decimated by Government regulations, compliance costs and contracts going to major companies like Boral (who in turn are closing significant sections), a loss of Tourism due to the Global Financial Crisis and the affect of this same GFC on the local economy, the closure of the Telstra Call centre (100 jobs), the South Grafton Abattoirs, and general trends towards part time and casual employment. Over the last two

years, most of the retail small businesses have reported business down 50-70% on two years ago. Many businesses in the CBD have reported a 30 per cent increase in business electricity costs in the last 18 months. The Grafton Correctional Centre closure also caused negative publicity for the community, making hard to “sell” business and entice residents due to reduced economic factors and fears.

We have seen major chain stores and franchises close (Collins, Game, Foxx Foe, Ally, Williams) and a number of independents including McKelly’s Department store, Gone Fishin, Little Ones, MORE .. Some businesses have moved to home, internet or out of the CBD to reduce costs (This That Patchwork, Material Needs, Monster Byte, a Chiropractor). I know of two businesses that were in negotiations to sell their business, however the buyers walked away when the Prison closure was announced

12. 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)

Again, this is outside the scope and activities of the Grafton Chamber of Commerce and Industry to have empirical knowledge, although again we would be willing to being employed by the State Government, or receive a Grant to survey and consult if these details are needed by the Select Committee.

Response to Question on Notice (per transcript)

Population of Grafton: current to 2011 is 51, 252 ([Council website](#))

SEIFA disadvantage rating 934.5 ([Council Website](#))

Journey to Work in Clarence Valley Data : ([Council Website](#))

Tourism Profile (2011) [Destination NSW Website](#)

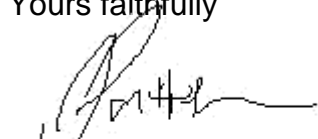
Information on Timber Industry : attached summary from Regional Development Australia Northern Rivers August 2012

Information on Fishing and Recreational Fishing. We have been unable to collate this information in time, as figures are not normally collated by Woolli or other local Chambers.

We hope the information contained answers many of your questions, and we would be please to add to or clarify anything further.

We appreciate your time and involvement in this vital enquiry into the local community.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James Patterson', written over a faint rectangular stamp.

James Patterson

Executive Officer

On behalf of The Grafton Chamber of Commerce and Industry