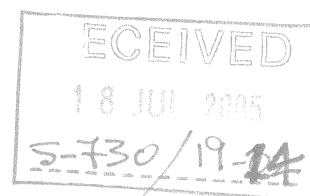


**Standing Committee On Law And Justice  
14 June 2005**

**Responses from the Members of the  
Inverell Chamber of Commerce & Industry**



1. Do you believe that a community based sentence can be effective in reducing re-offending? Why/why not?

Community based sentencing can be effective in reducing re-offending if the sentence imposed is truly appropriate to the offence. The sentence must be perceived by the general public to be fitting to the crime and at the same time act as a deterrent to the offender. Sentences could be served in highly visible positions, without inciting ridicule of the offender/s, to act as a deterrent to potential offenders.

Where a first time a offender has committed a petty crime and is considered not likely to re-offend, community based sentencing could be a way for them to be held accountable for their crime, and perhaps giving them the opportunity to fit better into their community.

2. Can you describe the business community's reaction to the use of community based sentencing option in Inverell and surrounding areas?

Offenders' sentences for crimes of violence or dishonest or drug related matters may not be attractive to most businesses. Some traffic offenders (in particular drink driving offenders) similarly may also not be viable propositions to most businesses.

In addition to this some businesses with customer focus on young persons or the aged may be unwilling to await the result of required police checks prior to taking on board a sentenced person.

Home detention option may be seen as inappropriate in some circumstances eg Break, Enter & Steal offences which leaves the offender within the community which has been the victim of the original crimes.

3. Can you tell the committee which agencies and private companies in the Inverell area provide placements for offenders on a community service order?

Inverell Shire has taken on community service order persons for riverbank beautification in the past.

McLean Memorial Retirement Village has taken on community service order persons for gardening/maintenance work.

Has the Chamber of Commerce had any feedback on these placements?

None.

What factors may effect an organisations decision whether or not to accept placement on community service order?

Factors affecting decision to accept placement include:

- Nature of crime for which community service order imposed, eg violence, dishonesty, drugs, sex offender etc
- Length of time involved in having result of police check returned for businesses dealing with young persons and the ages
- Public perception of the business after accepting the placement

4. Do you think it is appropriate and in the public interest to tailor community based sentencing options for special needs/disadvantaged groups in New South Wales?

It may be appropriate to tailor community based sentencing so that the offender/s contribute to the organisation or group which may have been the victim of that original crime. Alternatively, it may be appropriate for community based sentence to be served in a highly visible area so that the public can witness restitution being made by the offender/s and at the same time perhaps acting as a deterrent to potential offender/s being placed in such a highly visible position.

It could be appropriate for rural sector businesses to have community based sentenced persons allotted as part of drought mitigation activities.

Where the crime and offender fit the guidelines community based sentencing should be considered but not purely on the basis that the offender falls in a special needs or disadvantaged group.

The law needs to have the same consequences for all people within Australia. If a person is able to commit a crime, (a person with special needs or someone in a disadvantaged group), they face justice in the same manner.

Placement of these people would of course be appropriate eg; someone with mobility problems would not be placed where this would be impossible to complete the placement.

5. What cost considerations should be taken into account when considering expanding the availability of community based sentencing options, or tailoring them, for special needs/disadvantaged groups?

Cost considerations could include:

- Insurance of sentenced person whilst engaged in community based sentence activities
- Re-coup of costs incurred by business accepting the placement from Department of Corrective Services due to savings in the department not having to house, clothe and feed the sentenced person say during weekend detention
- Activities performed during the community based sentence should not be part of the profit making activities of the business accepting the placement eg could be restricted to cleaning and other housekeeping activities within the business
- The cost to the community and the host organisation should be weighed up against the cost of more traditional sentencing alternatives

- The social cost is an important factor, for example the impact community based sentencing have on the host business and the community in general. Will a stigma be created against the host organisation? This may be affected by the types of crimes that receive this sentencing.

6. What do you think is the impact on the community of the availability of intensive supervision programs (community based sentencing options) in the Inverell and surrounding areas?

One impact may be that the local community, especially those persons who may be subject of these community based sentencing programmes, will not be disadvantaged by being dealt with differently to those persons in areas where the programmes are available. Persons may be sentenced to terms of imprisonment purely because no provision exists in the local area for home detention.

7. Do government agencies such as Department of Corrective Services, Dept of Community Services, Police and others work together locally to provide coordinated support for offenders and their families in Inverell?

The Chamber of Commerce is involved in the PACT meetings which are held regularly, involving the police department, council representatives, Chamber of commerce and at times religious and other groups.

The Chamber has also arranged meetings of concerned business people and police representatives to discuss concerns and to gain understanding of what needs to be done by businesses if a crime is committed in their store.

Probation and Parole are probably the only organisation providing any direct support for offenders and their families. Indeed, the local police station has a sign in the foyer advising only visits by legal representatives to persons held in custody. This would indicate no actual support to families of offenders.

8. Was the Chamber of Commerce consulted by council in preparing its crime prevention plan?

The Chamber members were invited to give input to the council's crime prevention plan by way of a crime prevention questionnaire. However the completion of the questionnaire was up to each business and it is unknown how many returned it to council for consideration.

Can you share with the committee your views on crime prevention in Inverell?

Overall the prevention of crime is very good as the PACT statistics will prove. Anecdotal information however is that some crimes may go by the wayside due to the difficulty in obtaining adequate convictions and/or based on special needs/disadvantaged group status.

How would an increased availability of community based sentences impact on the level of crime in Inverell?