

Submission
No 453

**INQUIRY INTO THE PRIVATISATION OF PRISONS AND
PRISON-RELATED SERVICES**

Name: Name suppressed
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Partially Confidential

I am a serving Correctional Officer with 10 years experience in addition to 23 years working in private industry prior to joining the department and have watched and listened with interest to the debate over the proposed privatisation of Parklea and Cessnock jails together with court and escort security services.

The Labour government is proposing these measures in direct contravention of long standing Labour Party policy. The privatisation is being touted as a cost saving measure. However the anticipated savings are such a tiny percentage of the department's budget that it is difficult to believe they can be accurately determined.

Much of the debate has been focussed on overtime. It has been used for many years as an alternative to recruiting more staff. There are also spikes in overtime which can occur due to unforeseen circumstances. One example is hospital escorts. An inmate may require several days in hospital due to illness or injury. An A or B classification inmate requires 3 officers to be on guard. This equates to 9 officers in a 24 hour period. I have seen 3 inmates admitted to hospital concurrently for an extended period. That required 27 officers over a 24 hour period. Admittedly that was an extreme occurrence but serves to demonstrate how large amounts of unscheduled overtime can be accrued.

Currently officers with more than 40 days of accrued annual leave are being made to take leave at a time convenient to the department. The result is that there are more officers than usual on leave and the short fall is made up with the use of overtime. So while the department reduces its financial liability with regard to annual leave it increases its overtime bill.

Correctional centres now have audio visual booths for interactive links to courts, legal aid, parole offices, medical specialists etc. The cost savings have been enormous by obviating the need for inmates to be taken on escort for minor court matters or parole hearings. Yet the department still refuses to recruit staff for these booths and operates them using officers on overtime. The audio visual links have become an integral part of our operations but the department appears to view them in a luddite fashion as a passing fad.

Cost savings could be made by slashing the bureaucracy that has ballooned during the current commissioner's tenure. It is such a paradox that this bureaucracy has been developed by such a well known micro-manager. It is obvious to anyone working in the department that the large number of deputy and assistant commissioners are virtually impotent in their positions. A recently retired deputy commissioner is currently employed as a consultant to perform security reviews thus sidelining at great expense a whole section within the department tasked with performing the very same duties.

Setting aside the economic considerations, correctional centres are part of the justice system along with the courts and the police. The removal of a person's liberty is a solemn and drastic act undertaken by a court and it is administered by correctional officers. All functions of the justice system should be run directly by the state to give the public the confidence that they are safe from criminal elements in our society.

Correctional Officers work in a challenging and sometimes violent environment. Nonetheless it is a worthwhile and satisfying career. In any uniformed service, morale is important as is a sense of belonging. At the present time, morale is very low, which is not good and could lead to problems ahead. Our own senior leaders show open contempt for us. It is a credit to the officers at the coal face that they keep turning up and doing their jobs professionally.

Recent figures show that escapes and assaults on staff are at record low levels. This does not happen by accident. It happens by having well trained, professional officers who work as a team and perform their duties with diligence.

There are many examples of poor decision making and money wasting by this Labour government. The level of nepotism is astonishing and surely contributes to these shortcomings. There are people working in the top echelons of power who have no experience of life in the real world and whose only qualification for their jobs is being related to another person in the top echelons of power. I am certain that many people working at the front line in government departments could provide practical ways of saving money and improving efficiencies. Unfortunately these voices are ignored by these self serving power brokers.

I am directly interested in keeping prisons in public hands but I have a wider interest in improving the standards of morality, ethics and governance in NSW.