

Submission
No 152

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

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SUBMISSION TO PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY ON THE PRIVATISATION OF PRISON AND PRISON-RELATED SERVICES

Privatising prisons is an area that, in my opinion, needs to be entered into slowly and with caution if at all. Several factors need to be considered. Two that come to my mind are:

- The **ethical** question of whether any aspect of the justice system including prisons should be privatised, to become profit making organisations for shareholders. Some questions which may arise in prisons as profit making organisations relate to i) *productivity*: such as, if there are 2 inmates, one who is a productive, compliant worker and another who isn't, if profits are at the margin, will the best inmate be given positive work references which may lead to his/her parole? ii) If *profits* are at the margin, or if the private operator is competing with another to secure their tender or another one, where does the organisation implement cuts? Cuts to programs, such as health (including alcohol and drug programs), psychological, life skills, rehabilitation and welfare programs and services within the prison (or 'streamlining' of these), which do not have an immediate 'bang for the buck', and cuts to custodial staff necessitating more time in cells for inmates may be the easiest target as the results are least visible (being long term). However, cuts like these are often most detrimental to the welfare of inmates and eventually to successful re-integration into society
- The **practical** application of private organisations such as law enforcement agencies, which in practice are often characterised by a lack of, or resistance to control or regulation, and an inability of governments to be fully aware of some of the abuses that have occurred in these organisations until many years later. Some of the older forms of similar organisations that may be considered internationally are private military services (such as mercenary soldiers) and private police forces (such as vigilante groups and security companies). Australian experience has been seen in some of the negative issues related to the actions of some private security guards towards unruly patrons, and more recently, of the abusive behaviour found to have routinely occurred in privatised immigration detention centres by guards towards immigrants. These issues were serious ongoing unregulated and undetected abuses of power, and the potential for this ever occurring again needs to be well considered before rolling out the privatisation of prisons. Additionally, from a cost point of view, dealing with any consequences (eg. financial, legal, social and criminal) from the above issues in future may prove more costly to governments in the future.