

**INQUIRY INTO THE CLOSURE OR DOWNSIZING OF  
CORRECTIVE SERVICES NSW FACILITIES**

**Name:** Name suppressed

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Partially Confidential

6<sup>th</sup> November 2012

To: The Select Committee on the downsizing of Corrective Services NSW facilities.

Honourable members,

I would like to briefly address items from the terms of reference for the committee as broadly seen by most staff within the Corrective Services.

**(a) the basis for the decision to close or downsize any facility.**

- The decision to down size or close Correctional Centres with-in NSW was and is solely based on economics.
- The introduction of Community base sentencing was introduced as an alternative to custodial sentencing and to reduce the independence on gaols and reduce the cost of criminals on the NSW public.
- Since the introduction of intensive correctional orders or community based sentencing the gaol population has decreased by approximately 2000 inmates.
- While all understand the need for alternatives to custodial sentences, it appears at times that the onus on community based sentencing and the wish to have this cost cutting process succeed has over shadowed the community's expectation that the law and justice is there to keep them safe.
- All too often offenders are given 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> chances prior to any custodial sentence. This is at the risk of the community as it is the community that these criminals are affecting.
- The concern of most staff and the community is where are we going to house these inmates who show little or no regard to the law and continue to offend until such time as they are incarcerated? In 2 or 3 years when this process goes a full cycle, will this process show the same effect on the community as did the Richmond report in the 1980's leaving us no where to house these offenders?

The committee may be able to look at the cost comparison between supervising an offender on an intensive correctional order and the cost of housing a repeat offender in a correctional centre.

The basis to close correctional centre in NSW was partially based on the above, but also includes the fact that 4 newer correctional centres housing approximately 500 inmates have been built in NSW in the last 10 years reducing the viability and financial sustainability of some smaller centres.

**(b & c) rural impact statement and consultation with the community.**

As was shown with the down sizing of Grafton and the closure of Kirkconnell and Cooma, there was little or no consultation with any stake holders. The stake holders on all occasions were given minimal notice of approximately 2 week.

A study into the effects to the communities in the area where these closures occurred would be of interest, as we are discussing small towns loosing a million dollar industry with little or no notice.

**(d) cost associated with the closure / downsizing and relocation of prisoners.**

Grafton Correctional Centre was / is the most northern correctional centre in NSW. This centre not only housed inmates from the local area, but also housed inmates required for court in this region. This region went from Coffs Harbour to Ballina to Lismore and any other court house with-in this area. With it restructure and down sizing it now means that the next available correctional centre is at Kempsey some 2.5 hours away.

Under the restructure of Grafton that occurred this year Grafton can only house approximately 50 inmates. Any inmate not required for court must be sent out of the centre to make room available for other inmates required for court. This causes a never ending scuffle of inmates too and fro for this purpose.

Any inmate who has family in the Grafton area will have to wait until the inmate is at MNC before being able to visit the inmate and as above this is a 2.5 hour trip 1 way.

The Mid-North Coast Correctional Centre (MNC) held the remand inmates and is the reception gaol for the mid-north coast region.

Since the downsizing of Grafton the Mid-North Coast Correctional Centre now not only has to house the inmates for the Kempsey mid-north coast court area, but also has to accommodate the inmate for the northern region courts thus doubling the number of remand or unsentenced inmates housed at this centre.

The inmates received into Grafton and forwarded onto MNC are often not screened or interviewed due to the lack of staff at Grafton, and important health and other information is not been recorded until they are seen at MNC thus putting more work onto the staff at MNC and possibly placing some inmates well being in jeopardy.

The cost attributed to the closures and relocation is that,

- the inmates are constantly needed to be transported back and forth for court
- have very limited access to family and friends via visits
- impact on the ability of MNC to maintain a working population of inmates to sustain the viability of the centres industries (remand inmates are not required to work but may if they wish)
- prevent the inmates from being appropriately screened to address their needs.

**(e) impact on staff and families.**

The point of most concern about any of the closures or restructures is the lack of fore planning or notice given to the people affected by the closures / restructures by the department of corrective services or Government.

- Nearly all of the centres closed / restructured were given little or no more than 14 days notice that they were to be close. This includes Berrima, Parramatta, Kirkconnell and Grafton.

The impact on these staff must have been devastating as they believe they were in a job that offered security and a future. They not only had to decide if they wish to remain in the employ of the department, but if they could afford to relocate their families away from their extended families and the support they offer, and away from years of friendships and contacts.

- Some of the officers relocated in the first round of closures were sent to other centre that closed. It is known that Officers relocated from the closure of Berrima was sent to Grafton only to be informed a couple of months later that this centre too was to be partially closed.

The total lack of transparency or fore planning by the department is bewildering and showed very little respect for the staff that have made the department what it is today or the inmates that it is entrusted to care for.

The downsizing or closure of any centre could / should have been done in a progressive manner with little or no disruption. The "rush" closure of the above centres did not give staff or inmates time to adjust or make adequate plans.

A lot of inmate's visitor or families move close to the centre housing the inmates so they are able to visit. They also relocate close to the centre so the cost of phone calls is reduced thus not placing financial burden on the inmates and these people too were disadvantages by the urgent rushed closures.

The manner of the closures has led to a lot of concerns about arterial motives. One of these concerns is the never ending threat of privatisation and this concern along with the disregard for the staff during these closures has impacted on the short term or unplanned absenteeism within the department fuelled by a lack of trust.

**(f & g) long term plans of each facility**

As mentioned above, some concern has been raised about the “honey moon” period for the community based sentencing. Most centres closed were old but some consideration should be given to maintaining these facilities encase the gaol population of NSW again increases.

Some of these centres like Parramatta and Berrima and Grafton contain some heritage value and no plans have been revealed about their future or upkeep. Kirkconnell is based in a rural environment and will also require constant maintenance /up keep.

The committee may also be able to ascertain if these costs were considered when the centres were closed.

**(h) process used to identify any public sector employment opportunities**

I am unable to comment on any plans to relocate employment opportunities in the area that centres were closed.

There were little or no known efforts on behalf of the department or government to find officers / staff made redundant due to the changes any employment in the local areas.

**(i) other related matters**

- Officers were given the opportunity to transfer to other centres or take redundancies, but this did nothing to help the staff shortages encountered by other gaols in the state.
- Corrective services have not recruited permanent staff for approximately 4 years, and this has left a lot of centres short staffed.
- Many correctional centres can not operate effectively due to staff shortages.

I am currently employed by the corrective services and ask that my detail remain confidential or not be publicly published, and hope the information supplied in this document is of some assistance to the committee.

Regrettably this document was completed in haste and I apologise for any errors that may exist in the document.

Thank you for reading this submission / document.