

**Submission
No 30**

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

Organisation: Clarence Valley Community Unions

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Date received: 7/11/2012

7th November 2012

Submission by Clarence Valley Community Unions

Clarence Valley Community Unions, (CVCU) was at the forefront and organiser of the save our gaol campaign, I feel we should make this submission.

CVCU was created under the auspices of UNIONS NSW to have all unions working together as a collective, to meet challenges from government on our professions, which in turn have an impact on our communities and our standard of living.

The aim of CVCU was to co-ordinate the unions and engage the community to campaign and fight against Government decisions which have a negative impact on our communities. We are an A political organisation.

Standard of living is something governments never mention. They concentrate on fiscal policies with little regard for our standard of living. This is where CVCU is prominent as is Unions NSW.

Right from the outset, what occurred to these employees at Grafton gaol was wrong. We should not treat our people like that. To give government employees two weeks' notice to make a decision, to apply for transfer, apply for their own job or take voluntary redundancy should not happen in our society. The hurt and pain expressed by a lot of the employees was overwhelming.

The sheer number of people from the community that spoke out during the campaign was again incredible. It was surprising to see that number of people that either have currently or have had a relative that was employed at the gaol. Combine this with friends employed at the Gaol, and the tentacles spread further.

Add to this the number businesses that expressed to CVCU that this decision would have a dramatic negative effect on their business and it was certainly clear this decision would have devastating consequences for our community.

This was the NSW Government doing this to their own workers and their own people in the Clarence Valley community was nothing short of a disgrace. This was not a multinational company doing this but a government body. I'm sure government in the past have criticised companies for doing what they did to the Grafton Gaol.

The involvement of CVCU commenced on Friday Afternoon 29 June 2012 when members of the POVB contacted our organisation and asked for the assistance of CVCU.

CVCU members attended a Prison Officers meeting the next day and just about every day after this. It was clear that the PSA and POVB were restrained in taking industrial action which was accredit to them.

These unions called right from the start as did CVCU for the pause button to be pressed and to sit down and talk.

A major rally with large crowd had to be organised before the Government would agree to talk to the union and local community representatives about the decision. This Rally occurred on Thursday 5 July 2012 and by this time CVCU had amassed over 10,000 signatures on a petition

This meeting occurred on Friday 6 July 2012 between Community representatives, Chamber of commerce Jeremy Challacombe, Mayor Richie Williamson, Local MP Chris Gulaptis, UNIONS NSW Adam Kerslake, POVB Matt Bindley, PSA Shane O'Brien, and Government Members Acting Premier and leader of the Nationals Andrew Stoner and Greg Smith.

It was clear that this meeting was to appease the community and was a token gesture, Andrew Stoner left prior to the completion of the meeting.

On Saturday 7 July 2012 word filters through that the prison trucks are on their way and a picket line forms at the Grafton Gaol. This was no ordinary picket line with union members this was a Community picket line.

On Sunday 8 July 2012 as forecast the prison trucks arrive. There is no consultation and one prison truck forcibly drives through the picket line committing criminal acts in the process. Again there was no consultation.

On Monday 9 July 2012, Local Member Chris Gulaptis met with Premier Barry O'Farrell on his return from leave and following this meeting the Premier reserved his decision.

A second Community Rally was organised for Tuesday 10 July 2012 this attracted a larger crowd such was the angst. The rally was calling on Andrew Stoner the Leader of The Nationals to stand up for the bush.

In 2004 whilst in opposition, Mr Stoner expressed great concern about the need for Governments to consider the impact on communities prior to making a decision. In September 2004 he introduced the Rural Communities Impacts Bill into parliament. This Bill would have forced Government decision makers to consider the consequences of their decisions on regional communities because Mr Stoner argued that:

"If we blindly follow this ideology of economic rationalism, as evidenced in the raft of Government policies I have detailed, it will be the death of small country community after small country community."

In introducing his Bill, Mr Stoner expressed concern about the decision of the then Labor Government that would have cut 42 full time NSW Government from Grafton and he said this:

"In the case of Grafton, there was a rally at which the honourable member for Clarence spoke, along with people from those affected agencies, along with the Australian Workers Union and cleaners from schools. Labor is losing support in its heartland.

They were decrying the impact on Grafton of the proposal—42 direct jobs gone, and with the multiplier effect, using government figures, a total of 192 extra jobs are going. That is 232 jobs out of the Clarence economy, or 4 per cent of the total workforce. If 4 per cent of the total workforce of Sydney were being slashed, it would be 52,000 jobs. What a great hue and cry we would have if that were to occur. But here the city-centric Labor Government says it is okay to hack into 4 per cent of the workforce in Grafton.

What will that mean apart from all those jobs going? Extrapolating the figures, it will mean 532 fewer children at Grafton schools, which will then mean 20 fewer teachers. It will mean a downgrade to the hospital. It will mean fewer police. This savage cut to just that one local economy will affect all services"

The Bill called for Community Impact statements in regional areas to be completed prior to Decisions such as the closing of Grafton Gaol are made by Cabinet. Although the Bill was defeated it clearly showed that Andrew Stoners policy was for Community Impact statements to be completed prior to decisions of this kind being made.

Following the second Rally Premier Barry O'Farrell made the decision that the decision to down size Grafton Gaol would proceed. Further prison trucks were dispatched along with the riot squad to prevent a repeat of the previous attempt to remove the Prisoners.

The community of Grafton showed their spirit when the prison trucks arrived about 3am on Thursday 12 July 2012. There were no violent scenes, Community people peacefully and respectfully protesting a disgusting decision.

Consultation

The main issue we see with this decision was the lack of **Consultation**.

It is clear that there was no meaningful consultation on the impacts of this decision, on the employees, the community, business people, Prisoner Relatives, Recommendations from Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in custody.

I have already commented on the way the Prison staff were treated but to be told that the decision to down size Grafton Gaol was made in November 2011, further illustrates the disgraceful way they were treated. It was in fact an inmate who first told the employees that the Gaol was about to be downsized on the day before prison Officers were told.

Proper and meaningful consultation between Government and affected staff should have occurred between November 2011 and July 2012.

VCU, the PSA, POVB and the Clarence Valley Community right from the outset called for the pause button to be pressed and to sit down and talk. This claim was in vain.

The Government was made aware of alternative solutions but it was clear they did not want to listen. By not working with the unions in a meaningful way we now have the farcical situation where Grafton Gaol is in limbo, Cessnock not open and unable to be opened at present.

It is clear that the meeting on Friday 6 July 2012 between Community representatives, Chamber of commerce Jeremy Challacombe, Mayor Richie Williamson, Local MP Chris Gulaptis, UNIONS NSW Adam Kerslake POVB Matt Bindley, PSA Shane O'Brien, and Government Members Acting Premier and leader of the Nationals Andrew Stoner and Greg Smith, was a token gesture and a joke.

Acting Premier Andrew Stoner left prior to the completion of the meeting. And Greg Smith Football quote at this meeting Minister Smith said words to the effect of; "In a football game sometimes you loose and you just have to move on."

This we feel says it all

Impact Statement

It is clear that by not consulting with anyone in the community that the Government had no real idea on the impact that this decision would have on the community.

Therefore this decision was made without any rationale on how it would impact on

- Local Businesses
- Local Housing market
- Local Schools
- Local People
- Families

Recent job losses with Telstra Call centre and Local abattoir closing exacerbate the effect of the gaol downsizing.

Economists argue that for every dollar spent in a community like Grafton it exchanges through 5 to 7 separate hands before it leaves the community. Gaol wages loss of between 8 and 10 million dollars quickly multiplies to significant amount of money ripped from this economy.

It is our understanding that there were no reports or records on which the minister or Government based there decision upon. In recent years the Gaol had significant works completed to enable it to operate more efficiently, what about this waste.

Closing

We the unions and the community are not the enemy, work with us to achieve mutual outcomes. All we want is a fair go.

In closing we would like to tender media articles from the Daily Examiner newspaper and the following footage which we feel captures the motional tie that the Gaol has to the community of Grafton.

The best way that I can sum up what has occurred with the downsizing of the Grafton gaol is, 'It is like attending the funeral of close friend who died from a senseless or stupid act, it hurts a lot and need not have occurred and would not have occurred had common sense prevailed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

CVCU would like to see the following recommendations

1. The NSW Government should revise its decision and restore Grafton Gaol to its previous operational status.
2. The NSW Government should not go ahead with any decision to abolish rural job opportunities without first completing a rural impact statement on the effects of such a decision on the rural community.
3. The NSW Government must establish a proper consultative process, by establishing a committee comprising representatives of
 - Local Business
 - Local Council
 - Unions
 - Government representative

From the regions affected by the proposed decision

- A representation of Treasury and Government meet with this committee
- The community Impact statement prepared for Unions NSW be implemented prior to any decision.

Submitted by: Anthony King
Clarence Valley Community Unions