

Submission  
No 343

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

**Name:** Mr David Walker

**Date received:** 25/02/2009

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# **Inquiry into the Privatisation of Prisons and Prison Related Services**

## **Public Submission of: Mr. David Anthony Walker**

I would firstly like to take this opportunity to register my protest in relation to the behaviour of Mr. Ron Woodham and the NSW Corrective Services on Monday 23 February 2009.

Comments made to the Enquiry into the Privatisation of Prisons and Prison Related Services (hereafter referred to as the Enquiry) and subsequent media reports, I found to be deeply offensive. I am referring to the negative comments made in relation to NSW Correctional Officers.

I feel Mr. Woodham's comments were defamatory to certain parties named and were certainly aggravating to damage already sustained as a result of previous media releases of the 'Commissioner's Media Unit'.

Mr. Woodham's comments were grossly inflammatory and I believe were delivered in such a way that demonstrated contempt for the proceedings. Mr. Woodham used the Enquiry as a platform to launch a smear campaign against Prison Officers presumably to garner public support for this ill-conceived Prison Privatisation crusade.

## **Submission**

I am a Senior Correctional Officer with the NSW Corrective Services. I have been engaged in this capacity for approximately 10 years.

I have recently been elected to the Foundation Committee of the Community Justice Coalition.

I am strenuously opposed to the Privatisation of Prisons and Prison related services by the NSW Government.

I am sure the Enquiry has heard the moral arguments that relate to this issue. How privatisation of a fundamental Governmental responsibility like Custodial Corrections transcends the morale and ethical boundaries of our Community.

Profit from the misery of humans is perverse and should not be tolerated.

I sat in the public gallery during the first day of the Enquiry and was amazed at how simple the argument was. I was anticipating being bombarded by figures, graphs, statistical data and Independent Case studies and alike. Instead all I got, initially at least was a bunch of spiteful diatribe by a bitter Commissioner who seemed hell bent on delivering a fatal blow to the Professional Association of NSW Prison Officers.

I heard that realistically all the NSW Tax-payer stood to benefit from this exercise was a measly \$15 Million. As a NSW Tax-payer, I was a little under-whelmed to say the least.

Before I go to the core of my submission I feel it is necessary to state a couple of salient facts in relation to the NSW Corrective Services.

1. NSW Corrective Services is 'a closed shop'. For years, at the behest of Mr. Ron Woodham DCS has become an enigma. It has bucked the popular trend to enhance transparency and has in fact become less open and transparent in the conduct of its business. The enquiry has heard that Freedom of Information refusal figures are the highest of any NSW Agency. The enquiry has also heard of the abolition of the position of Inspector General of Corrective Services and the watering down of the powers of the Official Visitors Program. Frankly, the Commissioner does not care too much for scrutiny of his Administration at any level.
2. NSW Corrective Services is 'top heavy'. A cursory examination of the Department's Corporate Structure indicates that we have 1 Commissioner, 2 Deputy Commissioners, 7 Assistant Commissioners, 2 Chief Superintendents, 5 Executive Directors and 4 Regional Executive Directors. And so it goes on.

The proceedings certainly raised more questions for me than it answered. These include however are not limited to the following;

1. It seems apparent that the financial benefits of privatisation to the Government simply are not significant enough to alone compel the move to privatisation.

Mr. Woodham repeatedly offered the benefit of bench-marking public facilities against private sector facilities as being the underlying reason for privatisation. One must ask firstly, if Junee which is a facility that has been privately operated for 15 years does not offer sufficient bench marking opportunities what will be different at the other proposed locations?

Secondly if plans to privatise CESU go ahead, there will not be any comparable services against which to make comparisons, as such the bench-marking benefit is excluded leaving nothing but **possible** piecemeal financial benefits.

2. How does Mr. Woodham explain the exemplary record of NSW Corrective Services in relation to lowering the rates of escapes, deaths and assaults? If the rates are anything to go by, NSW Prison Officers are doing a sensational job and Private sector organisations worldwide should be bench marking themselves against NSW.
3. Is it not the case that the regime of Mr. Woodham whom I have seen described in the press as the J. Edgar Hoover of Corrections is not able to manage workplace and industrial relations to a point whereby effective consultation may be achieved with Unions?

4. Is it not the case that Mr. Woodham has always used the threat of privatisation as the stick with which to drive his reform strategies? If this is indeed the case is it reasonable for the tax-payer to accept that the only performance management strategy that a public sector agency with a One Billion Dollar Budget has at its disposal, is the privatisation of essential services? I think not.
5. With due consideration for the need for financial reform and restraint during this global economic crisis what **else** has Mr. Woodham as the Department Head done to achieve said reform and restraint? What steps has Mr. Woodham taken to comply with the Premier's direction to achieve 20% savings in the Senior Executive Service ranks?
6. Mr. Turner from the PSA was reluctant to cross his members engaged in administrative services within the Department during his evidence, but I'm quite happy to go there. Is it not the case that the 40% increase in staff numbers put forward in the Departments submission, relates predominantly to administrative and ancillary staff services? Not 'frontline, standing in front of an inmate all day' positions.

I recently heard a Professor from within the Department of Health say that with regards to his own Department, the bureaucracy had become so costly and inflated that it was actually inhibiting service delivery. Those comments struck a cord with me and made me consider Corrective Services. I drew similar conclusions.

Further it made me consider why in this time of economic crisis my own Department had not taken steps to significantly reduce costs in areas other than frontline services.

Several months ago along with some colleagues I started a 'Group' on the Social Networking Website, 'Facebook'. It is called "Suggestions to save Big RON a few clams". It was meant as a tongue in cheek cynical look at some of the financial leaks that existed within NSW Corrective Services. The theme of the 'group' was that NSW Corrective Services could achieve the savings that were mandated by the times without actually privatising or attacking the pay and conditions of frontline Officers.

Group members would post ideas some of which coincidentally or otherwise were adopted as policy by the Department shortly thereafter. Ideas like emailing pay advices to staff rather than having them individually posted out.

Extravagances of the Department like yoga teachers and bottled water were also critically examined by this group.

The relevance of this, to this enquiry is that even Prison Officers sitting at home on their computers can strategize cost cutting measures and identify financial leaks. Why then is it that a bloated bureaucracy such as DCS cannot critically analyse its own operation more comprehensively than to merely attack frontline services and push the privatisation agenda.

## **Sick Leave.**

I work in the Prison Hospital at Long Bay, prior to that I worked in the Surry Hills Police Cell Complex. In my only limited time in the Department, I have been spat on. I have had human excrement thrown at me. I have had to fight for my life with my bare hands in a cell smeared with an offenders own faeces. I have been confronted by offenders armed with blood filled syringes and another with a gaol made cutting weapon. I have held together the shocking self inflicted slash wounds of a disturbed offender. I have applied life preserving techniques to deceased offenders. I have attended the funeral of a colleague killed by an offender. I have attended the funeral of a colleague killed by himself. I have even extinguished an offender who had set themselves on fire.

My sick leave record by all accounts is quite poor.

To put it into perspective I saw a psychologist for a period of time to discuss why I kept seeing the face of a particular deceased inmate every-time I closed my eyes. He often commented to me that the best advice he could give with regards to my ongoing employment as a Prison Officer was.... Resign immediately! it's the only sane thing to do.

So yes sick leave is an issue in Prisons, at least my experience. Is it an issue that can be credibly linked to overtime manipulation? It is my respectful submission that to do so would be offensive. Did I mention that I haven't done 1 hour of overtime in 8 months?

The Department applies band-aid remedies to many of its problems. Let me offer an example. Prison overcrowding is a problem worldwide, NSW is not exempt. 3 weeks ago the Department re-opened a previously mothballed wing where I work to accommodate 150 inmates and take some pressure off the overcrowding. The Department outlined a 'Way Forward' manning level which I honestly found very generous. This manning level meant that our location which previously had 105 positions now had 144 positions. Do you think that they immediately moved 39 additional staff to our Centre either by redeployment or otherwise? No. What they have done is actually overtly stated that the 39 positions will be filled on overtime.

It is noteworthy at this point to indicate that the opening of this wing presents to the Department a 200% increase in inmate capacity at Long Bay Hospital.

It is apparent then that within a short space of time if the location has had a 37% increase in positions with a 0% increase in staffing then a proportionate increase in overtime costs would be expected. Does this mean that Officers from my work location are manipulating overtime? Are we driving the need to privatise? I would not have thought so.

On a personal note. I do hope that this Enquiry gives due consideration to the families of the potentially displaced employees particularly from Cessnock. These people are not the master manipulators or bullies like Mr. Woodham would have you believe. If you take the word of Sharon McLeod the Official Visitor from Cessnock, they are hard-working, professional Officers dedicated to their profession.

I think that this Enquiry is going to find that this push for privatisation is not the necessary evil that it has been made out to be. Management of the Corrective Services are going to have to go back to the table and justify their generous salaries by managing. Managing their resources, their workforce and their challenges as is the expectation of every NSW Tax-payer.

These people are public servants and to expect the Community, the public to accept something as fundamentally inappropriate as the privatisation of Prisons merely to make up for their shortcomings is narrow-minded and irresponsible.

Thank-you for the opportunity to make a submission to this Enquiry.

I would be happy to appear in person before the Enquiry or provide further assistance as considered desirable by the members.

David Anthony Walker