

**Submission  
No 52**

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

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## Inquiry into the closure or downsizing of Corrective Services NSW facilities

Submission by Rosalind Dale

To the Committee

I was previously employed by the Department of Corrective Services at Berrima Correctional Centre as a clerk until the closure of the Centre in October 2011. I did not apply for redeployment, choosing a redundancy package. I would like to submit the following for your consideration.

In reference to Section C.

Some months prior to the closure of Berrima, it was mentioned at a number of staff meetings that Berrima may close or change its operations and the Centre had to make substantial savings in operating costs. As the majority of operating costs went towards staff wages, it was decided the custodial staff work 8 hour shifts instead of 12 hour shifts. It was an unpopular decision but one that was made in order to save the Centre from closure. Other operating costs were proportionally small in relation to custodial wages and overtime expenditure. All efforts were made to cut costs in every area of expenditure and they were achieved. In the event of a change, it was put forward by the executive staff that Berrima could become a centre for aged and infirm or disabled inmates as the centre has few stairs making it suitable for that client group. The return to a protection gaol was also put forward as Berrima previously worked well in this capacity. A juvenile detention centre was also an option considered. As far as I can remember, the Berrima Correctional Centre Community Consultative Committee nor the Council were informed of the impending closure. The Print Shop was a flourishing unit with many inmates learning new skills and it returned a good profit. The unit was well accepted and utilised by the community. The inmates contribution to the local community was valuable to many organisations. They were actively engaged in the long term maintenance of Berrima by mowing public grounds for the local Council. The inmates participated in a program in conjunction with the National Trust maintaining the gardens at the local historic property, Harper's Mansion. On an annual basis the inmates

participated in planting over 10,000 tulip bulbs in parks in the Shire for Tulip Time, the major tourist attraction; the preparation of Moss Vale and Robertson showgrounds and steward duties during the shows and preparation of Bundanoon oval and assisting at the Scottish festival, Brigadoon and the Goulburn Rose Festival. Nevertheless, despite the efforts made to keep the centre from closing, on-going rumours made staff anxious about their uncertain futures. Eventually, the closure was announced at a meeting. Staff were reassured that no-one would lose their job-hard to believe as Parramatta and Kirkconnell were also announced to close. We were assured there would be a smooth transition for the inmates and the staff. That may have been the intention however, in reality, the situation was far from smooth. The inmates, we were told, would be gradually moved out over a period of months to other centres. From the outset of the news of the closure, there was panic, anxiety and confusion. Inmates and staff alike were fraught with the prospect of major change. Instead of a gradual transition, the inmates were removed within a few weeks, many were very upset by their relocation as it impacted on the possible association problems they faced and impacted on their family visits. Some of their families had to travel from great distances south of Berrima and would find it even more difficult to visit a Sydney gaol.

In reference to Section E

The immediate impact on the staff was quite devastating. As I worked in the Administration office at the time, I was running messages to the HR staff from Berrima staff who were on leave, frantically phoning to see what they could secure in the way of a job. It was perplexing to see how badly people were affected by the news of the closure as it impacted on, not only themselves, but also their families. They were faced with long-distance travelling to work or up-rooting their families and moving, totally disrupting their lifestyles. Many could not risk giving up a secure job with the Department as their financial situations depended on two incomes. Sixteen people out of thirty three chose redundancy-not including the Justice Health staff. Of those who chose redundancy, most did not want to move or commute. I was in this category. Even now, a year later, I have spoken to a number of ex staff from Berrima who are suffering from the effects of extended travel times for work which impacts on their family lives and relationships with family members. In my case,

I have been put in the position of having to find new work which is not easy at 58 years of age and with limited skills.

In reference to Section I

The cost of closing Berrima is immeasurable to the community. I have spoken to most of the shop owners in Berrima who have told me that since the centre closed, they have experienced a noticeable down-turn in business from tourists, visitors to the Gaol and the staff. When the Gaol's Craft Shop was operating, the shop keepers of Berrima always experienced extra sales. Members of the public often phoned to inquire when the Craft Shop would be open.

There are three remaining all female centres in the system i.e. Mulawa - a small centre with a small high risk state; Emu Plains - a medium sized centre with various security risk classification inmates and Dillwynia - a larger centre also with various security risk inmates. All these centres are in the Sydney Metropolitan area. Berrima is conveniently situated between Canberra and Sydney and about an hours drive inland from Wollongong. This location is suitable for inmates who need to maintain contact with their families during incarceration which leads to calmer behaviour and a better transition on release. Berrima was a valuable centre in which to house inmates with association problems in other centres.

I have noticed since the centre closed that the indigenous people have made a claim for the centre. It is my belief following my own research, that there are no remaining Gundungurra people in existence and that the gaol was not a sacred site. There is currently a 'Berrima Jail Action Group' actively trying to claim the centre for a retail outlet which I consider very limited in realistic terms. Perhaps the external buildings are suitable for this purpose however, the centre is a heritage listed building and therefore cannot be renovated without much ado, if at all. I cannot see this as a practical solution. I believe the Centre is a secure and functional place and should be re-opened as a correctional centre once again for all the reasons that it was a success when it was open.