

**Submission
No 9**

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

Name: Mr Matt Bindley

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Firstly thank you for taking the time to read my submission.

My submission is based on the experiences I had mainly through the downsizing of Grafton Correctional Centre and I have provided some background information I doubt you would have had the opportunity to either hear or read about.

I base my remarks both personally and from the aspect of being the State Chairperson of the Prison Officers Vocational Branch.

I have given you my perspective and version of events as they evolved over a period of approximately 1 year.

I am more than happy to provide any further information as you may require and I will assist you in any way I can.

My name is Matthew Bindley. I am currently the State Chairperson of the Prison Officers Vocational Branch (POVB) within the Public Service Association (PSA). In addition to this I am a current employee of Corrective Services New South Wales and hold the rank of Senior Correctional Officer. I have been employed by Corrective Services since 1993.

My employment history has involved me working primarily in three different Correctional Centres, these being Metropolitan Remand Centre at Long Bay, Parklea Correctional Centre and currently John Morony Correctional Centre at Windsor

From the onset I would like to take the opportunity to thank all members of this Parliamentary enquiry and for taking the time to read, listen and watch submissions by all people who have taken the time to participate in this enquiry.

It's vitally important incidents like the downsizing of Grafton Correctional Centre never transpire again. It should be noted this is the first instance of closures of Correctional Centres in New South Wales. In 2011 Parramatta, Kirkconnell and Berrima Correction Centres were closed. This was on the trail of Parklea Correctional Centre being privatised or as it was stated "outsourced".

As State Chairperson of the Prison Officers Vocational Branch I with other members of the State executive of the POVB and representatives of the Public Service Association was in the position to be involved in all recent closures and downsizing of Grafton Correctional Centre. It should be noted the POVB has a membership of over 3500 members which represents the ranks up to and including Senior Correctional Officer.

From the outset I was astonished with the decision to "downsize" Grafton Correctional Centre as there was no indication given this would occur. Senior management within the Department still had meetings scheduled in relation to the centres Management Plan. While I acknowledge the scheduling of the meeting had changed a number of times there was no insight into what was planned for the location.

I initially heard from an anonymous source from within Corrective Services New South Wales that Grafton Correctional Centre was going to close. This person told me they had heard the information the offices of senior management and would not elaborate further than this.

Communication was then made with the then Deputy Commissioner Ian McLean on Wednesday 27th June in relation to the matter. While the matter was discussed the Deputy Commissioner conveyed the location would change the manner in which it operated. The Deputy Commissioner said we needed to meet in relation to Grafton Correctional Centre but stated it would need to be the following week due to the unavailability of the then Commissioner Ron Woodham. This was not possible due to the media having been alerted to the possibility of Grafton Correctional Centre not being "downsized" but closing. A meeting was scheduled for the POVB to attend at Long Bay regional office on Friday 29th

June. It was in this meeting we were informed Grafton Correctional Centre would be downsized and the impact on staff would be that approximately 107 people would lose their position in the location. Corrective Services New South Wales intended on leaving only approximately 21 custodial officers and approximately 72 inmates.

We were informed Grafton Correctional Centre would become a Transit Centre and inmates would remain in the location for a maximum of 2 or 3 days until transferred to an alternate Correctional Centre. We were informed the only inmates that would remain in the Centre longer would be either a small number of minimum security inmates who were to remain in location to attend to the needs of the Centre which would include but not be limited to ground maintenance and assistance within the kitchen. Other than this, inmates who were on trial or nearing court matters would remain in the Centre.

There appeared in my opinion to be very little thought into the impact such radical changes would have not only on the staff or their families, friends, the community, the economic effect on the community nor was in my opinion was consideration given to the impact this would have on not only indigenous inmates and their families who have ties to the land and local region but all inmates and their families.

The impact I personally witnessed on members of staff and their families was horrendous as they with their families were left with the prospect of being forced to either relocate to another town/city to continue employment with Corrective Services New South Wales, take a redundancy or reapply for a job within the downsized Centre. The impact on their partners was not limited to being forced to leave employment within the district or the impact on children who were going to be uprooted from current schooling and sporting or leisure activities let alone the prospect of being in the predicament of leaving friends behind. Further concern revolved around those people who were in the situation of caring for children with disability who had treating doctors in the area or who cared for ill or elderly members of their family.

This was evident when I personally was in the situation of witnessing members of staff and their wives, husbands, partners, children and extended families reduced to tears through the emotional upheaval of what their futures may or may not bring.

While the POVB/PSA tried to negotiate alternate and more sensible options with Corrective Services New South Wales all attempts gained absolutely nothing. I still stand by the fact there were alternate options rather than upheave the lives and families of over 100 people.

The only negotiations the POVB were involved in captured the management style the current General Manager was undertaking in location and we made it clear to Corrective Services New South Wales through upper level management we had the strong belief he needed to be relocated for the good order of the location. This was not a new issue with the Department as twice within two years the Industrial Relations Commission through the now

retired Justice Marks had enough concern to attend the location in person to deal with matters concerning the management and functions within the Correctional Centre. It was recommended by Justice Marks a 3 person panel (member from Corrective Services New South Wales, member from the POVB/PSA and an accepted independent) be formed to investigate the issues and concerns that were occurring at that time within Grafton Correctional Centre.

There were allegations of Bullying and Harassment by management on staff to which some were found to be true. While some allegations were found to be true there never appeared to be equality in how the matters were dealt with. Staff felt threatened and often felt they could not voice their concerns because it either “fell on deaf ears” or fear of retribution.

Senior management of Corrective Services New South Wales sent senior managers in Director Liz Ball and Assistant Commissioner Col Kelaher to the location to speak to staff who wanted to raise issues about the centre. Again nothing was done even though it was obvious there were problems between management and staff. This was captured through a statement made by Justice Marks when he described the relationship between management of Grafton Correctional Centre and staff as “toxic”.

Further to this staff had enough concern on matter to make contact with ICAC who had an investigator attend Grafton and interview a number of staff. As a result of this the matter I am led to believe the matter was referred from ICAC back to Corrective Services New South Wales for further investigation. A retired officer of the Department was engaged to conduct a preliminary report and a further investigation was conducted by a person named Mr Mal Brammer. This report was bizarre in my opinion from the point of view as I was informed that not all staff that made statements to ICAC was not interviewed by Mr Brammer in his investigation. When I asked how the report could be complete and thorough I was simply given a blank look and told I would have to take it up with the Commissioner.

It was obvious to realise through this process what the issue was and the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner agreed certain actions would occur in a bid to rectify the situation but every time the changes were supposed to execute there would be a different reason for the changes not to happen. There was a distinct feeling there were other processes being dealt with in the background and this was to be played out some 8 months later when the announcement was made to downsize Grafton Correctional Centre.

The only consultation I am aware of from the position I hold is the General Manager was going to be moved from the location and another person was going to place there in the interim to work through any issues before another General Manager was going to be place in the location. There was never any communication or indication of downsizing until the above mentioned date. This left all concerned feeling betrayed and deceived.

While the official reason given for the downsizing of Grafton Correctional Centre is there were financial benefits to be made through this process and opening the recently built extension of Cessnock Correctional Centre it is hard to digest a reported saving in the vicinity of \$5 000 000 would be the primary reason for potentially crippling the economic viability of Grafton and the regional area. If the economic theory that every dollar changes hands seven times before it leave a community the size of the Clarence Valley the true economic loss for the region could extend as far as \$35 000 000.

This does not even take into consideration the expense on the Government and tax payer for the unnecessary redundancies and transferred officers packages incurred throughout the process.

This process did not and has not taken into consideration the financial loses people incurred through being forced to relocate and the depressive nature the numerous forced sales of houses have on the local housing market. These are finances that will never be recouped but expected to be absorbed by staff and their families. Consideration was never given to nor was compensation given to those who incurred penalty for being forced to break fixed mortgages or lease agreements.

I do not understand how the Government could accept the ideology of closing any Correctional Centre let alone a rural Correctional Centre without any rural impact statements either being done, completed or table before actioning a downsizing. This was only ever going to leave a situation of bewilderment and confusion throughout the community. This was highlighted by the support given by the Mayor and Head of the Chamber of Commerce for the Clarence Community.

While I cannot and would not take such liberty to speak on behalf on the groups I do not represent I will however say that throughout the time I spent in Grafton lobbying to keep the Correctional Centre I had the privilege of meeting a large number of Grafton residents who considered not only the decision made to be a disgrace but further to this they considered Grafton Correctional Centre and the staff working there to be a major part of the community. This was only highlighted by the generosity of the as they too manned the picket line. Local business and shop owners too displayed their support by donating produce to those manning the picket line. This was a true show of what the Correctional Centre and its employees mean to the community.

The ultimate frustration was shown when we had the opportunity to meet with Acting Premier Andrew Stoner, Attorney General Greg Smith, Deputy Commissioner Ian McLean and staffers in Sydney in an attempt to rationalise with the view point of keeping Grafton Correctional Centre operating under the same conditions as it currently was and with the view of creating the same outcomes needed through alternative options. Unfortunately the resonating line I will never forget was when the Mayor Richie Williamson asked for time for the matter to be resolved through alternate options and was told along the lines of "it's like

the state of origin, we can all sit here and talk about whether or not the try was a try but the reality of the matter is nothing is going to change so get on with it". Further to this we were told clearly along the line of "we didn't have to meet with you but we decided to meet with you to let you know what is going to happen". When the Attorney General and Acting Premier were asked would they attend Grafton and address the community in relation to the decision the reply was along the lines of "no, why would I do that? They'll only be cranky with me".

In closing while I condemn the decision makers for a disastrous decision which can only be rationalised through in my opinion poor management and poor decision making I am disappointed there was no consultation as to how better more palatable outcomes could have been achieved without the necessity to cause the mayhem that was caused.

In closing in the future should the need arise to downsize or close Correctional Centres I would hope the process is conducted in a more professional manner which only sees the best possible outcome achieved. Should you need any additional information in relation to this matter or matters of interest that I may be of assistance please contact me.