

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

Name: Ms Nicole Jess

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**A SUBMISSION BY NICOLE JESS - SECRETARY OF THE PRISON
OFFICERS VOCATIONAL BRANCH TO AN INQUIRY INTO THE
CLOSURE OR DOWNSIZING OF CORRECTIVE SERVICE NSW
FACILITIES.**

**SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE CLOSURE OR DOWNSIZING OF
CORRECTIVE SERVICES NSW FACILITIES**

The Prison Officers Vocational Branch covers all custodial staff that are employed within the Government run centres in NSW. I have been on the Executive of the Prison Officer's Vocational Branch for over six (6) years. My current position in Corrective Services NSW is as a Senior Correctional Officer and I have been employed by the Department for over twenty four (24) years.

Under the Terms of Reference of this Inquiry, a Select Committee is to inquire into and report on the closure and downsizing of CSNSW facilities and in particular:

- a) The basis for the decision to close or downsize any facility including the documents and other records that were considered by the Minister, such as any economic or financial analysis.**

On the 29th June 2012 the state executive of the Prison Officers Vocational Branch met with Deputy Commissioner Ian McLean. At this meeting we were informed that the Grafton Correctional Centre would be downsized to a transit centre for new inmates and then they would be classified and moved to other centres in NSW.

We were informed that the new centre in Cessnock needed to be opened and it had to be cost neutral so a centre had to be closed or partially closed.

The State Executive new that closures or partial closures would happen but it was our opinion that it would probably be a metropolitan centre as it would have little effect on the community and inmates and it would have a lesser effect on staff and their families.

As an Executive we have shown that we can negotiate with management to reach cost savings. This was proven in August 2011 when three (3) centres closed – Kirkconnell, Parramatta and Berrima Correctional Centres. In addition there were further job losses in all centres in NSW, with a total of six hundred and fifty job losses. I cannot understand how we were given nil input into the downsizing of Grafton.

The Grafton Correctional Centre had extensive disputes in the IRC in regards to various matters. The Department in my view never dealt with these issues appropriately or in a timely fashion for the good order and running of the centre. I feel that in the end it was easier for the Department to partially close it rather than deal with the real issues that were occurring in the centre. They did this with little regard for the effect it would have on the community as a whole.

b) Each Rural Impact Statement completed before the decision to close or downsize any rural or regional facility.

I am unaware of any Rural impact Statement that may have been completed. If one had been completed I do not understand how the decision could have been made and approved by the Department and the Government.

During the action taken by staff of the centre and the community I have never seen such an effect on all members of the community and the surrounding towns. I had many community members approach me and tell me of the job losses that the community have had over the past year and the effect that they had on the community and the concern for their families and the community if the centre was downsized was far greater than the Government stated.

I do not believe that a rural impact statement was completed and I believe that the true effect of what the downsizing will have on the Grafton community will not be shown for some time. I feel that the effect is not going to be a rapid one but a slow one where in time the true effect will come to light. This will be when the community

needs less teachers, nurses and other services due to families leaving the community.

c) All consultation that was undertaken prior to the decision with stakeholders, including local government, chambers of commerce, industrial bodies, prisoner welfare groups and staff

There was no prior consultation with the Prison Officers Vocational Branch or the staff at Grafton Correctional Centre. I am unaware if there was any consultation with any other stakeholders. I base that on the fact that the chamber of commerce for Grafton were just as shocked in regards to the decision and were active in the community action to try to stop the downsizing from taking place. As were many other stakeholders in the community.

Grafton Correctional Centre had a large population of Indigenous inmates and I do not believe that consultation took place for any prisoner welfare groups or Aboriginal legal aid and is at odds with the outcomes from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.

d) The costs associated with the closure or downsizing of each facility and the relocation of the prisoner population to other locations

The cost due to closures or downsizing has never been given to the Prison Officer's Vocational Branch.

The relocation of prisoners to other locations has been absorbed in centres around NSW however as previously stated we were informed at the meeting with Mr Mclean that the downsizing was so the new centre at Cessnock could be opened and to date that Centre has not been opened.

The costing associated with the downsizing of Grafton Correctional Centre should also take into account the fact that the Department transferred officers to this centre in February 2012 when they had already made the decision to downsize the centre. This shows the Department had no regard for savings or for the staff itself.

d) b. What is the cost effectiveness of the current decision that has been made in Grafton?

I do not believe that there is any cost effectiveness in the decision to downsize Grafton Correctional Centre. Grafton Correctional Centre was never fully staffed and due to this, the Centre costs was blown out due to the staff shortages. The centre was funded for seventy eight (78) staff yet for some time the centre only had sixty six (66) staff.

e) The impact on staff and their families, and on families of Indigenous inmates of a closure or downsizing.

In general the impact on staff and families range from the following:

- House prices fell.
- Children were removed from schools. Taking them away from a community they had grown up in and had involvement in other agencies like sport and community groups.
- Businesses were sold or closed.
- Spouses had to resign from jobs to relocate.
- Families were separated – husbands relocated, families were relocated leaving behind grandparents etc.

Grafton Correctional Centre has a large population of Indigenous inmates. The closest centre for them to be transferred to is Mid North Coast Correctional Centre, which is nearly a three (3) hour drive. Many inmate families had moved to Grafton to be closer to their family member in the centre. No regard was given to these families or the impact it would have on the inmates and families. At one rally I spoke to a wife of an inmate who had moved to Grafton with their children from Lithgow. She spoke at the rally and her children were in attendance. This woman also had a business in the town. Due to the downsizing he was being moved, which meant she either had to sell her business and relocate with no assistance from the Government. Speaking to her made me realise that the downsizing of centres and closures has a far greater impact on all members of a community.

CONCLUSION.

The closure of Grafton Correctional Centre was done based on little information without proper consultation with all parties and with little regard to what the effect would be on the community as a whole.

From this inquiry proper policy should be implemented when facilities are being looked at for downsizing or closures. The effects it will have on the community should be a major factor in making these decisions. Community groups should be advised and have an input into assisting the Government in making these decisions. If decisions continue to be made in the same ad hoc process as Grafton, then I have fears for all rural locations. Information should be readily available to the community and all stakeholders so information can be verified and decisions made on true facts and figures, not information that is misleading or correct.

The events that took place at Grafton Correctional Centre should never occur again and I hope that the outcomes from this inquiry make sure it never does. Grafton Correctional Centre should be returned to its previous functions. The Prison Officers Vocational Branch are more than willing to assist the Department and the government in doing this with savings in the running of the centre and getting work practices that benefit the department, inmates and the officers.