

Submission  
No 221

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

**Name:** Mr Ronald Peter Bloemers  
**Date received:** 22/02/2009

---

## The inquiry into privatisation of prisons

My name is Ron Bloemers and I have been an employee with the department of corrective services for the past 16 years and 7 months.

I believe that a privatised gaol would be a backward step for corrections and the community. It is common knowledge that a private operator is only in the business of making profits for its shareholders to the detriment of its employees and inmates alike.

On the GEO website they explain there are various ways they can make a profit to appease their shareholders. One way is to move inmates interstate and then charge 600% the going rate to call their family. This is one tactic they have in their pursuit of maximising profit for its shareholders and on their website to potential shareholders boast about it.

The private system "warehouses" inmates

In the USA (ref: "business behind bars") US vice-president (now ex vice president) Dick Cheney was implicated and fronted a congressional hearing to explain himself. He had bought about 80,000 dollars worth of shares in the company. All this can also be viewed on you tube or google under the heading "private prisons" put on there by hollywood actor Danny Glover

Terms of reference

As far as public safety and rates of escape are concerned the current front line workers of this department have achieved various records in the shape of the lowest escape rates ever.

Due to strategies implemented about 10 years ago

\*.e.g. case management

\* dynamic security interaction with inmates, in short: a far more humane system

\* I believe also that working for a private system would be detrimental to staff and inmates alike. The incidents of assault on staff and inmates would rise due to lack of officer interaction with inmates. I believe that the officers under a private system would be reluctant to report any incidents, as it would make them look bad.

\* the privates paying their staff 30% less that would make staff more inclined to engage in corrupt behaviour. The police service had their wages dramatically increased a number of years ago to minimise corrupt behaviour

\*another problem with a private operator would be overcrowding. We are all well aware that the privates would cramp as many inmates in their gaols as possible to try and make money. 2 or 3 inmates per cell would be the norm. Overcrowding [warehousing] will lead to more assaults, more aggressive behaviour. This environment will make for angrier men upon release.

\*the rates of rehabilitation would be lower under a private operator for the simple fact that it would not be in their interest to have inmates rehabilitated, as it would affect their bottom line. They need inmates to stay in gaol to make a profit and appease their shareholders.

\*inmates with mental health issues would be worse off, as I believe they would not provide the same service as the inmates currently receive. Once again it would not be in the private operator's interest to have low recidivism rate, as they like more inmates to return to gaol.

\*the staffing levels are allowed to drop, as happens at Junee gaol, saving on salaries.

\*The gaol will open regardless of the staffing levels, which is not safe for officers and inmates.

\*Working for the privates the officer's are substantially worse off in reference to their pay and conditions.

\*At the Nagle royal commission in 1978 Justice Nagle's recommendation was that prison officers receive a 30% pay increase as a barrier to corruption.

\*On the issue of overtime in particular. The reason the overtime is available is that this department refuses to drop the flawed/ outdated 209 roster formula which results in officer shortfalls of 18 days per year. That shortfall is supplemented with allocated overtime.

\*Metropolitan Women's Correctional Centre (Victoria) was handed back to the government after a government report found that this particular gaol had excessive lockdowns, inadequate staffing levels, failed security systems, lack of drug rehabilitation courses and other programmes, lack of health services and lack of suicide prevention management.

Group 4(English private operator) operated a gaol in Fulham (Victoria) and before the gaol was opened a vast number of hanging points were identified but were ignored. A number of inmates had hung themselves from these points and in one instance inmates tried to resuscitate the suicide victim, as the officers had no idea what to do. Myself being a first responding officer a couple of times I find that hard to fathom and that would be due to lack of training. The families of

those inmates that committed suicide sued group 4 (and therefore the government) and subsequently won the case.

\*The use of private security guards in perimeter security of prisons will not be a success as we have already seen at long bay complex and particularly at MRRC when the guards left their post and decided to do a spot of shopping. The major advantage of prison officers providing perimeter security is that they know what is behind the walls.

\*The following information and statistics were based on the documentary 'business behind bars', approved for use by educational institutions and community organisations. This video was released by Ronin films: website; [www.roninfilms.com.au](http://www.roninfilms.com.au).

\*In NSW the inmate population since the year 2000 has risen by 61%, whereas the officer numbers have more or less stabilised. This is another reason why our department runs overtime.

In Victoria under Jeff Kennett the law and order agenda therefore there was an increase in private prisons. 11/12 march 1998 there was a riot at Port Phillip prison as a result of understaffing, visitors being turned away for no apparent reason, bad food and babies being stripped searched. The officers employed by private companies only get 2 weeks of training whereas we get 12 weeks of training. Group 4 requested more funding to run Victorian gaols.

\*Governments have a tendency to protect the privates who run gaols so that the governments decision to let the privates run the gaols doesn't seem to be a bad one. That's why Junee in NSW is closely guarded secret. It is a worrying

Yours sincerely  
Ron Bloemers  
1/c correctional officer  
02/02/2009.