

Submission
No 137

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

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Date received: 27/02/2009

Partially Confidential

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Tuesday 24th February 2009

The Hon Amanda Fazio MLC
Chair, The General Purpose Standing Committee No.3
Parliament House, Macquarie Street
Sydney, NSW 2000

Subject: Inquiry into The Privatisation of Prisons & Prison -Related Services

Madam Chair and Honourable members,

I wish to thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on the privatisation of prisons & prison related services. My name is Kevin Blunt,
..... I have been a Correctional Officer now for over seventeen years. In my time in corrections I have worked in four correctional services in ten different correctional centres. I have worked with all types of offenders, male & female, maximum security to low security. My experience has been at the coal face', or 'frontline' of corrections. I have worked in what are considered some of the most difficult prisons in Australia with some of the most difficult prisoners.

The reason I wish to bring up my experience in corrections Madam Chair is not to boast. I do this hopefully to prove that I have an understanding of the issues relating to corrections, particularly those issues that currently face NSW Corrective Services such as privatisation. I have an understanding of how these issues effect our staff and the inmates in our prisons. I am not exaggerating in saying that I probably have a better understanding of these issues than a lot of the senior managers in our department.

In my time as a correctional officer I have established & maintained friendships with officers in many public as well as private prisons. I am a member of the International Corrections & Prisons Association (ICPA). Through this organisation I have established

& maintained friendships with numerous officers working in public as well as private centres across Australia, & throughout the world.

Through talking to other officers, visiting different gaols (Both public & private), reading about contemporary correctional issues I have concluded that there is 'nothing new under the sun' when it comes to prisons. The problems we currently have in NSW Corrections are problems that have been experienced in comparable prison systems throughout the world.

There is certainly a wealth of material out there for this committee to reference when it comes to the subject of the privatisation of prisons. I will admit I have some bias on the subject of 'private' as opposed to 'public' gaols. I do believe the public system if managed properly will always provide a superior service than a private gaol.

Madam Chair you will no doubt hear & read in the many submissions made to this committee from some learned experts in corrections. I may not have a university degree, but I do consider myself an 'expert' in the field of corrections. That is, expert in the frontline operations & management of prisons. I hope you & the other members of this committee will take a critical view of reports & statistics that are provided to you on this subject. One thing I have learnt in this job over the years is the truth of the old adage 'Damn lies & statistics'

I am against the privatisation of prisons and courts in NSW. I am against this privatisation not only out of my own self interest, & that of my fellow officers but because I believe that privatisation is not in the public interest. The privatisation of these services if it goes ahead will be a mistake that NSW will regret for years to come.

After working in four services I have a fair idea of what works & what doesn't. There are several basic flaws in how NSW Corrective services operates. I believe if management addressed these operational flaws they would save tens of millions of dollars in public money, not the pitiful \$15 million that the Commissioner claims will be saved by the privatisation of Cessnock, Parklea & the Courts.

I am also opposed to privatisation on moral grounds. As a Christian I find it disgusting that people can profit from the misery of others. Ms Margaret Hinchey of the CLRI in her submission to this committee wrote.

'CLRI NSW has deep reservations about the further privatising of prisons. Our most serious objection is a moral one. Privately run prisons like any private business are about making profits for the company in charge and its shareholders. It is morally wrong and repugnant to allow profits to be made from the infliction of punishment. Prisoners are human beings and as such, despite their crimes, have an inherent dignity that must be respected. They are not goods used to generate profits for shareholders.'

This is a view I personally concur with 100%. It would appear that the majority of the people in NSW are also against private prisons. A poll of 1003 people conducted by

Essential Research over January 2009 found: just 19 per cent of respondents support privatising Cessnock and Parklea Prisons and only 20 per cent support the proposal to privatise prisoner transport.

Madam Chair, Honourable members. I would be the first one to admit that NSW Corrective Services needs to reform its work practices. I have seen better & more effective ways of running gaols. We can do more, for less without compromising standards. In fact I believe we could lift them. Its a pity that senior management can't see what really needs to be done to make this service more effective. After reading the transcript of the Commissioners evidence before this committee I really must question how serious Commissioner Woodham is about about reform?

By the Commissioners evidence on page 23 of the transcript, we now have 750 uniformed executive officers in this department! We also have 8 Assistant Commissioners & two Deputy Commissioners for only 3800- 4000 uniformed officers. To me this is outrageous. No other Correctional Service in this country is so top heavy with management. Assuming these 750 executive officers all worked in our 32 gaols, we know that they don't, that would be 21 executive officers per gaol.

As someone pointed our Madam Chair in their submission it is a case of 'too many chiefs & not enough Indians' in NSW Corrective Services. Perhaps the Commissioner should inform this Committee how many of these 750 Executive Officers are actually employed in prisons & court locations.

The Commissioner says he has had a lot of difficulty with the union. If the Commissioner wanted to keep the union on side with his Way Forward Reforms perhaps he should have offered to make them all Assistant Commissioners. Instead he accuses those of us who do the hard yards in this department of 'roting overtime, of taking too many sick days, of driving expensive 4 wheel drives, & being inept in our jobs.

This is a hard job & having our own Commissioner insulting us in the media has angered me. Personally I hate overtime, I don't take excessive sick days, I drive a ten year old car & I have never been accused of being inept in my role as a prison officer.

This is most surprising coming from a man who makes more money than the prime Minister of Australia. To me this is more than a bit hypocritical. Commissioner Woodham says in his submission that increased sick leave & overtime blowouts by the staff are what made The former Minister Hatzistergos & he 'spontaneously' or mutually agree to privatise Cessnock & Parklea prisons.

The Commissioner also says in his submission that he has tried to negotiate with the unions since the beginning of the Way Forward Reforms in 2003. This is not true. I know this, all the members of the POVVB in NSW also know this. There has been no negotiations. No debate on these issues between the Commissioner & our representatives. Since 2003 the Commissioner has only dictated the agenda, or as he calls it 'consulted'

via emails or through one of his Deputy or Assistant Commissioners. This is *not* negotiation.

Commissioner Woodham obviously does not like our union. He says the POVB is the main cause problems in NSW Corrections. No I apologise. I am misquoting him according to page 5 of his evidence its not the 'union', its the unions '*members*' he does not like & who are the problem within this department.

I wonder what the new Minister of Corrective Services makes of all this? As we all know the Minister, the Honourable John Robertson is the former head of unions NSW. I imagine he would have a very interesting working relationship with Commissioner Woodham considering the Commissioners attitude to union members. Perhaps the Minister can explain to the Commissioner how to 'negotiate' with our union.

Unlike Commissioner Woodham I don't believe we should be running up the white flag & handing over our prisons to private companies. It seems strange to me that for someone who holds the Public Service Medal, as Commissioner Woodham does that he could think this way. We can do things much better in the public sector of corrections. I believe we don't need to privatise prisons to save money. After all saving money is really what this debate is all about. We need to look at best practices from other services & to reform our management structure, not privatise.

Madam Chair I am very lucky to work in Some of my friends in corrections elsewhere would think this is a strange statement to make. Some people believe that working in a maximum security gaol is worse than working in a minimum security goal. In the end I have found that it comes down to the quality of people you work with.

The staff I work with at are the best I have ever worked with. They watch out for each other. They are concerned for each others welfare. The general manager, commissioned officers, & officers, The admin staff, the offender services & program staff, & our justice health staff do a thankless task in a very difficult environment. There is obviously room for improvement but the public system is a much better work environment than any private gaol could hope to be. Its unfortunately the people above the gaol level in upper management who appear to be out of touch when it comes to how prisons should run.

Perhaps if the Commissioner was a better manager, serious about reform, & willing to negotiate we wouldn't be in the mess we are today & looking at privatisation. The buck stops with Commissioner Woodham. If the commissioner had recruited officers to fill vacancies there would have been no 'overtime blowout'. The accusation of rorting is a myth. There has been no 'rorting of overtime' in this department. Did the Commissioner provide names or numbers of officers who had allegedly 'rorted' overtime to this committee? No he didn't. It was just another slur against prison officers & a cheap headline to further his privatisation agenda.

If there had been roting then the Police or ICAC would surely have been involved in investigating this. I personally believe that if the Commissioner had not ruined staff morale with these silly accusations then our sick leave rates would be much better. This is clearly bad management. There can be no excuse for bad management when we have 750 managers. The only solution he can put forward to resolve the problems & save a few dollars is to privatise Cessnock, Parklea, & the courts.

Madam Chair I have digressed. Getting back to the subject of privatisation of prisons if private gaols are such a good thing for NSW how many glowing endorsements of private prison providers have been tendered to your committee? Has this committee sighted any references from a state or country that attest to the superior service of private gaols? If such references did exist I am sure Mr. Grant would have tendered them.

Have any members of this committee heard submissions from staff or prisoners who prefer employment or incarceration in private prisons? I doubt that they have. When I worked at the Wagga Court Transport Unit I transported a hundreds of inmates to Junee gaol. I also got to know a number of the staff at Junee in my time there. I don't recall ever hearing from any inmates who were looking forward to being held at Junee!

I know of 18 officer who last year left employment at Junee Correctional Centre to work at the Alexander Machonocie Centre in Canberra. This is a public sector gaol. Every officer I know who works in the private system would prefer to work in the public system. What keeps officers working in a private gaols is not loyalty to the company or their working conditions. It is usually outside factors such as their home location, their family situation, & the lack of other employers in the area that keep them working in the private gaol system.

Looking at the experience of Junee Correctional Centre, which Commissioner Woodham & his management team hold up as a shining light in their argument for privatisation, we now know what the communities of Cessnock & Parklea, can expect if the push to privatise succeeds. We can look forward to fewer, lower paid jobs, less security for the community & staff as well as a dramatic decrease in rehabilitation programs and standards of care of inmates.

We all know that comparing Junee Correctional Centre to a public gaol is like comparing 'apples & oranges' but some still they insist on using Junee as a 'benchmark' in their comparisons & arguments for privatisation. I see that from page 9 of the Commissioners submission Mr. Schipp agrees that comparing Junee with a Public gaol is not a fair comparison.

Junee, unlike Cessnock & Parklea is a medium security gaol. Of course the cost per day, per inmate will more expensive in a maximum security gaol. The difference in the operation of Junee can best be summed up in correspondence I received from a former officer. He said:

'Junee gaol operates on the barest of manning as I discovered there. Safety is more an issue of good luck at Junee than anything else. I would hate to be one of those down in one of those pods when it all goes horribly wrong. Those at the Henry Dean building would not care and even know anything about this and what staff face in our gaols. The bosses never talk to anyone on the ground to know what it is really like and what difficulties they face. To be fair though, we can never have enough staff if the prison population were to riot out of control'.

Overseas and interstate experience has shown this time and time again. Everyone suffers when prisons are privatised. The only winners in this will be the shareholders in the private prison company.

There is *no* strong evidence that taxpayers will save a cent in the long term through privatisation in fact private prisons often cost more to run than public ones.

Numerous studies have been carried out in the UK and the US on private prisons. The National Institute of Corrections, in a 2001 report by the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJS), reviewed a number of studies and suggested that there was *no* definitive research evidence to support the conclusion that privately operated facilities were significantly cheaper or better in quality.

After reading the submissions to this committee Madam Chair what is very clear to me is that the privatisation of prisons & courts is in no way in the public interest. The public interest is always, & must always remain the primary consideration in formulating policy within the NSW Public Service.

After this inquiry is completed perhaps this committee should consider an inquiry into the management of NSW Corrective Services. It is my opinion that by reforming the management of NSW Corrective Services, and not privatising we will achieve real savings in public money.

If the senior management of Corrective Services continue to disregard the public interest & want to push privatisation then they should resign. Perhaps they can seek employment in the private sector. I thank you Madam Chair & Honourable members for the opportunity of making my submission to this committee.

Yours faithfully

Kevin Blunt