

**INQUIRY INTO ISSUES RELATING TO THE OPERATIONS  
AND MANAGEMENT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF  
CORRECTIVE SERVICES**

**Organisation:** NSW Ombudsman  
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**Subject:**

**Summary**

Our reference: ADM/2816

Legislative Council  
GENERAL PURPOSE  
STANDING COMMITTEES

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The Hon Amanda Fazio MLC  
Committee Chair  
Legislative Council  
General Purpose Standing Committee No 3  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Ms Fazio

Thank you for your invitation of 7 December 2005 to make a submission to the Committee's inquiry into issues relating to the operations and management of the Department of Corrective Services and related agencies.

I note the terms of reference cover three areas of the department's operations. As the committee would be aware, I cannot publicly discuss specific complaints received by my office, except in the circumstances outlined in the Ombudsman Act 1974. I am happy, however, to provide a general overview of the type of complaints I have received in relation to each of your terms of reference.

Term of Reference 1:

I have not received any complaints about these matters. The complaints I receive about CSI generally concern:

- the food provided to inmates by CSI Food Industries, commonly known as Pro Serve or "cook chill", usually about insufficient quantity and poor quality;
- matters relating to inmate employment in CSI Industries, such as allegations of unfair dismissal, inaccurate pay;
- buy ups (inmate canteen) – while these are generally managed by individual centres, CSI has a role in overall co-ordination of the buy up system. Many inmates would wish to see CSI take a central role in the provision of buy ups to avoid the current situation where there are variations in price and availability of goods at various centres.

Term of Reference 2:

- a. Complaints from inmates are generally about the timeliness of their access to non-correctional staff (ie chaplains), and clearly not issues such as security screening.
- b. I am aware the department is currently conducting an evaluation of the High Risk Management Unit, and expect their submission will provide you with full details. We receive complaints from inmates about the HRMU program and about the conditions of their accommodation in the HRMU. Inmates from the HRMU also complain about similar issues to all other inmates, such as food, property, visits, phone calls, but clearly the strict regimen under which they live can have the effect of increasing the frequency of such complaints, as I noted in my recent annual report. Staff from my



corrections unit visit the HRMU at least twice a year, interview inmates and staff, inspect any records relevant to current complaints, and observe the physical conditions of the accommodation.

- c. I receive many complaints from inmates about decisions made about their individual classification, and naturally some of them claim a lack of objectivity in the process. I am aware of recent amendments the department has made to the classification procedures and will assess their adequacy in light of any complaints made to me.
- d. Inmates rarely complain to me about staffing levels and over-crowding, however, many complaints I receive have their origin in these issues. For example, I constantly receive complaints about areas of correctional centres being locked down due to lack of staff, and access to specialist staff such as welfare, psychologist etc being sporadic due to insufficient staff. I also receive complaints indicating that inmate population sizes at some centres cause problems, such as visitors complaining about insufficient times being available for booked visits and difficulties in booking visits. For instance the restructure of Parklea in late 2005 increased the inmate population substantially, placing a strain on many things such as visits, access to phones and availability of one-out cells.

Term of Reference 3:

The issues relating to this term of reference are generally not within my jurisdiction as they involve the actions of Ministers. However, I did receive one complaint this year about an interstate transfer, which I made the subject of inquiry with the Commissioner.

Finally, I would like to note that unlike our oversight functions relating to the NSW Police, child protection and community services, we do not have any general powers to keep under scrutiny the operations of the Department of Corrective Services. You may be aware that the former Inspector General of Corrective Services did have specific functions of 'investigating the operation of the Department' and 'assessing the effectiveness of the procedures of the Department'. None of those functions were specifically passed on to the Ombudsman when the Office of the Inspector General was closed. We only received a modest budgetary enhancement to deal with the increase in complaints that occurred following the closure of that office.

Please do not hesitate to contact me on 9286 1001 if I can be of assistance to the Committee.

Yours sincerely



Bruce Barbour  
Ombudsman

9/1/06