

Submission
No 265

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

Name: Name suppressed
Date received: 27/02/2009

Partially Confidential

To whom it may concern,

Firstly I would like to thank the staff I have had the privilege to work with over the last 20yrs plus at Cessnock Gaol, This includes the custodial, civilian and nursing staff as a whole who have done an exceptional job in a very trying work environment.

I would like firstly to comment on the alleged accusations by Mr Woodham to the committee earlier this week. Mr Woodham stated that an employee had threatened a senior staff person with physical violence in relation to the introduction of Area management at this centre. This sounds extremely bad but what Mr Woodham failed to tell was the full story in its entirety. That this was an event that allegedly happened over 15 years ago and that the matter was fully investigated by the Department at the time of the event and the matter was put to rest by the Department and considered dealt with and closed. (Not much of a headline in a full disclosure of the entire facts?) Mr Woodham also stated that a roster clerk was smoked out of his office by Prison Officers lighting newspaper and stuffing the air vent with same. Again Mr Woodham has not given all the relevant facts. Did Mr Woodham mention that at this time and location (again over 15yrs ago) that inmates had access to the area in question and could have preformed this act? Did Mr Woodham mention that this matter was also investigated and that NO officer was found to be guilty of any misconduct. Again not much of a headline in telling the full story.

It was also mentioned that a privately run institution would benefit the local economy by sourcing its produce locally, Was it also mentioned that this was done at Cessnock in the late 80's and 90's and was only stopped due to a direction from upper management that all food would be purchased/supplied from a central division in Sydney?

Mr Woodham has made mention "That this is the nature of the staff at Cessnock" Does Mr Woodham know or realise the amount of staff who have retired/left since these events occurred? Is he unaware that these staff have been replaced over this time period or is he also falsely accusing these officers of these events or of similar events?

It is impossible to have the staff turnover that has occurred at Cessnock over this time period and have the same culture that was present at the time of these alleged events. It is impossible to remain stagnant.

During the enquiry earlier this week it was mentioned that over 45% of inmates are likely to re-offend mainly due to lack of proper skills training and or educational and vocational programmes being offered.

In the late 1980's I can recall such courses being run in the workshops at Cessnock, sometime with a tafe teacher coming in and teaching such course as Welding (Certified plate welding certificate). This gave the inmates recognised work skills which they were able to turn into gainful employment upon their release.

Is this happening now?

Surely due to the skills shortages in the building trades this would be a viable option.

Mr Woodham has stated that it is a fiscal reason for the privatisation of Cessnock gaol has Mr Woodham factored in the following decisions that have been made by Senior management by the Department.

At Cessnock we have a kitchen that makes and provides meals for Cessnock and other centres, it operates 7 days a week of which 5 days require 2 shifts to operate. It is staffed by 2 permanent positions to fulfil the required 48 shifts required to operate. However there is a shift shortage of 10 shifts per roster which has to be filled due to the amount of days an officer is rostered, Who fills these vacancies? A custodial officer- Result the officer is taken from the general pool available and has to be replaced, result - overtime. Cause poor planning by Senior management.

Approximately 2 years ago a position was created at Cessnock for a Deputy Governor- Reason, to oversee the security issues of the building of the newly preposed 250 bed facility at Cessnock. However during this time period not a spade of earth has been turned nor has a date for the building to be commenced been put forward.

Result - An executive position has been paid out of allocated funds at Cessnock for this time frame.

Also during this time frame a 3rd Deputy governor was employed for a period of approximately 6 months again paid for out of allocated funds for Cessnock. Reason - Unknown, Result further cost to Cessnock.

Last year a major refurbishment was finished to the activities building at Cessnock, one that was long overdue and badly needed. Result - A Senior Assistant Superintendent was placed in charge of security over this project for a period in excess of 3 months? (One must wonder what the extra Deputy was doing at this time). Added result reduction to available staffing pool due to unfunded position which added to extra overtime to cover the shortfall.

Can Mr Woodham explain as to why with all the available land at Cessnock we do not grow our own produce?

Surely over the long term this would not only reduce the costing to the Department but would also give educational and life skills to the inmates as well as better job skills for employment upon release.

At Cessnock we have approximately 150 custodial and industrial staff with an average of 20yrs service to the department. That is about 3000yrs of service and experience that the department is willing to throw out, an unacceptable loss and this does not include the civilian or nursing staff

We the staff at Cessnock understand the fact that evolution is an ongoing factor and that changes will happen as time goes by.

What we do not appreciate or tolerate is the untruths or half told stories that depict us as nothing but thugs unwilling to change.

We are not the ones who have not participated in the Way forward, we are the victims of a not to carefully thought out plan by Senior management to throw us to the wolves.