

Submission  
No 319

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

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Partially Confidential

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

..... I have been a Correctional Officer for 21 years. I make this submission to the upper house inquiry as an individual affected by the impact proposed Privatisation of Parklea and Cessnock Correctional Centres and related services.

I am not opposed to purpose built privately operated gaols, as it has been proven overseas and within Australia that these Gaols in the long term will be found wanting and returned to the public service. Of course this will depend on to what end the state government is prepared to subsidise their operation.

I am not opposed to the general principles of "The Way Forward" reforms and as a member of the executive staff at Cessnock I along with all of the other executive staff gave our support to the department and we have all demonstrated this commitment time and time again since it's inception by embracing and promoting the reform.

I am opposed to the unnecessary upheaval and heartache that displacing staff and families by privatising existing government operated gaols and related services causes, especially as it is being done under the guise of budgetary reform.

Six years ago I was fortunate enough to be promoted to my current position which involved moving my family from a rented property in Liverpool NSW to Cessnock where we could afford to purchase a run down old minors cottage which we have been slowly renovating ever since. Never did we believe that we would ever move again. We laid down our roots in Cessnock. Our children have attended school in Cessnock and our youngest is in year 12 at Cessnock High. We have all made friends here and established community ties.

The privatisation of Cessnock Correctional Centre is a particularly cruel or at best ill thought out act of rationalisation it has ever been my misfortune to witness, let alone become a victim of. It is all well and good to say that no officer will lose his or her job but their options are limited. The closest correctional centres to Cessnock are St Helliers at Muswellbrook or Kariiong both are an hours travelling for any staff lucky enough to be placed there. If staff are not lucky enough to be placed at either of these centres then the only other option is relocation of the staff member and their families or extended periods away from the family unit travelling home on days off. Many staff may have no other option other than to resign and seek employment outside of the department.

I personally was, as a last resort reluctantly willing to relocate to remain with the department and very early in the process I submitted three preferences for placement, I was informed by telephone none of these options were available to me and my only option was a Sydney Metropolitan placement. Despite this being said other executive officers who submitted preference forms long after me were being offered placements at centres I had nominated. While this may appear to be a fairly minor and petty indulgence to bring before the inquiry, I cannot explain adequately the anger, humiliation, the intense anguish I felt at being thoroughly dismissed in such a matter of fact flippant manner by senior management I realised at that moment this process would be far from impartial. Long service, faithful service, loyalty, merit and professional conduct meant nothing to those rolling out privatisation. To be fair I will say the decision to exile me to Sydney was reversed and a temporary position closer was offered after an extremely emotional exchange of words. I suppose the point is what hope do the officers on the ground have of a fair deal if they treat executive staff with such contempt.

During this privatisation process all Corrective Services Staff have suffered the indignity of being insulted and ridiculed by their own Commissioner via the media, we have been told that we are incompetent, Rorters, Thugs, and Thieves and over the years we have bled the coffers of NSW dry? I ask the inquiry to consider how staff can be expected to operate normally with this constant negative media bombardment telling them how bad they are? It seems impossible but we do, we are professionals who understand only too well the importance of their obligations to not only the department but the people of NSW and the offenders currently in their charge.

The effect on morale, mental and general well being will be felt for some time to come. Myself and other officers that have generally gone about the business of managing offenders and keeping the public of NSW Safe, have now become the scapegoats for bureaucratic mismanagement.

The privatisation of Cessnock and Parklea affects not only custodial and industrial officers but affects other disciplines such as justice health nurses, psychologists, welfare, education and Alcohol and other drug counsellors.

The majority of staff at Cessnock are local members of the community and have affiliations with or are members of local organisations such as charity groups, schools, sporting clubs and volunteer groups. Many of these staff will be forced to relocate if privatisation goes ahead and the knock on affect to the broader community of Cessnock will be such that it will take years to recover.

In closing Prison Officers have in the past been described as "Living in the basement of Mazlow's hierarchy of needs" This is not the case. We are total professionals who are highly trained and have a profound understanding of human nature. An understanding that comes from constantly managing people. We come from vast and varied backgrounds and bring with us a multitude of occupational skills. If the minister and commissioner would like to know how to save money without privatisation, take the time to talk to your employees and allow them some ownership of the reform package.

We do not put a dollar value on the offenders in our charge. We manage the offenders with a deep sense of obligation and duty of care to NSW the local community and the offender.

I thank the committee for allowing me the opportunity to express my views and observations.