

Submission  
No 348

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

Name: Name suppressed  
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Partially Confidential

Is it in the best interests of the public to privatise the prison system?

There are two focal issues to be considered by this committee as there is with all government enquiries – the cost to the public purse, and the cost to society.

The cost to the public purse for NSW Department of Corrective Services has, no doubt, increased dramatically over the 10+ years I have been employed by them. Overtime practices by both staff and management have led to the massive blowouts and an ingrained culture of abuse on the financials of the department that has resulted in a cyclic problem.

Current work practices and attitudes need to change.

- Over the years the department has created many new programs and positions requiring more staff. By not employing sufficient numbers to cover natural attrition and new requirements, and not restructuring existing work practices, there has been a staffing shortfall. This shortfall leads to extra hours of overtime, double shifts, increased sick leave, creating more shortages and more overtime. A culture then found to increase pays and so adhered to maintain higher wages.

This is where a culture of laziness and manipulation steps up to exacerbate the problem. Ineffective management practices/ attitudes not ensuring the implementing of the pre-existing sick leave policy allowed some to do continual double shifts often covering positions between both courts and in the gaols and then take sick days to recover coming back onto overtime shifts on their days off. The sick days then providing others with their overtime or double shifts to continue the cycle.

Strict adherence to the policy would have reduced the opportunities for this practice to continue as is being shown now by the new policy implementation from Jan 1, 2009 (one that is remarkably like the old one in many ways).

Eg: No overtime after days off until regular shift worked, adherence to the sanctions imposed by progressing in categories penalties for excessive absences, etc

- Another major cost to the department is the ineffectual staffing practices. The department (like most government depts.) is excessively top heavy with several new sections and positions created over recent years. As is the way each feathers its own nest with the need for more and more staff and consultants to implement the new positions.

Within the gaols work practices need reviewing to better establish up to date work practices consistent with the modern public expectations whilst not endangering the lives of custodial or civilian staff and visitors. All could best be done with better consultation and organisation and without the heavy handed approaches taken recently to establish the changes.

The cost to Society, and inevitably the government, for not providing the best working gaols possible, is far greater than the monetary value. Public gaols are professional, largely transparent for public scrutiny, and safe for staff, visitors, and the outside public.

The primary role of gaols is to provide a secure environment to house the inmates, keeping society safe. NSW gaols have a good record for maintaining security, but it is the added security after the inmate is released that provides the unmeasured cost savings.

NSW public gaols run a variety of programs to target reforms in offending behaviour (I understand that the private gaol advertises the running of programs but deliver them in measured amounts to ensure maximising extra funding with minimal expense).

The importance of these inmate programs can not be underestimated. Education, welfare, alcohol and other drugs, psychology, first aid, communicable diseases, pre release, religion... are all designed to help provide the inmate with life skills and varied attitudes that may influence their lifestyle choices. The repercussions of these programs resonate through society as every inmate learns to address his/her offending behaviour saves the public from the trauma, injury, anxiety, financial loss, privacy invasion, and heartache associated with the crimes. The government saves in victims compensation, policing and security costs, trauma counselling, and hospitalisation, whilst the public saves on peace of mind.

At the outset I asked "is it in the best interests of the public to privatise the prison system?". The answer is no. We already provide good quality work with excellent staff and facilities. What we need is to work smarter from the top.

- build fewer but bigger gaols. Concentration of the workforce will decrease costs as fewer staff are required to man 1 large gaol than many smaller ones.
- Reduce the number of advisers and consultants, and sections, at head and regional offices within the department. Too many promotions over recent years with not enough workload to justify it, all management roles need to be independently reviewed to ascertain if they are actually performing a necessary role in the Department
- Move the excess custodial and executive staff from head and regional offices back into the gaols
- Adhere to the sick/facs/carers leave policies
- Restructure workings within gaols to better utilise staff
- Fully staff gaols with full time custodial officers first to improve consistency in dealing with inmates (one of the inmates main concerns in how they are treated) and utilise casuals to fill short term shortages.

In summary, I think that although the government will save money in the short term by privatising gaols across the state, in the long term having seen the problems with other privatised gaols, the costs will far outweigh the short term savings.