

**Submission  
No 29**

**INQUIRY INTO THE CLOSURE OR DOWNSIZING OF  
CORRECTIVE SERVICES NSW FACILITIES**

**Name:** Mr Anthony Craig

**Date received:** 6/11/2012

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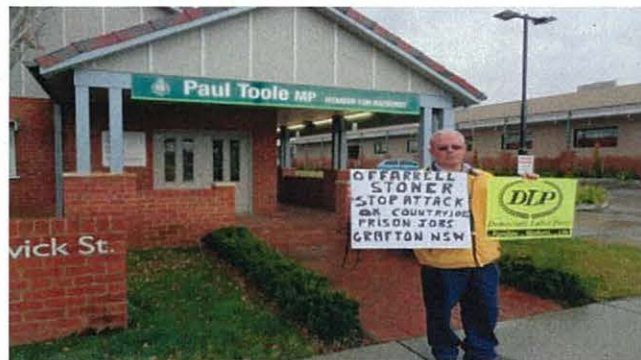
**Submission / Brief**  
**to the NSW Upper House of Parliament**  
**INQUIRY INTO THE CLOSURE OF NSW PRISONS**  
**TO LOOK AT DEVASTATING IMPACTS ON LOCAL**  
**COMMUNITIES**



Petition to NSW Parliament Kirkconnell CC closure



Graft Gaol



Protest outside local National members office Bathurst

**ITS RISK, COSTS OR BENEFITS TO LOCAL**  
**REGIONAL COMMUNITIES OF NSW**

**By Anthony Craig Ex Prison Nurse Kirkconnell Correctional Centre &  
Assistant State Secretary Democratic Labor Party (DLP) NSW**

November 2012

**Purpose** – This brief is for the NSW Upper House enquiry into the closure or down grading of regional correctional centres like Kirkconnell and Grafton by ex prison nurse Anthony Craig & Assistant State Secretary DLP (Democratic Labor Party) NSW. The closure of Kirkconnell has had a personal impact of me and my family by losing my position as a mental health nurse at Kirkconnell Correctional Centre and as Assistant State Secretary DLP NSW involved lobbying for fellow staff members jobs at Kirkconnell and the wider correctional community at Grafton Gaol.

I wish to place on the public record that the DLP(Democratic Labor Party (**not ALP**)) lobbied the various upper house cross benches to enable this enquiry to proceed in a short period of time. Although the ALP took the credit for getting this enquiry up and running, they know full well the Democratic Labor Party's involvement in pushing for such an enquiry with the upper house cross parties through various meetings and telephone conversations with the Greens, Fishers and Shooters Party, Christian Democrats Fred Nile and the ALP themselves. I was quoted by the ALP that such an enquiry like this could take up to 12 months to get organised. So through the actions of the DLP and other parties we now have this enquiry a lot quicker than 12 months.

It is obvious to many that Corrective Services NSW Bureaucrats were given instructions by someone either in the treasury or the O'Farrell government to cut expenses and come in under budget. At the time the department was also implementing prison reforms by having more inmates supervised outside gaols reducing the size of the prison population. The O'farrell government unfortunately made these decisions without adequate consultation with staff and the local communities. I am not aware of any regional economic impact statement being done at all when the decision to close Berrima, Parramatta or Kirkconnell was made.

Up until the last state election we saw prisons continued to be builded at record numbers in regional areas, the last being the South Coast Correctional Centre opened in December 2010 able to house 650 inmates of various classifications. Prior to that we saw the Wellington Correctional Centre opened in September 2008.

As a nurse who lost my mental health position at Kirkconnell Correctional Centre and took up the fight as Assistant State Secretary DLP NSW, it was no surprise that there was little or no consultation with unions, staff or the local business or general population on these closures or down grading of these centres. There were personal, economic and social impacts, which were either ignored or disregarded as not important enough by Corrective Services NSW. The local state member Paul Toole made statements in the press stating Kirkconnell Correctional Centre was not closing and in a short time later had to retract his statement when the department announced its closure. As was a similar situation with the Grafton Gaol down grading.

The Democratic Labor Party (DLP) took up a petition with over a thousand signature from local business and wider communities of Lithgow and Bathurst calling for Kirkconnell not to closed, but this was ignored by the O'farrell government.

# Summary and Key Issues- Benefits, Risks and Costs

## Benefits

Both the Kirkconnell Correctional Centre and Grafton Correctional Centres had significant economic and social benefits to their local communities over many years. Kirkconnell Correctional Centre had been established in the late 1950's and Grafton early last century. These institutions had providing a stable employment base during periods of economic downturn in local regional communities and were well regarded for providing inmates for local community projects. At Kirkconnell Correctional Centre there were over 70 correctional officers, school teachers, registered nurses, trades personnel employed. Grafton gaol had similar employment base with over 100 correctional officers, teachers, nurses and allied staff. Corrective Services NSW decision on Grafton Correctional Centre closure reduce the size from 275 to a remand centre of 60 inmates.

Small Businesses owners in both towns and surrounding districts with commercial contracts to supplied variety of equipment, food and other services needed at these centres year after year were suddenly face with an uncertain future. These closures and down grade will have a significant flow on effect to the wider communities of the Clarence valley and Bathurst district.

Community projects were undertaken by inmates at Kirkconnell Correctional centre like restoring community halls for pensioners or clearing undergrowth at local cemetery or parklands were no longer guaranteed.

## **Costs Financial impact statement / Risks**

There is no doubt that the Correctional centres provides significant economic benefits to local regional communities they serve in terms of employment and small business growth. Grafton provided full time employment to over 100 staff and Kirkconnell over 70 staff. Various newspaper and other sources quoted Kirkconnell closure would have a local economic impact was 5 million dollars annually and in Grafton along similar lines.

Correctional Centres were placed in regional areas for a number of reasons. One was to enable regional centres to grow with stable employment opportunities and provide business growth. So one has to ask the question why was the local communities ignored and not consulted prior to any decision was made to either closing down or down grading these centres.

Finding a job locally is not easy so unless you own a business or work for the public sector in many country centres opportunities for young people to get jobs are extremely difficult. Many have to leave the area or travel long distances a significant expense.

There are a number of older gaols at long bay complex Sydney. Why were they not consider for closing down. Their assets and land sold off with significant savings to the government and the taxpayers of NSW. Staff could have been redeployed across the metropolitan area correctional system with less impact to families and wider communities. Sadly staff affected in regional areas were forced to take redundancies or transfer to centres hours away from loved ones and their communities. Some staff at Grafton were told there were jobs at Cessnock, a five hour trip away. Many had to leave and restart their careers after long and faithful service to the state.

### Summary

Correctional centres were established in country towns for a variety of reasons, but one reason was to help ensure that a stable employer was available when times got hard and local businesses were able to grow. They would protect these communities where economic situations change for the worse.

These closures and downgrades have caused significant trauma and anxiety to local staff their families and the wider community and this is a disgrace. You cannot just get another job locally as there generally not available.

It is unbelievable that a government department would recommend closure and downgrading of a number of correctional centres in country regions and fail to do an appropriate economic or social impact statement.

At the very least it highlights a total indifference to country communities fighting years of droughts and economic downturn and at its worse a breach of trust or maladministration by senior bureaucrats within Corrective Services NSW.

It is hope that the committee will get to the true and if any person has neglected their duties be held accountable for their actions.

### **Recommendations -**

- 1. The NSW Parliament upper house committee consider whether the closures of these correctional centres were in the public interest;**
- 2. Senior Bureaucrats need to explain in detail why country gaols were closed when older city gaols could have been closed at long bay and staff relocated without the serious impact these closures have had on country communities, small businesses and families of workers;**
- 3. Whether Corrective Services NSW failure to consult with local correctional staff prior to the closures and communities is a breach of trust or maladministration.**

## References

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