

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

**SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE CLOSURE OR
DOWNSIZING OF CORRECTIVE SERVICES NSW
FACILITIES**

Corrected proof

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

At Grafton on Monday 10 December 2012

The Committee met at 12.00 noon

PRESENT

The Hon. P. Green (Chair)

The Hon. R. Borsak (Deputy Chair)

The Hon. D. J. Clarke

The Hon. A. R. Fazio

The Hon. S. MacDonald

The Hon. M. J. Pavey

The Hon. M. S. Veitch

CHAIR: You are welcome to the Inquiry, the second public hearing of the Select Committee on the Closure or Downsizing of Corrective Services NSW Facilities. This Committee was established in September 2012 to examine the various aspects of decisions to close and downsize Corrective Service facilities in New South Wales, including the impact such decisions have had on staff, their families and local communities.

Before I commence, I would like to acknowledge the Ngerrie people of the Bundjalung nation who are the traditional custodians of this land. I would also like to pay my respects to the Elders, past and present, of the Bundjalung nation and extend my respects to the other aboriginal people who may be present with us today. Today the Committee turns its attention to the downsizing of the Grafton Correctional Centre. We will hear from representatives of the Clarence Valley Council, Clarence Valley Community Unions and the Grafton Chamber of Commerce. The Committee is also holding a public forum here from 3.15 p.m.

On behalf of the Committee, I would like to thank all of the witnesses who are attending today. Particularly I would like to acknowledge the local member, Chris Gulaptis, for being with us today. I know that this issue is close to his heart as well. A further hearing is scheduled for Friday 1 March 2013 in Sydney where the Committee will hear evidence from other organisations and individuals. Details of these events are available on the Committee's website or by contacting the Committee Secretariat.

Before we begin I will make some comments about procedural matters. As to broadcasting guidelines, the Committee has previously resolved to authorise the media to broadcast sound and video excerpts of its public proceedings. Copies of guidelines governing broadcasts of the proceedings are available from the Secretariat. In accordance with the guidelines, the media can film Committee members and witnesses but people in the audience should not be the primary focus of any filming or photographs. In reporting the proceedings of this Committee, the media must take responsibility for what they publish and what interpretation is placed on anything that is said before the Committee.

In terms of questions on notice, witnesses are advised that if there are any questions you are not able to answer today but that you would like to answer if you had more time or certain documents at hand, you are able to take the question on notice and provide us with the answer at a later date. In terms of delivery of messages and documents tendered to the Committee, witnesses, members and their staff are advised that any messages should be delivered through the attendants or the Committee clerks. I also advise that under the Standing Orders of the Legislative Council, any documents presented to the Committee that have not been tabled in Parliament may not, except with the permission of the Committee, be disclosed or published by any member of such Committee or by any other person.

In terms of adverse mention—and this would be for the witnesses to pay particular attention to—I remind witnesses that the freedom afforded to the witnesses by Parliamentary privilege is not intended to provide any opportunity to make adverse reflections about specific individuals. Witnesses are asked to avoid making critical comments about specific individuals and instead to speak about general issues of concern. Finally, will everyone please turn off their mobile phones for the duration of this hearing? I now welcome the first witness, Councillor Richie Williamson, Mayor of Clarence Valley. All witnesses must be sworn prior to giving evidence. Therefore, I ask you to state your full name and title and to swear either an oath or affirmation.

RICHARD JAMES WILLIAMSON, Mayor, Clarence Valley Council, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: Would you like to make an opening statement?

Mr WILLIAMSON: I would. Mr Chairman and members of the Committee, I start by thanking you and the Government for the opportunity to give evidence before you this afternoon. In doing so, I would also like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands on which we meet this afternoon and pay my tribute and respect to the aboriginal Elders of the Gumbaynggirr, the Bundjalung and the Yagel nations, which lie within the Clarence Valley Council boundary.

I first state to the Committee this afternoon that I believed in July, and I still believe, that the decision to cut over 100 jobs from the Grafton jail and out of the Clarence Valley economy was wrong. It was wrong then and it is still wrong today. I believe the decision to do so was taken by the Government without a range of data being made available to the Government by the Department—a Department, in my view, that seemed to be hell-bent on downsizing or closing the Grafton Correctional Centre. I am keen to hear the outcomes of the Committee's deliberations.

I do not believe that there was any sort of plan developed within or outside the Department or within or outside the Government. I believe the Government had little or no idea how the Grafton and Clarence community would react to such a decision. But as we all know, react it certainly did. I believe that the impacts of the decision were not in the best interests of the people who I represent; were not in the best interests of the staff; were not in the best interests of the businesses in the Clarence Valley; and were also not in the best interests of the inmates or the families of those inmates.

From where I sat, this could be best described as somewhat of a debacle. I could not see where there was any consultation with regard to the decision or the announcement. I have not seen any form of rural impact assessment, little or no consultation with regard to staffing and little or no consultation with regard to the families of inmates. In fact, the first I heard of the decision was when I received a telephone call from a Deputy Commissioner, some 20 minutes after he had informed the staff of the decision that had been made.

As I outlined in the Council's submission to the Inquiry, the question still remains: How could one of the largest and highest paying employers be taken away from our community without the full economic impact being considered, without a financial analysis or a rural impact statement being undertaken and with no consultation? The Clarence Valley Council's own input/output model shows that for every job lost at the Grafton Correctional Centre, another job was lost within our economy. So, 100 jobs lost directly means, indirectly, another 100 jobs lost from the Clarence Valley Council economy. The Valley has a higher than average unemployment rate of 6.6 per cent. The State average in New South Wales is just above 5 per cent. We also have a lower participation rate at around 50 per cent, compared with the New South Wales average of 62 per cent.

The effects of that decision on 29 June are still being felt and still affecting our community. Only last week I was speaking with a number of principals of high schools. As a direct result of those job losses and those inmates being moved to other detention facilities, our schools are going to be losing a number of staff over the next 12 months or in the next school year. The effect of those jobs being lost has not even begun to be felt on our economy. The loss of some 240 or 250 extra mouths to feed at the correctional centre also means that inmates' personal shopping requirements have been taken out of our local economy as well. Family members of inmates are now travelling to visit those incarcerated to other facilities throughout New South Wales and that is having a personal affect on them and others.

With your indulgence, Mr Chairman, I would like to take a couple of minutes to explain the outcome of those decisions through my eyes. It was, of course, a very stressful time for everyone involved in this process. After I received the telephone call from one of the deputy commissioners, I impressed on him how important it would be that every effort be made to keep every single job in the Clarence community. I also impressed on him that we would not be taking lightly the decision that had been made.

Within days of that telephone call, my community had gathered over 10,000 signatures on a petition and that was the start, I believe, of a movement that very quickly developed here in Grafton. On 6 July the member for Clarence, Chris Gulaptis, the local Chamber of Commerce president and myself, met in Sydney with the Attorney General and the Acting Premier, along with Department officials. Some would say "asking

for" but I would say "begging for", the pause button to be pressed on a decision that was having a great effect on my local community. As we all know, that pause button was not pressed and unfortunately that saw the withdrawal of a number of jobs from the community.

On 7 July, just a day after that meeting, the community came together to rally at the jail and that rally continued for a number of days and stayed in place until 12 July. As I said earlier, the Department was hell-bent on making this happen—and happen at all costs. On Sunday 8 July I witnessed what I will describe as a very dangerous situation when we saw a prison van move through a crowd of people, on the way allegedly causing some damage to a parked car. Can I say that that image was very disturbing then and that image should be very disturbing to everyone? In the early hours of Grafton Cup Day, with the Riot Squad overlooking the proceedings, the prison vans then entered the Grafton Correctional Centre in a way that I must say to the Committee, was a very humbling and proud moment to witness. With the vans entering the facility, my community stood in absolute silence—without any blockages whatsoever—to watch something that they had fought for over the previous days, simply disappear.

However, as I said at the start of my evidence this afternoon, questions still remain. How could one of the largest and highest paying employers be taken from our community? The other question that still remains, Mr Chairman, is what is next for the Grafton Correctional Centre, a centre that has served Grafton and served the State very well since the late 1800s? During that whole process, I and others stood in front of our community, which was clearly in distress. And can I say, standing in front of 2,500 to 3,000 people, on two occasions, who were distressed about the decision that had been made, was not something that is particularly fun. To see one's community in distress is something that I hope other mayors do not have to go through. Unfortunately, as I said, the Attorney General and the Acting Premier at the time were unable to press the pause button to let other processes develop, to let other negotiations with the staff and other negotiations within the Department to proceed.

As I said, I believe that decision was the wrong decision. I said at one of the meetings with regards to the public meeting on the riverbank, the Grafton jail is in this town's DNA. It has been a part of Grafton since the late 1800s. I hope through your deliberations, Mr Chairman and the Committee, there is a better outcome that is able to be achieved for my community. I hope there is a better outcome that can be achieved for those incarcerated and their families and I hope there is a better outcome for the workers at the Grafton Correctional Centre and the economy of the Clarence Valley. I wish the Committee very well in their deliberations.

CHAIR: Thank you, mayor. I will lead with the questions. How long have you been a councillor in your local area?

Mr WILLIAMSON: I was first elected to Clarence Valley Council at the first election following the amalgamations in 2005.

CHAIR: How long have you been mayor?

Mr WILLIAMSON: Since 2008.

CHAIR: You mentioned that the deputy commissioner or someone called you and gave you—was it 20 minutes warning?

Mr WILLIAMSON: No, no. I understand that he had briefed the staff on the decisions some 20 minutes since he rang me, so he briefed the staff first and then he made a telephone call to me. The name escapes me. I think it might have been Deputy Commissioner Callagher but I am happy to provide that.

CHAIR: You will take that on notice to help clarify that matter. Outside that have you or the council had any inquiries about the prison expansion or downsizing?

Mr WILLIAMSON: Look, there were some previous inquiries with regards to a new facility, as I understand it. I am happy to provide you with as much detail as possible. Those inquiries were not directly with my office and date back some years now. As I understand it, there was talk of a new facility being built—a 600-bed facility, as I understand it, but that certainly was some time ago but has been in my time in the mayoral office.

CHAIR: So it was before 2005 when that initial approach was made?

Mr WILLIAMSON: It would have been after 2005?

CHAIR: After 2005?

Mr WILLIAMSON: And I am happy to provide, Mr Chairman, as much information as possible.

CHAIR: If you could that would be fantastic. In your submission you talk about "Input/output modelling conducted by Council shows for every 1 person employed directly by Corrective Services in Grafton, another job was created indirectly. Therefore the loss of 100 employees has a result of losing 200 jobs". Can you maybe expand on who did this modelling and whether it could be tabled?

Mr WILLIAMSON: Yes, and again I am happy to take the tabling issue on notice, Mr Chairman, and I am happy to make that information and data available. It is a series of computer software that the council has a licence to and I am more than happy and willing to make that available to the Committee with regards to their deliberations.

CHAIR: I will now move on to the Hon. Amanda Fazio.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: Thank you, Chair. Councillor Williamson, can you explain what the economic impact has been to date on the Grafton community since the downsizing?

Mr WILLIAMSON: The exact data I do not have. Some of that data I will make available to the Committee. So the evidence I can provide really is of an unqualified nature and a nature that, I guess, is reflective of the business community. In fact I have had discussions with some proprietors who have lost business directly because of the decision. There were some fruit and vegetable retailers in the city who lost some contracts directly. There is also another business who bought the personal effects for the inmates and those jobs have immediately disappeared but the flow-on effect is something that is just as alarming as the immediate effect and the education or the school jobs which have not come into account yet until next school year is something that is of considerable concern but they are very, very real. The school principals with whom I have spoken to have acknowledged how real they are.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: In your submission you also talk about the effect on prisoners or their families. You say that the impact of travelling to Cessnock or Sydney has been especially significant because a lot of the families of inmates come from the lower socioeconomic sector and they cannot afford to move from those areas to try to live near their family members who are incarcerated. What comments have you had from community members in relation to that?

Mr WILLIAMSON: I have had a number of comments from community members with regards to that. Some of those prisoners who have been moved, I understand it, have been longer term prisoners and their families moved specifically to Grafton to be close to those family members who have been incarcerated. They are now in a catch 22 position where they could pull up stumps and go to the new location and invest again but there is no security around how long the inmates will be at that particular facility. There are a number of cases like that. As I understand it, a number of people have already taken the decision that they will move but there are a number who simply cannot afford to move and cannot afford to travel to see that family member who is incarcerated.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: What outcome would you like to see as a result of this inquiry taking place?

Mr WILLIAMSON: I think what the community and what I would like to see is the positions—and I acknowledge that not all of them may not be able to be returned to Grafton—I would like to see a great investment in the prison system in Grafton and the Clarence Valley. I understand that there is an older part of the correctional facility which is outdated. We are talking of a facility that was built in 1893 and has been operational ever since. There is no doubt that opinions and community views have moved on but I believe there is a large proportion of the correctional facility that at very short notice could be operational again and a recommendation from the Committee and obviously the Government agreeing to that would be an outcome that places us in a stronger stead than what we are today.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Councillor Williamson, do you think the decision should be overturned? Is it the ideal thing that you would like to see the whole decision overturned and the facility reopened?

Mr WILLIAMSON: I think the decision was wrong and that being a wrong decision I would like to see the investment in that facility returned to Grafton and if there are avenues to bring down the costs within the department here, I would like those avenues to be explored. That was the whole idea of asking the Attorney General to press the pause button. The unions were saying they can get the costs down. The unions were telling me and others at that meeting given the opportunity they were willing to work with the Government to ensure that those costs dropped and dropped quickly. I would like those opportunities to be re-explored.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I want to get a quick clarification. When you are talking about the impact on Grafton, would it be fair to say that it is actually broader than Grafton; it is the whole Clarence Valley?

Mr WILLIAMSON: There is no doubt. I know as a fact that some of those 108 jobs lived at other places within the Clarence Valley—Yamba, Maclean and Gulmarrad, for example. There is no doubt that we are not talking about within the 60 signs of the city, that is for sure—absolutely.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: I want to explore with you the reasons that were provided for downsizing the facility. Can you advise the Committee of the reasons the Government gave to you, as mayor of the community, for why the facility was downsizing?

Mr WILLIAMSON: As I recall, the reasons were all economic reasons. There was also a reason given with regards to the age of this facility and what the department could do within the heritage listed area, but most of the explanations were all around the costs per prisoner per day and those costs being extraordinarily high.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Do you agree with the reasons that were provided to you by the Government for the downsizing or do you think there were other motives at play?

Mr WILLIAMSON: Look, I think there may have been other motives at play and those motives could have been around the culture of the jail. I am not qualified one little bit to give a qualified position on the culture of the jail. The main explanation given to me was regards to the costs per prisoner per day.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: A bit earlier on you spoke about the heritage aspect of the facility and you will see that one of our terms of reference is looking at the heritage aspect. What involvement has the council had in working with the Government in maintaining and preserving the heritage values of that site?

Mr WILLIAMSON: To my knowledge, none.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Do you think the council has a role to play in that particular area?

Mr WILLIAMSON: I think the council has a role to play with regards to any proposal that the department may bring forward with regards to heritage and certainly the streetscape of the facility. That image of the old part of the jail is iconic and there are roles that the council could play should there be a proposal put to the council.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: What involvement did the council have in assisting the Government in relocating public sector employment positions to Grafton? You should be aware that the Chair of the Committee is probably a bit unhappy because he lost 20 public sector jobs from his community to come here.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: But he got a new jail.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: What involvement did the council have in determining which public sector jobs or how they were to be relocated?

Mr WILLIAMSON: The involvement we had was purely from a lobbying position. We lobbied very hard through the local member's office to ensure that we were not forgotten and, if there were avenues for jobs to be public sector jobs to be very quickly brought into our economy, we were of the view that that should happen and happen very quickly. As I understand it, the applications for jobs with the Department of Lands have closed and there are interviews going on almost as we speak for those positions, some 41 of them. I

understand there have been more jobs with Roads and Maritime Services and I would hope that there are more public sector jobs to come and to be announced next year. That is something that we would welcome very much.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Have you been advised how long those jobs will be located in Grafton or is there some risk that at some stage in the future they may be moved as well?

Mr WILLIAMSON: I think there is always a risk. There is a risk with every job, both in the public sector and also in the private sector. As I understand it, going from memory, they are jobs for a number of years. I cannot recall if it was three or six years but a number of years those positions will be in the sector.

CHAIR: Do you know how many jobs Roads and Maritime Services is proposing?

Mr WILLIAMSON: No, not off the top of my head.

CHAIR: Take it on notice.

Mr WILLIAMSON: But I know there has been some and there will be more. I am happy to take it on notice.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: At the outset, Mr Mayor, you have been a very strong proponent and leader within your community with the local member, Chris Gulaptis, and there is no doubt that it was a huge shock to the community. We went out to the correctional facility today. Do you think in the minds of most people within the Clarence and even the mid North Coast and the North Coast that people think the jail is actually closed?

Mr WILLIAMSON: Yes, no doubt.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: It was interesting to be out there today and see the 62 prisoners on remand and waiting to go to court. Are you aware how many jobs still exist out at the facility?

Mr WILLIAMSON: The exact number I am not aware of.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: I think there are still 35 at the facility. Have you had any discussions with Corrective Services about how the maintenance of the newest part of the jail—the minimum security area—is going to be maintained?

Mr WILLIAMSON: There have been no discussions with my office and none that I am aware of with the council either.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: Have you been given any assessment of the pay scales for the new jobs that are coming to the region through Crown Lands? Have you done any assessment of the impact that will have in the region?

Mr WILLIAMSON: No, we have not. I am happy to do that once that dataset is available with regards, firstly, to the number of jobs and, secondly, the wages associated with those jobs.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: That would include the jobs with Roads and Maritime Services as well?

Mr WILLIAMSON: Yes. As you would know, Roads and Maritime Services have an extremely strong base here in Grafton with a regional office and also the Pacific Highway office. The numbers have grown in those two offices, which is very, very welcome.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: There is no doubt that the decision about the downsizing and closing of the maximum wing and the minimum security area came as a shock to absolutely everyone. Do you accept that part of the issue has been that the opening of a new jail at Narooma, the expansion of the Cessnock facility and a newish facility at Kempsey created more beds than were required at the time for Corrective Services?

Mr WILLIAMSON: I accept that there could well be a flux of beds in New South Wales. What I find difficult to accept is why Grafton needed to take the brunt of every bed closure. Something I would have liked to

have explored, had the pause button been pressed, was spreading those closures across a number of facilities. In discussions I had with some high-ranking union officials they were saying that some of those beds at Long Bay I think could well have been mothballed or closed and Grafton kept open. That is the kind of detail I would have hoped could have been brought to the table had the pause button been pressed.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: You are clearly unhappy with the decision that the Government has made, but are you happy with the progress that has been made post that in terms of bringing these other departmental positions to the community?

Mr WILLIAMSON: Yes, I am. Every job in every economy, especially a rural economy as we have here, is like a nugget of gold. The jobs that the Government has committed to are very welcomed. Does it overcome what we have lost? Not yet. Is there more potential for more of those jobs? I hope so. I think the Government has done the right thing in those new departmental jobs in Grafton but there is still some way to go.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: Do you have a dataset in relation to how many government jobs—Federal Government, State Government or local government—in total maintain the economy of the Clarence Valley Council?

Mr WILLIAMSON: The local government jobs, yes. I am happy to provide those details to the Committee, and I will do so very accurately. We have some 580 or more staff; they are not full-time equivalent positions, within the Clarence Valley Council. I would dare say we would be the single largest employer in one organisation in the Clarence Valley. What we do not have is the public service sector jobs that would be in the Clarence Valley.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: You do not have numbers for that through the hospital, the Roads and Maritime Services divisional office or National Parks and Wildlife Service?

Mr WILLIAMSON: No.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: Grafton is very reliant on the State Government public sector payroll as a divisional regional centre, is it not?

Mr WILLIAMSON: Absolutely.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: It will be interesting to see how we are going in terms of numbers to the district.

Mr WILLIAMSON: Yes, it would be. I think it would be fair to say that since the Grafton jail debacle, decision, whatever we might call it in the middle there, I think we have been somewhat sheltered from other decisions that have been made within other departments and I think that should be acknowledged as well.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: It is a bit hard coming at this late stage to ask questions. All the questions I had I have been busy marking off.

Mr WILLIAMSON: With a name like Williamson I understand what it is to be last in the list.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: With a name like Borsak I am normally upfront; today I am at the end. I will ask them anyway but from a slightly different angle. You have talked about the economic impact on the Grafton regional area and certainly the local council area but do you actually have a dollar figure? Is it \$1 million or \$500,000 on an annualised basis? There are multiplier effects: if you lose 108 jobs, you lose 216 jobs and you may actually bounce through the system.

Mr WILLIAMSON: I do not have them specifically available. No doubt those kinds of numbers would have been in the rural impact statement should one have been done.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: Some economic modelling is what you are saying. We have been told by the Government that all 108 positions bar one lost at the jail have been placed locally. You mentioned a little earlier that you know of some going through Roads and Maritime Services and I do not remember what the other one was, and you added up that there was probably about 60 or 70 in that lot. Have you got any feel for where the rest might be coming from?

Mr WILLIAMSON: No, I do not but they will be will very welcome when they do arrive.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: Obviously from what you are saying there was no process involved in identifying those new jobs. Has that all sort of happened subsequently because of your protestations?

Mr WILLIAMSON: I do not know about that. I know that when we met with the Acting Premier, he was in a position to inform us about the North Coast jobs plan and there was some \$5 million attached to that announcement, which he gave us a briefing on. I understand that has delivered a few jobs directly to Grafton but it was not a Grafton or a Clarence Valley jobs plan; it was a jobs plan for the North Coast. I am not privy to where the other jobs are or of the plans with regards to those jobs—that is a government decision.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: Do you have any ideas regarding the long-term use of the facility over and above the full reopening of the jail? Is the council looking to prepare a submission to the Government regarding any such alternative developments?

Mr WILLIAMSON: No. I think the ultimate outcome is that it remains a correctional facility. There is still potential as I understand it for that facility to continue to operate in some capacity. I think there is certainly capacity for the facility to be upgraded, if we can call it that. We do acknowledge that there is a section of the prison—I understand the Committee were there today—that is old; there is no doubt about that. I also have an understanding—I have been in the prison and let out again on a number of occasions—of what potential is there and I would like to see that potential come to fruition.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: When we had a look this morning there was a very large section that we were told by the commissioner has been mothballed: the minimum security area. I think it would be in the interests of the council at the first possible opportunity to lobby very hard to make sure that that section is reopened because they are going to keep it that way. The council wants to make sure that as soon as the numbers in the corrective system start to pick up again for that particular class of detainee that they come to Grafton first. That is what I was coming at in terms of talking to them about what you could do to be the first cab off the rank to make sure that facility is opened again. I do not have a handle on the number of staff that would have to be re-employed but just going through the jail this morning the whole thing looked like it was all set and ready to go. There would have to be new mattresses and the whole thing would need to be fitted out again. If that was to happen you might find you might pick up 30 or 40 jobs straight away.

Mr WILLIAMSON: I am sure the council and the local member will be very keen to progress that. As I said to the inquiry, I believe there is a great deal of potential for the facility. I think that reinvestment in the facility will give the Clarence a boost. It will give us a stimulus economically and it will also certainly lift us up from where we were in July.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: The commissioner gave evidence to the inquiry in Sydney that there were not any current plans to do any more capital development on the site. From looking around the jail this morning there might be an opportunity to develop the minimum security facility because we were told those buildings went up in 1991 so they do not have any heritage issues at all. If there were to be such a development then the council could be thinking about the extension of that part of the prison.

Mr WILLIAMSON: Certainly I agree with your statement. The council will certainly be lobbying for as much investment as possible. We certainly will not be the applicant for any works, which is something that the State would obviously need to commit to.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: Was the justification for the closure by Corrective Services subsequently explained to you?

Mr WILLIAMSON: The justification both from Corrective Services on 29 June and the subsequent meeting with the Acting Premier, the Attorney General and some of the department heads that I attended with the member for Clarence and the President of the Chamber of Commerce was specifically around the cost of the operation per prisoner per day. Some heritage issues were also brought to the attention of that deputation as well but the primary excuse, if we can call it that, was financially driven.

CHAIR: In your submission you talk about the Indigenous population being around 5 per cent and that one of the major concerns is about family access to prisoners who have been moved out of the area. Do you

have any evidence of the real impact on those families? Have some of those families consulted with you or have you had representations made to you?

Mr WILLIAMSON: I have had representation from some elders. The evidence they brought to me was verbal evidence. There is no hard written evidence but I am sure through government departments there would be data that would possibly be available with regards to some of those issues.

CHAIR: Mayor, thank you for taking the time out on behalf of your community. It was very important that the Committee heard from you this morning. It has been resolved that answers to questions taken on notice be returned within 52 working days—that takes it to around 31 January. The secretariat will contact you in relation to any questions you have taken on notice. I wish you well for the Christmas season.

Mr WILLIAMSON: Thank you, Mr Chair. I wish you and the Committee members well in your deliberations.

CHAIR: Before we break for lunch I wish to acknowledge Ms Christine Robertson, a former member of the Legislative Council, who is present at today's hearing. It is nice to see you.

(The witness withdrew)

(Luncheon adjournment)

ANTHONY KING, Chairperson, Clarence Valley Community Unions, and

KASSANDRA PACKWOOD, Treasurer, Clarence Valley Community Unions, sworn and examined:

CHAIR: Would either of you like to make an opening statement?

Mr KING: Clarence Valley Community Unions was the organisation that led the campaign against the downsizing of Grafton jail. Clarence Valley Community Unions was formed to be an alternative voice after successive governments had implemented policies and made decisions which have had a negative impact on our community. We are union led but community driven and we are apolitical. We are not about any political party; we are about the community. Clarence Valley Community Unions is an organisation of unions and community members, working together to achieve a better standard of living for our community. Our aim is to achieve a better standard of living for all of us, not fiscal or government policies. You do not hear too many Government departments talk about the standard of living but that is what we are about. We were only formed in April of this year and we only had one meeting between April and the downsizing of Grafton jail.

This new initiative was not an overly organised or coordinated movement, yet when you look at what occurred throughout this campaign, with the rallies and the picket line, the fact that so many people would come out and be involved highlights how widely and deeply the closure of Grafton jail is felt by this community. This decision was wrong on so many levels. I dare say numerous submissions and other evidence before the Committee will talk about that but in further evidence of how wrong this was, with the Chair's indulgence, I have some documents here. The first is a report from local employment coordinator for the Richmond, Tweed and Clarence Valley priority employment area. This person came to a community forum on 15 August, after the downsizing of Grafton jail. He delivered a presentation which details this area and its disadvantages and I would like to table that.

Document tabled.

The report demonstrates that this is a high-needs area in terms of Government support services. We really should be investing in communities on the North Coast, not taking services away and not cutting jobs out, which also further disadvantages people here. A researcher from the Coffey Institute at Newcastle University, also turned up to the community forum on 15 August. He did some research for the Community and Public Sector Union, which they have released to us. He provides in-depth research and findings on the fact that cuts in Government sectors normally are firstly, bad for the community but then need to be reversed later by governments. I wish, with the Chair's indulgence, to tender his PowerPoint presentation and two reports he has completed. Electronic versions are available.

CHAIR: Would you be able to make an electronic version available to the clerk. That would be useful for us.

Mr KING: We can do that. The decision is wrong on so many levels. When you look at the number of people from the community who have got involved in this, on all sides of politics, it demonstrates how wrong the decision was. But we also have proper research and proper academic arguments to say how wrong it is. We are calling for the jail to be reopened.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Mr King, in the submission from Clarence Valley Community Unions, on page 4 it says: "By not working with the unions in a meaningful way, we now have the farcical situation where Grafton jail is in limbo, Cessnock not opened and unable to be opened at present." Is that still the case?

Mr KING: My understanding is that it is still the case and further to that, they have reopened another wing of Long Bay. There were media reports on that on the weekend they have opened up another section of Long Bay. My understanding is that Grafton jail is still being maintained—the entire centre is being maintained for pests and all the usual maintenance is still being carried out. It seems like a good idea to just put it back and let us start to heal the damage that has been done to the community.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: You think the decision should be overturned?

Mr KING: Certainly.

CHAIR: In its previous capacity?

Mr KING: Yes, back to full capacity, including the return of the females—who were removed last year, with very little fanfare and very little notice—to the weekend detainees who were taken out as well and then they basically took the rest.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Your submission makes a number of recommendations. I just want to work our way through the three recommendations there. But, with regard to rural impact statements, your submission talks about impact statements, the need to do them and has some extensive quotes in there. Can I ask you what your understanding is of the impact statement that was conducted or the assessment on the community that was conducted prior to the decision?

Mr KING: I do not believe one was done. The only rationale for the downsizing or closure that I have ever heard was that it was costing too much per inmate. My understanding is that one was not done.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Do you have any examples of rural impact statements or some sort of process you would like to see followed, for a rural impact statement or assessment?

Mr KING: Yes, our umbrella organisation, Unions NSW, has conducted that research and attached to their submission is a community impact statement. That is the model we should be following.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Your third recommendation is about setting up a proper consultative process. Clearly, you are critical about the consultative process that was followed by the Government in making this decision.

Mr KING: That is correct.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Why are you critical of that process that was followed?

Mr KING: Right from day one on this campaign, once the decision came out, the prison officers came and saw our organisation and asked for help. From day one we said, hit the pause button, let us sit down and talk about this. The union message from the Public Service Association [PSA] and the Prison Officers Vocational Branch [POVB] was: that this can be fixed, we can run the centre a lot cheaper, we do not need to do this, we do not need to hurt all these people; stop and let us have a chat. And it certainly did not occur.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: The recommendations suggested in your submission, you feel that was a much better mechanism for consulting with the community?

Mr KING: It certainly is and I think those sorts of recommendations is what the submission from Unions NSW say: Talk to the local people. Other towns have fought against jails coming to town; we are fighting to keep one. It is part of our fabric.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: As the Chair says, the process to create the prison in his place on the south coast, the community was on side and maybe we should follow the same process, to keep the community on side all the time. Part of the process after the decision was made was to identify other public sector jobs and relocate them to Grafton. That has been conducted at the expense of other rural communities, such as where the Chair comes from. Is that a fair way of compensating for the loss of existing Government jobs in Grafton?

Mr KING: No, it is not. All it is doing is hurting another community. We have a jail here that can be run efficiently, with a stable and well-paid workforce and yet we are causing further damage to other communities. One, we need the jobs here—this community certainly needs them on the back of the hits that we have taken recently. The real answer is, just put the jail back, get the workers back there and put the prisoners back there. It is a happy fit and it has been for 120 years.

CHAIR: On the back of Mr Veitch's question, you talk about putting the jail back. We went out and saw it this morning. The older side of the jail looked quite archaic. Are you suggesting the restoration of that? Do you see the way in the future to keep that going, or do you think there is a need to totally rebuild the old section?

Mr KING: Realistically, it was working to a reasonable standard earlier. They were able to house prisoners, they were safe and everything was working reasonably well. Yes, it could have been run better, the unions say that straight away. But why not reopen it and then look at alternatives should there be some archaic sections there that may need to be updated or upgraded. But let us look at that and sit down and talk about it, not just make a decision and force that decision upon the workers and the community.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: You mentioned the removal of female prisoners from Grafton jail. Did that happen before June 2012?

Mr KING: Yes, my understanding is the POVB or one of the speakers later will be able to tell you when but I believe that occurred last year.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: You also mentioned the abolition of weekend detention. Did that only happen when the downsizing took place or did that happen before the announcement?

Mr KING: It is my understanding that those two cuts took place in 2011.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: So you see that as a sort of precursor to the closure that was announced in June?

Mr KING: It could be seen as a precursor to it.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: I think there would have been more of a community outcry if all those things had happened at once.

Mr KING: I think a lot of them were done, all but in secrecy and there was not an organisation such as—

Ms PACKWOOD: Our main complaint, as the community unions and the community voice, was the distinct lack of transparency in the actions of the Government and the decisions that were being made with real human damage being made to the community. The closures you have mentioned with regards to the removal of weekend detention, changes to the housing of female inmates, et cetera, there was no negotiation or consultation or transparency in any of that. There is a real feeling of betrayal amongst the employees, the families of the inmates and the community at large, at such a vital piece of their community being changed in a way that changes the fabric of our community.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: Because you represent all union members in the Clarence Valley, not just members of the POVB, have you got any information, whether anecdotal or otherwise, on impacts on jobs in other areas as a result of the closure?

Ms PACKWOOD: My other representation is of the Nurses Association and I can tell you that in two days time, just anecdotally, a family that has a senior nurse who works at the emergency department here at Grafton and her husband are leaving town because of cuts to Corrective Services that happened in Grafton without any consultation. The hospital has lost six senior nurses, and by "senior" I mean post-graduate study level, senior clinicians, difficult to replace in a small town like Grafton—not brand new out-of-university student nursing qualifications; I am talking highly educated in junior managerial levels, the sort of staff that a hospital in a community like Grafton would be very keen to retain. They are leaving because they were married or part of the jail community, that is, their partner was employed. Amongst that were the nurses employed at the jail, and again you are looking at a highly educated and much more mature workforce than in other areas and those nurses have been lost to the community as well—their wages, their education, their experience and their families because they take their families with them.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: We visited the intake area at the jail where they do the medical assessment of the people coming in and they said they no longer have drug and alcohol counsellors or psychologists working there.

Ms PACKWOOD: Yes.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: Do you have any idea how many staff would they have lost out of Justice Health?

Ms PACKWOOD: I really would not have an accurate number and as such I hesitate to answer. What I do know is that the direct impact of the loss of those people means that there has been more pressure applied to the emergency department across the base of the hospital and they do not have the staff trained necessarily specialised in the field of taking in and managing inmates.

Mr KING: If I could add to that, the detoxification centre at Grafton jail was only opened several years ago; it might be three years.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: The year before.

Mr KING: The year before, there you go, so it is only recently that they have spent a lot of money on it and now they have taken the staff out of there.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: Apart from the impact on nursing staff are you aware of other impacts on local businesses and employed people as a result of this?

Ms PACKWOOD: As simple as the day after certain families found out that they had lost their jobs they cancelled house cleaners, they cancelled school enrolments, they cancelled renovations on their houses. Anecdotally, the circle of friends I move in mow lawns, clean houses, own their own building companies, et cetera. The loss of jobs flows through them. I do not want to feel like I am telling anyone to suck eggs, but \$30,000 a year income earners do not get six-weekly haircuts and do not have someone to clean their houses and do not get new kitchens; \$100,000 a year earners and shift workers do, and so there has been an immediate impact. I have a girlfriend who is a hairdresser and manages her own business and she has lost \$30,000 up until the last financial year since the closure and she has had to let go of two apprentices.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Can I ask you a question that I asked the mayor. Several of the submissions say there were cultural issues within the facility and that was the reason it was closed. Do you think that is a fair statement? Do you have views about that statement?

Mr KING: That is wrong. If there are issues, deal with them. My understanding is that the Prison Officers Vocational Branch had been to the Industrial Relations Commission on numerous occasions to try to resolve those issues to try to make the place work a lot better. Let us fix the problem, let us not damage a whole community.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Do you think it is one of the reasons that the Government may have looked at closing the facility?

Mr KING: I do not know.

Ms PACKWOOD: If that is the case it is a rather blunt weapon for a touchy problem and caused an awful lot of collateral damage along the way.

Mr KING: And still is.

CHAIR: You make a comment in your submission about "Standard of living is something governments never mention" and you just mentioned it in your opening statement. You say "They concentrate on fiscal policies with little regard for our standard of living. This is where CVCU is prominent as is Unions NSW". Can you talk about what you mean by the standard of living?

Mr KING: More government services at the front end, with disadvantaged people—more human services like the Department of Community Services, Family and Community Services that actually treat those people and resolve the issues—means that those people can actually participate a lot better in the community with better outcomes at the other end. When you look at the jail, the amount of money that has gone out of the town now, the prospects of employment for our youth are now a lot less. With the prospects of employment being a lot harder and a lot lower, it is harder for a lot of people to participate in the workforce and it is hard for people to have meaningful employment and active and fulfilled lives. That is our aim. If we can keep the government services here, we keep a better community and improve our standard of living. That is my aim with being involved in this organisation.

CHAIR: Are you aware that Parramatta jail was closed, Kirkconnell jail was closed and Berrima jail was closed? Were you aware of any issues there?

Mr KING: I am not entirely sure. I know that there were centres closed but I am not sure of the full issues. If you look at Parramatta, the displacement effect for workers there is a lot less if you have to travel to Silverwater or Long Bay than if you have to pack up your home and move.

CHAIR: My point is that it seems governments, whether it be this one or the last one, seem to be able to close those with what seem to be little issues but this one has been significantly different. In light of that, what would you have seen the process being, given that it takes five years to plan a prison to get one to be functional yet there seem to be very few business plans of how to close or downsize one. Obviously that is the issue that this inquiry is trying to get to the bottom of. How would you see the flowchart being in closing one or downsizing one?

Mr KING: I would see it as "Let us sit down and talk; sit down with the community, with the unions, with the local council, the chamber of commerce", especially in regional areas because the magnifier effect of the hundred-odd jobs out of Grafton jail, should that be replicated across Sydney, I think the figures are 22,000 or 25,000 people out of work. That is just enormous. If a company tried to downsize or tried to walk away with this sort of impact, I am sure governments would criticise that company. The real aim for us as unions is that we are not the enemy. Let us sit down and talk, and let us talk in a meaningful way. If we need to achieve something, let us see if we can do it together.

CHAIR: So you would be of the view that the department should have a proper and detailed process to close a correctional centre in much the same way as they would have in introducing a new one into a region?

Ms PACKWOOD: I would agree.

Mr KING: Certainly.

Ms PACKWOOD: Would you close down a hospital by just driving up and emptying it of patients on a Saturday? Would you do that in a regional area? It would not be deemed appropriate, nor is the dealing of inmates and their families in such a way. Grafton loves its jail. There are a lot of wedding photos taken out the front of those beautiful walls and that beautiful garden. Grafton is the opposite to a lot of towns; we love our jail. Personally, I have been involved in the jail in one way or another with family or friends working there for 20 years and I am 34. I have not been with my husband that long but my family and friends have been employed there that long and those walls I walk past on my way to work. You do not just come in on a Friday or Saturday and empty a place of the inmates without consultation with their families.

There are entire communities that have been destroyed by this. So, in answer to your question, Chair, yes, you would go in and discuss the impact with the community that you are going to do it and say, "Okay, if it is to happen—and we do not necessarily agree it does—but if it has to happen, how can we make this impact as least devastating as possible with the least amount of human collateral?" Because at the end of the day it is been human lives that have been destroyed.

CHAIR: Have your members ever complained about the age of the facility? We went out this morning and had a look. Certainly it is quite a different ambient—never mind it being a prison—but it does seem fairly closed, dark, old and aged. Have your members ever complained about the age of the facility—

Mr KING: No.

CHAIR: —having implications on their morale?

Mr KING: No.

Ms PACKWOOD: No.

CHAIR: They are quite happy with the infrastructure out there?

Mr KING: Yes. There have been no complaints to me from any of the staff about the facilities there. The minimum security section—the unit section was built in 1989 so a lot of that infrastructure up there is not all that dated. There have been no complaints at all from anyone.

CHAIR: I must admit my point of reference is from the South Coast Correctional Centre that is just a couple of years old.

Ms PACKWOOD: Brand spanking new.

CHAIR: Brand spanking new. I noted quite a difference in that and I would be interested in the difference in the morale among staff if they were to work in both facilities. I was asking if there had been any issues in terms of the age of that centre.

Mr KING: No, none have been raised.

CHAIR: Okay, that is fine. You handed us two documents. Let me clarify two things about the documents. The first one is okay to table but I need to clarify the second one from the Centre of Full Employment and Equity [CofFEE]. Has that been published or is it a confidential document?

Mr KING: From my understanding it has been released.

CHAIR: We may need the permission from the authors if we are going to publish the document.

Ms PACKWOOD: He was happy to circulate it to us.

Mr KING: Stewart Little from the Public Service Association was the person I was talking to. We can follow that up.

CHAIR: If you would. In terms of the first document entitled "Australian Government Priority Employment and Area Initiative", when was that presented to you?

Mr KING: That was presented on 15 August at a community forum.

CHAIR: So that is fairly recent?

Mr KING: Yes.

CHAIR: Do you know what investment the Australian Government has had in the local area in terms of job creation given the significant socioeconomic downturn?

Mr KING: Not offhand, no, sorry.

CHAIR: I just thought it was a significant document that included lots of graphs but it did not show the plan the Australian Government was going to apply to the need basis of employment.

Mr KING: I am not sure.

CHAIR: So you cannot tell me how many jobs that is predicted to create?

Mr KING: No.

CHAIR: I note in your submission that you did present a 10,000 signature petition?

Mr KING: Yes, that is correct.

CHAIR: How long did it take you to put that submission together?

Mr KING: It was within two weeks.

CHAIR: Two weeks?

Ms PACKWOOD: It just took ages to table.

CHAIR: Who did you present it to?

Mr KING: I believe it was presented to Parliament but we can follow that up as well.

CHAIR: I note also in your submission you mention that Mr Stoner expressed great concern about the need for government to consider the impact on the community prior to making a decision in terms of a bill presented in Parliament, the Rural Communities Impacts Bill. Have you seen that bill?

Mr KING: I believe so, yes.

CHAIR: Do you agree with that bill?

Mr KING: Yes. He should be doing what he was arguing for back then.

CHAIR: So you agree with that bill and that it was the right way to go?

Mr KING: Yes.

CHAIR: But it was defeated according to your submission?

Mr KING: Yes. Any sort of community consultation prior to making a decision from Cabinet in rural communities really needs to be community. It is common sense.

CHAIR: I would agree with you in my view. In your submission you say a dollar goes around five to seven times.

Mr KING: That is correct.

CHAIR: Do you wish to say anything further on the multiplier effect on the community other than what Ms Packwood articulated on a few moments ago?

Mr KING: It really does speak for itself. When you look at the wages cut to Grafton out of that jail you would have to be conservatively looking at \$7 million or \$8 million. When you times that by five to seven it becomes a significant amount of money out of this community.

CHAIR: In the Shoalhaven it is about a \$10 million payroll, so it is a significant part of the community. How do you see the Government replacing the jobs in other sectors? Is that not putting back some of that economic loss?

Mr KING: It certainly is.

CHAIR: How does the union see that?

Mr KING: On one hand we welcome it to this community but it has to be said that we are hurting another community in doing that and hurting other families. That brings us back to the point: We have a jail there, let's use it; we are not hurting other people.

CHAIR: In your submission you said "therefore the decision was made without any rationale on how it would impact on local business, local housing markets, local schools, local people and families." Are you aware of the commissioner's reply to this Committee on 23 November that those sorts of issues were taken into consideration?

Mr KING: They were?

CHAIR: The rationale for why they were doing what they were doing—the closing or downsizing of the jail?

Ms PACKWOOD: We have seen no evidence of that.

Mr KING: We have certainly seen none of that.

CHAIR: The aging of the facility and the economic needs—the mayor mentioned this morning the cost per day per prisoner. You have not seen any of that information?

Mr KING: I have not seen that report but I believe that the price per prisoner here in Grafton was said to be high but, as our campaign was, hit the pause button, let's sit down and talk. If the commissioner is looking at those factors from within his department then who is talking to the chamber of commerce? Who is talking to the council? Our real issue is, from the understanding I have of this, that no-one was spoken to within the community. That is our real argument about this.

CHAIR: Have you had any representations from Indigenous families who now have to travel to visit their loved ones and relatives?

Mr KING: I think that all speaks for itself.

Ms PACKWOOD: I have had some personal dealings with members of the community who are involved. The beauty of the movement that occurred around the jail was that we had the families of offenders, ex-offenders and employees of the prison service all lined up for the same reason. I have spoken to some older members of the population since then and they are struggling. They are already often disadvantaged financially and in resources for travel. Dealing with government systems is difficult for them. There does not seem to be a lot of advocacy for them in having to travel to another unfamiliar place, find their way around and negotiate that system again. I know that some of them are feeling more disenfranchised than they did before. At least they knew they were close and many of the employees at the jail, as I said, have been long-term employees so there was a real feeling of being part of the family or the community and they were feeling quite safe. So there is a lot of unfamiliarity and a lot of concern.

CHAIR: Are you aware that there is a scheme that has some travelling—

Ms PACKWOOD: Yes, but it is difficult for them to access anecdotally.

CHAIR: I understand that. I just wanted to see if you were aware of it?

Ms PACKWOOD: I am thank you.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Mr King, I want to get a bit of an idea about Clarence Valley Community Unions, which you said was set up in April this year—

Mr KING: That is correct.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: When you talk about "unions" you are talking about trade unions?

Mr KING: Yes, under Unions NSW.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: You said it was an apolitical organisation. By that do you mean there is no connection with any political party?

Mr KING: That is correct.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: So the unions involved in this organisation have no connection or affiliation with any political party at all?

Mr KING: Unions NSW may have an affiliation but this community group is apolitical.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: You said that Unions NSW was the umbrella organisation of this organisation?

Mr KING: Yes.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: You do not think it flows that—

Ms PACKWOOD: Are you asking us if there is bias?

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: No, I am responding to the statement that the organisation is apolitical. I am trying to ascertain what the situation is so as to evaluate the evidence that is being given. Mr King, you did say that the umbrella of the organisation is Unions NSW and then you said it is totally apolitical. I took it from that that there was no political affiliation with any party at all. That would not be the case, would it?

Mr KING: We certainly have no affiliation to any political party; Clarence Valley Community Unions has none.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: But your organisation is made up of representatives of various trade unions.

Mr KING: And the community.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: What is the makeup of the organisation? I am just taking it from the name Clarence Valley Community Unions.

Mr KING: Yes, community unions. The idea behind the structure is that we work with our community. You do not have to be a union member to be part of this organisation.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: I think you said earlier that you had heard no complaints about the facilities at Grafton jail. Are you aware there is a safety issue in getting inmates into the jail itself because of heritage aspects—something that the Committee saw today—when they are bringing the vehicles in with inmates or when they are taking them out because there are two sets of gates and a lack of space?

Mr KING: I am not aware of a safety issue. I know that they back the trucks right into the centre.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Apparently there is a safety issue. Would it come as a surprise to you know that there is a safety issue?

Mr KING: Questions like that are more for the Prison Officers Vocational Branch [POVB]. That is more an internal issue.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: It is a very substantial issue with regard to Grafton jail and that is why I am raising it with you.

Mr KING: I would be saying let's fix the problem.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: The problem cannot be fixed there because there is a heritage issue in getting vehicles in and out of the jail and it is not so easily fixed.

Ms PACKWOOD: How many unsafe incidents have occurred with a prisoner or an officer? We have not been given any evidence of that in our representations. Do you have any of those figures?

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: The Committee has had advice given to it that it is a safety issue. That is not an issue that your organisation is aware of?

Ms PACKWOOD: No.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: You were talking about the inmates and their families. Are you aware that the Aboriginal Legal Service of New South Wales, the organisation that represents Indigenous inmates, has largely come out in favour of the closure?

Ms PACKWOOD: I was made aware of that anecdotally while I was treating someone at my facility and I asked for evidence to be given to me so that I could then verify it because the evidence I have been given

through conversations with members of the public and affected individuals is exactly the opposite. I am happy to change my opinion to whichever opinion is correct but I need verified information first.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: I think the best verification of that evidence would be to go to the website. Is the evidence that was given by the representative on the website?

CHAIR: Yes, it would be published.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: At our last hearing in Sydney a representative of the Aboriginal Legal Service, which represents a significant portion of inmates, largely came out in favour of the closure. It was felt it would be better for inmates on the whole to be in new, updated facilities. That evidence is on the public website.

Ms PACKWOOD: I will be sure to circulate that through the community members that I have been speaking to and make sure they are aware that their inmates and families are better served in a newer facility.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: That is according to the Aboriginal Legal Service that represents those inmates.

Mr KING: Can I add to that?

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Yes.

Mr KING: There were members of the Aboriginal Legal Service on the picket line.

Ms PACKWOOD: And active on the picket line.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: I can only go on what the representatives of that organisation who appeared before the Committee said when giving their evidence, and it is published for all to see.

Mr KING: That may be the case but were they actually local representatives from this area?

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: They are the organisation that speaks on behalf of Indigenous inmates.

Ms PACKWOOD: Rural or metro? The impact of this jail closure is on a rural and regional area. You could save the same amount of wages by shutting one particular wing of, say, Long Bay. No families would have to move, no children would need to be pulled out of school and no offenders or their families would be disrupted. But you have done the same thing in a regional area and the impact is—which is what I believe we are here to discuss today—akin to a natural disaster except that this one is manmade. When I am being offered evidence such as from the Aboriginal Legal Service as representative of members of their community, with all due respect, I would ask whether the people they are speaking for live in a metro area, where it is as simple as a train ride, or whether they live in a regional area and have to first make it into town, then make it onto a train and then travel four or five hours before getting there?

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: I suppose the best thing to do would be to read the evidence.

Ms PACKWOOD: I certainly will.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Is the Aboriginal Legal Service represented on your organisation?

Mr KING: There are none on the executive of the committee but they are certainly welcome.

Ms PACKWOOD: They are welcome members of the meeting; everybody is welcome. Have you read our mission statement?

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: Yes, I have.

Ms PACKWOOD: Excellent.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: Would it be fair to say that most people in the Clarence Valley think that the jail has completely closed and that the community perception is that there are no people working out there?

Ms PACKWOOD: I am being told any version of events actually. People are surprised to know that prison officers are still employed. People are wondering what the point was if we are still employing and maintaining inmates. So people are confused.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: Do you know how many people are working there and how many inmates there are?

Ms PACKWOOD: I do not know the number of inmates. I believe the number of prison officers that I have been informed informally about is around 30.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: Today we heard it was 35. The number of inmates goes up and down and at the moment it is quite high—it is up to 62. The Committee was given some information today, which it will need to confirm, that there was a view that any staff member who wanted to stay at Grafton has been able to stay. What is your view of that? Maybe there were some who took a position at Cessnock or elsewhere—

Ms PACKWOOD: I have been informed directly by prison officers and their families who have been affected by this that that statement would be untrue and without breaching confidence I could actually prove that, if need be.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: I would be happy to receive that information.

Ms PACKWOOD: Certainly.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: How many State Government jobs are in the Clarence Valley? We have the public hospitals, the schools, the National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Roads and Maritime Service, and we have Crown Lands coming. It is a town that heavily relies on the State Government payroll.

Ms PACKWOOD: Absolutely.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: Do you have a number?

Ms PACKWOOD: On hand absolutely I do not, I am sorry. I do not want to state a number and then be proven to be incorrect.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: I asked the mayor the same question today. I think it is a relevant question to ask, going forward. The decision has been made and, trying to be positive, given that we have got the 41 Crown Land jobs coming and extra Roads and Maritime Services jobs and we have growth in the region so that there will be more nurses, police and teachers. I wonder if there is some way we can actually do a measurement, so we can talk about some of the positives that are happening in this region from the closure. I am from the little fishing village called Coffs Harbour where there has been a real sense of gloom and doom but there are some small lights on the hill.

Ms PACKWOOD: There are some small lights on the hill but what we are still suffering from is the collateral damage. There are families still moving away and mine is one. My husband draws two State Government pays: He is a Fire and Rescue Service officer and he was part of the Department of Corrective Services. I am one of the senior nurses who will be leaving Grafton Base Hospital. Without blowing my own horn, I will be leaving Grafton Base Hospital with three degrees and a lot of experience. It is not something the hospital can cope with. I will be pulling my child out of school and my second child, who was going to start school, will be pulled out as well. We sacked a cleaner. So there is a lot of that damage still happening. There are a lot of displaced prison officers shuffling for positions. Some are looking for transfers out but have not been given them; some are asking to stay but have not been allowed to. There are a lot of families in limbo because of that. Some families have teenagers in high school in Years 9 and 10 and families are having to be split and having to make the decision: does mum stay while dad goes and tries to find work in another jail or in another area?

There is not that flexibility here in Grafton for a person employed by the Department of Corrective Services to be able to go and get another job. You either become a sawmiller or drive trucks. Positivity would be great for Grafton but at the moment there might be lights on the horizon but they are little ones and they seem to be a long way away.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: The Clarence Valley Community Unions, where else across New South Wales has a cluster such as this started?

Mr KING: One has started in Kempsey, Muswellbrook, Penrith, Bathurst, Central West, Ryde, Queanbeyan—there are more coming.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: But Clarence was the first?

Mr KING: With Penrith, we were one of the first.

CHAIR: I thank you both for attending. I do note there were a lot of submissions from the community and we acknowledge those submissions as being the breath and blood of people's lives. We appreciate you have come to give testimony on their behalf. The Committee has resolved that the answers to questions taken on notice should be returned within 52 days, which is about 31 January. It has been extended because of the Christmas season. The Secretariat will be in contact with you in relation to the questions you have taken on notice.

(The witnesses withdrew)

JAMES PATTERSON, Executive Officer, Grafton Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and

JEREMY CHALLACOMBE, Councillor, Clarence Valley Council and former President of the Grafton Chamber of Commerce and Industry, sworn and examined:

SANDY STEWART, President, Grafton Chamber of Commerce and Industry, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: Would anyone like to make, or contribute to, an opening statement?

Ms STEWART: I thank you for inviting us to be here this afternoon. I am the newly elected President of the Grafton Chamber of Commerce and Industry, elected last month. I am here with Jeremy Challacombe, the Past President and James Patterson, our Executive Officer. Jeremy, as Past President of the Chamber, will talk after I have finished on the history leading up to the closure of the jail. James Patterson collated and submitted our submission on the jail closure, after consultation with our members, of which we have 130.

The jail closure has had a huge impact, socially and economically, on the community of Grafton and surrounding areas. I am a small business owner, a bookkeeper and a business activity statement agent and I have clients throughout Grafton, the Clarence Valley and northern New South Wales. I have seen firsthand the impact of the jail closure on businesses in Grafton. One business has had an income downturn of \$3,000 per week which equates to \$156,000 a year. That is equivalent to three to four full-time positions. A local shop close to the jail has had to put off staff, due to the downturn in sales from families visiting inmates.

Trade services have been affected, for example, the electricians and plumbers who did the minor repairs and maintenance at the jail have had a downturn in income. Jail staff being relocated has had a ripple effect throughout the community: school numbers are down and junior sporting groups have been affected, to name a few. Two businesses that were for sale prior to the closure of the jail had buyers lined up to buy those businesses but as soon as the buyers heard of the closure, they pulled out of the sale.

Grafton has lost 350 employed positions over the last 12 months, with the jail closure and the closure of the abattoirs and the Telstra Call Centre. We are an above average unemployment area and a very low income area. There is a great lack of confidence in town and the community's sense of worth has been greatly affected. Grafton is a very close-knit, supportive community. When the jail closure was announced, we had over 3,000 people attend rallies and hundreds on the picket line. People closed their businesses and lost income, because their sense of community was worth taking time to attend the rallies. More consultation and investigation should have taken place prior to the closure of the jail and for the history of this, I will hand over to our Past President, Jeremy Challacombe.

Mr CHALLACOMBE: I reiterate, we are a high unemployment area, there are no two ways about that. There are a whole lot of factors and this was the culmination of a number of other factors. We have been dwindling and dwindling and dwindling over probably the past 40 years. I note there are some questions as to where we were with the Public Service. I am digressing a little but if I go back to when I was a youth and I worked with the Ag. Department, there were 200 people working at the research station, in ballpark figures. There was a regional office in town and we have seen it dwindle and dwindle and dwindle away from there.

Over the last three years, as Sandy mentioned, we had Telstra closures with the loss of a number of jobs; we had the abattoirs close and we have had a number of others things over 10 years leading up to that. We are a community that has a high unemployment rate and a lot of the workers receive the unemployment benefit. So we have been going backwards and backwards and backwards. And the jail was seen very much to be the last straw and it was extremely disappointing, from our perspective, to have a government come in and do this on top of other private sector bits and pieces.

There are a number of points here to raise. I will go over them in point form, rather than in great detail and then I can answer any questions. The suddenness of the decision publicly: it came out of left field. There were mumblings and we had lost a bit of this and a bit of that but then suddenly we heard that the jail was going to be closed. The lack of consultation: We have a Chamber of Commerce and a Council but the perception is that there was no consultation. The lack of explanation regarding reasons: It was just going to close and we heard "there is industrial strife" or "it is old and inefficient" but there was no sitting down and going into any detail about those things. Lack of explanation regarding potential impacts to the broader community: There was a complete lack of preparation of a social impact statement, contrary to a bill raised earlier by the now Deputy

Premier who put the bill before Parliament. It was defeated but I believe it is also contrary to a stated Cabinet requirement.

So there was no social impact statement and certainly, when you are talking about low socio-economic areas in rural communities that, I would have thought, would have been one of the first things that would have been addressed. There was a lack of consultation by the local member. It was initially intimated that he did not know but I believe, in hindsight, there was some communication but I think there could have been a lot more and a lot more consultation with the community by him, or regarding the advice that was given to him. I will move on to the actual closure. The timing of the removal of prisoners: It was Grafton Cup Day, probably one of the premier public holidays in Grafton and yet a truck was snuck up to pull prisoners out. It may have been pure coincidence but a lot of us are very cynical about the timing of the way things were done.

Apparent lack of planning regarding the end destination of prisoners: Again, it is hearsay but we heard "We took prisoners to here but we could not drop them off here, we are going to go somewhere else". I do not have that written down but that was hearsay that came back to us. In a situation like this there is a lot of hearsay but at the bottom of it, there is probably an element of truth and it is an indication that there was not proper consultation and proper planning.

A total lack of contact with the Council, the Chamber of Commerce and with other local bodies.: There was a total lack of assessing the economic and social impact on the local community. There was none perceived. When we found out about the closure, myself, the mayor and the local member went to Sydney to meet with the Deputy Premier and the Attorney General who was the Minister responsible at the time. We went at our own expense and we went down with genuine feelings to say: Look, there is an issue here that is affecting the community, can we sit down and discuss it?

We got a polite reception for a short while and that was the end of it. We were prepared to say, "Press the pause button. We are down here. We are prepared to stay down over the weekend if we have to and let us sit down and discuss alternatives and the impacts on the community" and we were basically cut short with no discussion regarding the impacts and no opportunity to address a range of options. The Government would have had knowledge of previous closures, private and public, in Grafton and their economic impact, and this was just adding on to it. If we go on to the impacts of local businesses, contractors, electricians and plumbers, I had a number of people ring me up and say, "We have a contract with the jail. What is going to happen? Where is this going to? Can you as a chamber do anything about it? And that is part of the reason why we went down to Sydney to try to meet with the Minister and discuss it.

You have already heard about prisoner visitors, the Aboriginal community and local tradespersons, so I will not go on but I am quite happy to answer questions on that. One of the outcomes of it was we felt that we had to go down and try to justify things, so some of my colleagues went down to Country Week to basically say that Grafton is alive and well. Even though the perception is that the Government might have turned off the lights, they are not; they are on, so come and work with us. But it is something that we should not have had to have done like that. I will leave it there and I am happy to answer any questions. You have the submission put together by our executive officer, Mr Patterson, and maybe it is opportune to let him say a few words.

Mr PATTERSON: I am happy to answer questions.

CHAIR: Ms Stewart, I am sorry, I could not quite hear the statistics you gave. Exactly what was the financial impact on businesses? I think you gave some statistics.

Ms STEWART: There was one business that was affected by a \$3,000 per week downturn in income, which equates to \$156,000 a year. Other figures I do not have. James Patterson has some figures. It is just from talking to my clients and other businesses in the Grafton area and from them telling me about the impact on them.

Mr PATTERSON: I have statistics. One business lost \$4,000 per month on a service contract and one staff lost hours because of that. A printer got \$3,000 or \$4,000 worth of printing work done at the prison and now will have to find other people to do that, which will cost more to the community. Volunteer groups and community groups used to get their printing done at the prison because it was so low cost for them. Truck supply companies working with builders, bricklayers and associated trades have the same view—less income in town, so it has affected them directly; less building and renovations occurring. A bus company said, "We have noticed our school excursions have dropped off too. Whereas we would send two coach loads of students on

school excursions, schools are struggling to get one full coach". Rex Airlines have noticed a 25 per cent drop in September, a 19 per cent drop in October and a 16 per cent drop on the last six months last year. One small business located near the prison used to have one staff member who worked weekends but that person has been laid off due to the closure.

Another retail company that would supply about \$1,500 worth of goods such as televisions, kettles, sandwich makers and so forth for the buy-ups per fortnight has lost that. Also there are some larger items and that is another \$10,000 to \$20,000 per annum that they have lost. It has affected their staff in terms of the commission payments they are getting. It has been reinforced by the real estate agents that house prices have not increased over the last four years and they are struggling to make a return on house prices from four years ago. Even though it is a buyer's market no-one has the confidence to actually go as far as exchanging contracts. There are very, very few sales taking place at the moment.

CHAIR: You are making a direct implication that because of the job losses, business confidence is down?

Mr PATTERSON: Business confidence and community confidence. I will touch on a few more of these and I have some other anecdotal evidence as well. One electrician said, "Due to the downsizing or closure of the Grafton jail I have had to make two electricians redundant. There is virtually very little commercial building going on in the Clarence Valley." One businessman whose business actually ended up closing said that a lot of his business used to be credit cards and EFTPOS.

Since the closure of the jail these sales diminished greatly and while the loss of income due to the loss of credit cards and so forth was not the only factor, it was one of the factors resulting in him closing. That has been repeated at the department store level; that credit card sales have reduced. They are mainly spending cash if they are going to buy up big, and also with new car sales as well. I have had big car salesmen tell me the other day the same thing, that they are doing cash and not credit card sales.

CHAIR: We have a lot to get through and I am mindful of other members having a chance to ask questions.

Mr PATTERSON: Sure.

CHAIR: We heard about that impact but we have also heard about opportunities in terms of Crown lands and other public sector jobs. How does the business chamber see that?

Mr PATTERSON: I cannot speak necessarily on behalf of the chamber but certainly the people who are talking to me about it, these jobs are not here now and this is when they need them and the supporting jobs that have been spoken about.

CHAIR: Do you think that will do something to bring back confidence?

Mr PATTERSON: The confidence has been belted down over the last 12 months with so many job losses, not just the prison closure. It is a cumulative effect. It is going to take a lot to bring that confidence back.

CHAIR: Are you aware of how much finance it takes to turn over Clarence Valley? For instance, the Shoalhaven needs about \$3 million to \$4 million to keep everything ticking over, whether it is road building, other government funds or the private sector. Are you aware if there is a sum required to roll over the economy up here?

Mr PATTERSON: Yes, there is probably a statistic on it but I am not aware of it.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Talking about the chamber itself, how far and wide do you draw your membership? Is it just Grafton itself or is it broader to the Clarence?

Ms STEWART: We have four other chambers. We have one in Maclean, one in Yamba, one at Woolli, one at Iluka, and Grafton and we try as presidents to get together on a regular basis to look at everything as a whole.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Are they giving your feedback about the impact of the downsizing of the facility at Grafton? Have they been hit as well?

Mr PATTERSON: A lot of the people affected are transporting to town from places like Iluka, Wooli and so forth, so in a sense the local petrol station has lost income because that person is no longer commuting. It is a cumulative effect. It is little bits everywhere—we are talking about middle income here; something like \$40,000 to \$80,000 per year that these people are getting, and these people are affluent spenders. They do not necessarily save well but they spend; they tick over the money. So we are losing 100 people who are ticking over the economy basically.

Mr CHALLACOMBE: Basically the other chamber presidents, when I was there, were extremely supportive, as was the New South Wales Business Chamber based on the North Coast, John Murray. The support was there because there was recognition that it was going to impact on Grafton, number one, on the Clarence Valley, number two, but probably on the North Coast, number three. The other concern was the way the decision-making was done: Do we have any confidence? Where are we going to be going? We need to improve the system. That is what came out of it through the business chamber, from the top right the way down.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: So you would like to see the decision overturned, is that the chamber's position?

Mr CHALLACOMBE: I can hand over to the president of the chamber but I will say a few words first. I would like to have seen the decision being discussed beforehand with the rationale as to what needs to be done and what were the problems. If you are going to have something that is not going to be working, then you need to be able to discuss it. I do not close my farm down because of a problem in one little corner. I sit down and see what that broad problem is and address that broad problem. If it turns out that the farm is totally unviable, then I will probably try and flog it to some unsuspecting buyer, but that is really not likely to be the case and I suspect that is the same with the jail.

Ms STEWART: I do not know if the decision will be overturned because of the expense that has been involved. We would just like to see some more consultation in these things that are going to happen in the future.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Talking about consultation, just about everyone says there was a lack of consultation. When the chamber talks about consultation, what are they talking about? What exactly do you mean by consultation? Who should be at the table involved in discussions? How far out before the decision is made?

Mr CHALLACOMBE: From a government perspective I would think you are talking about rural communities where somebody would sit down. Now this is a low socioeconomic area and somebody said there were problems—whether there were or whether there were not—and say, "How do we go about addressing those problems?" And there is something missing within the system. Whilst you do not necessarily want to let the cat out of the bag, you would send some people around to say, "What is going on in that local community? Who do we need to talk to? Let's get some feedback. Do we just pull it like a bolt out of the air? They have just lost Telstra; the other parts have closed. We've had community reaction to those. Maybe we have a community here that has a few problems", so I think that consultation could have occurred both through the local member, through the Minister and discussing it with the chambers and with council. I think maybe the decision could have gone ahead, I do not know, but the other side of it was we offered that when we went down to Sydney and said, "Press the pause button. This is going to have this sort of impact. Can we discuss it?" And we were cut out of that.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: Mr Challacombe, you said earlier, maybe in your opening statement, you thought that the local member, Chris Gulaptis, may have been given some advance knowledge of the impending downsizing of the prison. Can you elaborate on that?

Mr CHALLACOMBE: What I read in the paper last week basically because as a lead-up to it I know both the mayor and I had been wanting to sit down with the local member and we were able to, but just before—and I am surmising here—but I think he was probably a bit shell-shocked about all this—"My goodness, what is this going to do to our community?" I do not really know what happens behind the secretive scenes of Parliament, party rooms and things like that, but basically what came out in the paper last week was, yes, there was a bit of an intimation but, no, we did not know how big it was going to be. Then I found out a bit more

lately. I put that down to you have a new member, I think very badly guided by the political system. I am not trying to hang it off him—don't get me wrong—but I think the system hung it off him and left him hanging out to dry.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: Mr Patterson, who said that you were aware of a local printing company that had been having work done by Corrective Services Industries that now had to try to source getting its printing done elsewhere. Are you aware of any other local businesses that have been impacted by the closure of Corrective Services Industries?

Mr PATTERSON: Yes, just the printing facilities alone did quite a lot of work for our volunteer groups. I am a member of a local theatre company and they had all their brochures, flyers and pamphlets done. They actually have to go outside and find a private printer and that will of course cost a lot more money. I have mentioned already quite a lot of the businesses that have spoken to me about loss of direct income and so forth. I know some of the real estate agents at the moment that have a couple of rentals have had to close up and go straight away because they were tied up with the prison. But in the rental market at the moment they are getting larger incomes from contract people coming into town to do contracts and not so much in the way of new people coming into town at the lower rental markets. A lot of these businesses had already pulled back a lot of money because of the closure by Telstra and the effects of the abattoirs closure.

We also had a couple of floods just beforehand as well and we had Centrelink come in and do a lot of work with the community with one of the floods and then the abattoirs closure. In response to that a lot of the businesses had already cut their hours and a lot of the owners had taken on shifts themselves rather than close the businesses down. So the businesses had made all the cutbacks and made all the stock controls. They had done everything they could do to try and keep themselves afloat, so when the prison closure came on it was just another nail that made it difficult. This is probably why the confidence is so low because they thought they had just got through these two crises and the global financial crisis and so forth and this is a lot of money that has been taken out of the economy.

The Hon. MICK VEITCH: Do you think that the types of things that you have just mentioned should be included in a rural impact statement?

Mr PATTERSON: Certainly. You have got to see the context of the closure that has taken place. As I said, Centrelink were here so it is on record that there was a huge crisis going on in the last six months before the prison decision was taken. It was fairly obvious to everyone. As an executive officer I would have been the first point of contact if someone had asked "Is this going to have an effect on business?" No-one spoke to us at all.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: On page 2 of your submission you talk a little bit about community impacts. You talk about the loss of households that existed because of the prison. You also talk about the impact on local volunteer groups. Can you elaborate on that? We all know particularly in rural areas that volunteer groups are often the backbone of service provision.

Mr PATTERSON: Up to six months ago I was the captain of our local Rural Fire Service. We had a family move into the area the year before and both of them did take up jobs with the prison service. They started a small rural property and became active members with the local fire brigade. As a result one of them had to go back to Western Australia because there was no work for them down here. As it was they were actually mucked around for six months before the training was put into place for them. So they were actually in crisis mode then so this certainly closed that down.

I know there have been other impacts in similar organisations, whether it is the Rural Fire Service or the State Emergency Service. I know that sporting clubs have been struggling with getting captains, coaches and family support because of the events that have been taking place. A lot of volunteer roles are starting to become difficult to fill even at our chamber level, because businesses have to focus on their business responsibilities and the amount of time that chamber members and executives members have available to support the work of the chamber is dwindling because they are really pushed.

The Hon. AMANDA FAZIO: Would you support the impacts on the social fabric being included in a rural impact statement as well?

Mr PATTERSON: Definitely. We are a tight-knit community so everything has knock-on effects. It is also the sense of loss that comes because your identity in the community is through the job that you do or the volunteer work that you do. When that is removed from you or if you have to close your business down that is a huge personal blow too. It is a crisis for an individual and as a close-knit community we share that—we really feel for the people who have been suffering and the businesses that have closed because of it.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: My congratulations on going to the Country Week Expo. What are the main strengths or economic drivers of the region? When you were at the expo at Rosehill what did you sell for this region going forward?

Mr PATTERSON: A quality of life. We offer everything from the hills to the river to the seaside in terms of the lifestyle choices you want to make but the community is close-knit. I have lived here for 12 years, having come from Melbourne and having lived overseas for quite some time. I have brought my kids up in this area, which has wonderful schools. My daughter learnt three languages at a local high school and she is at university now doing three languages for her degree. My son is 15 and he had difficulties with reading and spelling. He has been supported and he is a thriving student now at 15 years-of-age. The love, attention and caring of the community is really something. For example, Carringa Enterprises, which gives administrative support to the chamber, is one of the biggest local caring industries for intellectually disabled people and these kids work in local businesses one day per week with the support and the encouragement of local business operators.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Sorry to interrupt. From where I am coming from I hear 6 per cent unemployment, other people would say you have 94 per cent employment.

Mr PATTERSON: We have 50 per cent probably on low-income unemployment benefits or pensions, retirees on pensions. We do not have huge numbers in between. We are actually quite high and there is probably a hidden figure in that. It would probably be closer to 17 per cent if you really wanted to—

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: Mr Challacombe, were you going to say something?

Mr CHALLACOMBE: Yes. Could I add a little bit to that? We have been an area that is falling down and falling down. We had a big timber industry here and it has been whittled away and whittled away. We are rich in resources and we have a lot of opportunities but once you lose this bit, once you lose that bit and once you lose something else then the perception is that you are an area that is losing a lot of things. It is beholden on us as a chamber and as a council, but also beholden on the Government, to say "We want to get out of this low, socio-economic area and paying money out. This is an area with a lot of water, some absolutely magnificent natural resources, some very good agricultural land and a great timber area. There are opportunities so let's develop a plan." Rather than what we hear from the Government, which is "Okay, let's close down the jail and let's walk away from Telstra." This is a fantastic area. There are some issues in some areas but how can we start to build it back up again? As I said at the outset, I worked with the Agriculture department in the 1960s when there was a big research station out there and a big regional centre. The Government has put something back in but nothing like it was in those days.

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE: You talk about developing a plan. Is there a plan?

Ms STEWART: A month or so after the jail closure we got together and had a chamber meeting at which we had I suppose 40 or 50 members attend—which is unusual for our chamber meetings. We decided to do a SWOT analysis on Grafton, which we did over a period of five to six weeks. We have got the results of that SWOT analysis and next year we will go forward with how we can grow this area based on our threats, weaknesses and strengths. I do not have that in front of me so I cannot quote you on what has happened with that but that is something proactively that we have done since the closure of the jail.

The Hon. SCOT MacDONALD: It is good to hear you talking about that the strengths of the region and the comparative advantages, which I think is the way to go forward with some good leadership. Do you think the future of the town or any regional town is really ever going to be safe if it is going to be reliant or over reliant on the public sector? Is that the way to grow an economy that is diverse, resilient and productive?

Mr CHALLACOMBE: I think it is a combination of both. I do not want to sort of get away from it because we are here talking about the jail but we are also talking about decision making, the lack of consultation and the lack of encouragement and probably the lack of leadership. Okay we have problems in rural Australia

but let us stand out the front and start to lead where we want to go. It is not just going to be for public sector jobs. As you have heard from other people before, public sector jobs create numbers and they spend money in the area, their kids go to our schools and hospitals, so it is a combination of both.

Mr PATTERSON: If I could just add to that?

CHAIR: Yes.

Mr PATTERSON: It was not that long ago that we used to say that Grafton had a really stable economy. It had its highs and lows but we sustained ourselves over many years. The loss of jobs has undermined that whole ability that we did have. We are actually not looking for handouts. We want to work. If you have got public sector jobs they open up other opportunities through businesses delivering services or having family members who want to take up opportunities of other employment; it starts to sustain itself. So taking out large chunks of sectors, taking out a couple of forestry jobs and taking out a couple of these jobs here and there is actually cherrypicking some of your best talent within an area and, as I said, undermines the local confidence that you have in the future of the area.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: I am thinking about the past and the number of jobs there used to be in the Department of Agriculture. Are we talking about 20 years ago or 30 years ago?

Mr CHALLACOMBE: Do I have to give my age away? I finished Hawkesbury Agricultural College in 1967 and worked here at the research station for a number of years. So it was the late 1960s, early 1970s.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: What is the population of Grafton now compared with then?

Mr CHALLACOMBE: That is a very confusing question because Grafton has been a stable population. People say "Oh, Grafton has only 17,000 people"—

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: It has grown in the last few years.

Mr CHALLACOMBE: Basically you are talking about the Clarence Valley, not Grafton.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: You are representing Grafton Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Mr CHALLACOMBE: Yes, I am representing Grafton Chamber but the impacts are right across the board.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: My point is that Grafton and the valley have grown despite your thoughts—

Mr CHALLACOMBE: No, I do not think so. We have a thriving dairy industry, we have a thriving timber industry, we did have a jail—if we get back to the jail, the jail used to get out and work with the community. I used to supply a fruit shop with stuff that we grew and we used to get stuff from the jail and we also used to supply the jail. All of that has gone over a number of years. We have sort of got a sugar industry in the valley now. Our cattle industry is diminishing. So I am just talking about the rural side of things and I would dispute what you say. I think we have lost.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: I am talking about Grafton.

Mr CHALLACOMBE: I am talking about the valley too. We used to have over 200 dairy farmers here.

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: But the population of the valley has grown.

Mr CHALLACOMBE: I would have to check on that because I do not what the population was—

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY: Mr Patterson, do you have some figures on that?

Mr CHALLACOMBE: Roughly 46,000 for the whole valley and I would have to check to see what it was.

Mr PATTERSON: I just want to add that a lot of that growth is actually in peripheral areas. We have a high population that commute into Grafton—that was something that came out of the study for the Grafton Bridge. A lot of people come into Grafton from MacLean, Iluka, Wooli and so forth. So some of the growth you are talking about has been in peripheral areas such as around Junction Hill and so forth outside of Grafton as a centre and are usually shown in figures as the valley rather than just as the Grafton township.

Mr CHALLACOMBE: Yes, it possibly has grown but what we have done is that we have moved from a reasonably vibrant economy that was made up of both the public and the private sector to a nice warm place in the sun to live and receive unemployment benefits. So the population is probably still similar but the output is very different.

CHAIR: What are your tourism numbers?

Mr PATTERSON: I do not have those figures, sorry.

CHAIR: Could you get those figures on tourism and what effect that has?

Mr CHALLACOMBE: Yes.

CHAIR: You spoke about your SWOT analysis. What were your strengths?

Mr PATTERSON: We have a strong supporting sports community. We have a lot to offer as a destination. We have a broad experience within our population as far as age groups and semi-retirees with a lot of skills that come into the area and these things are sometimes not taken the best advantage of.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: Mr Challacombe, the report of the Chamber, as tabled, talks a lot about business opportunities lost from downturn in the timber industry. You talk about past Government policy causing a lot of job losses in that area. Have you got any idea of what sort of turnover has been lost to the timber industry in the last decades, just in ballpark terms?

Mr CHALLACOMBE: The number of sawmills—we are now down to two or three of the big sawmills—

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: This used to be a very vibrant timber town.

Mr CHALLACOMBE: It used to be a very vibrant timber town. I would be loath to say now, but I could certainly get you that information.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: Would you take that on notice? That largely would have been based on the fact that a lot of State forests, and certainly a lot of the viable hardwood that would have been available in the State forests in this area, would have been taken away and converted to national parks over time. Am I right in saying that?

Mr CHALLACOMBE: Yes. I do not want to get into a political discussion here as far as that goes. That is part of it but it is how you are managing these areas and again, it comes back down to management. What we are here for today is the jail closure. Government, in making decisions should consult with the community, have a two-way discussion and then make those decisions. And I think the same principles can apply to that.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: Also talking in terms of marine parks, and I mentioned national parks earlier. What has been the impact to your community with the creation of the Solitary Islands Marine Park and the like? Has it had an effect on the community in relation to recreational fishing and tourism?

Mr CHALLACOMBE: Again, it is anecdotal. We can come back to you and give you some more hard figures but the community is relatively divided. We had a fishing industry and it has been cut down, cut down and cut down for a number of reasons. Certainly, the marine park enhances the area from a tourism perspective but from a commercial fishing perspective, there are implications.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: Not so much talking about commercial fishing because a marine park shuts that down, but more importantly, it shuts down recreational fishing opportunities too. Certainly down the south coast, the experience has been that, wherever there has been a marine park, they have seen material downturns—especially over the summer time—in recreational fishing tourism.

Mr PATTERSON: I will talk to the President of the Woolli Chamber and the Yamba Chamber and I am sure they will be able to get us that information.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: Can you take that on notice for me?

Mr PATTERSON: Certainly.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: You talk also in terms of the manufacturing industry in your report. Is there any manufacturing left in the Clarence Valley that you know of?

Mr PATTERSON: Not on a large scale. There are some shop and kitchen fitters, wood turning and metal turning for trucks and small trailers. It is all fairly small business. We have got some large chain companies like WesTrac and so forth but fairly small organisations compared to what used to be in the area.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK: Turning to the new zonings that are turning up all over the State, has the Chamber considered the impact on agricultural production of the new E2 and E3 zones that are going to be imposed by the local council?

Mr PATTERSON: There has been rezoning in the latest reports put out by Council but it is very difficult to get a handle on everything there. We are certainly looking at our industrial areas. Our agriculture has been devastated, so we are really talking about small-time farmers left in the old huge blocks that used to be agricultural so it is becoming difficult to see if there is any impact, unless there is investment and encouragement coming from a greater source than the local Council or Chamber.

CHAIR: I thank you, once again, for coming in and putting the views of the Chamber of Commerce. I know the chambers are extremely important to every community. It is great to have you here to put forward your views on how these decisions have impacted the businesses. We are mindful that they keep the community rolling as much as other sectors in the community. I thank our fellow brother from the Blood and Mustard, Mr Challacombe. A few of us went to Hawkesbury.

The Committee has resolved that the answers to questions taken on notice be returned within 52 working days. That means 31 January, given the fact we have Christmas in the middle of that. The Secretariat will contact you in relation to the questions you have taken on notice. I think there were a couple of things and would be nice to get that information and the SWOT analysis, if possible.

Mr PATTERSON: Certainly.

CHAIR: I thank you again for presenting your testimony today, we appreciate it.

(The witnesses withdrew)

(Short adjournment)

CHAIR: On behalf of the Select Committee on the Closure or Downsizing of Corrective Services NSW Facilities I welcome the public this afternoon. We are pleased to see members from the local community here today and we thank you for giving up your time to participate in this parliamentary process. The Committee was established in September 2012 to examine various aspects of the decision to close or downsize Corrective Services NSW facilities, including the impact these decisions have had on staff, their families and the local community. As part of our inquiry we will also review the basis for the decisions and the process used to identify other public sector employment opportunities that could be relocated to regional communities to alleviate job losses.

This forum is a very important part of our inquiry. We know there is a high level of concern about the decision to downsize the Grafton Correctional Centre. With this in mind, today is about hearing directly from those affected by the decision. We are hoping to learn about how it has affected you and your families, as well as other impacts of the downsizing. A further hearing is scheduled on Friday 1 March 2013 in Sydney where the Committee will hear evidence from other organisations and individuals. Details of the hearing are available on the Committee's website or by contacting the Committee secretariat.

Before we begin I will make some comments about procedural matters. Speakers were asked to register in advance for today's forum. Those of you who have been registered to speak will be called up to the lectern in turn. You will have five minutes to address the Committee and a bell will ring at four minutes to let you know that you are nearing the end of your time. I may also just acknowledge that you have one minute left to help those who are a little bit nervous so that they can finish with a concluding statement. I encourage you at the one-minute bell to think of the last comment that you want to deliver to the Committee. Another bell will ring at five minutes to indicate that your time has expired. In order to be fair to all speakers we will be strict in enforcing the five minute time limit. If you are unable to finish, you can request to incorporate the remainder of your speech into the transcript.

What you say today is being recorded and the transcript will become part of the public record. What you tell us here today will help us understand the issues and how you feel. It will also assist us as we prepare our report. The transcript will be made publicly available and will be posted on the Committee's website. I remind witnesses also that the freedom afforded to them by parliamentary privilege is not intended to provide an opportunity to make adverse reflections about specific individuals. In fact, I request that you do not make adverse reflections for the sake of yourself and the Committee. Witnesses are asked to avoid making critical comments about specific individuals. They should instead speak about general issues of concern.

In terms of broadcasting guidelines, the Committee has previously resolved to authorise the media to broadcast sound and video excerpts of these public proceedings. Copies of the guidelines governing the broadcast of proceedings are available from the table by the door. In accordance with the guidelines the media can film Committee members and witnesses but people in the audience should not be the primary focus of any filming or photographs. In reporting the proceedings of this Committee the media must take responsibility for what they publish or what interpretation is placed on anything that is said before the Committee. Under the standing orders of the Legislative Council any document presented to the Committee that has not yet been tabled in Parliament may not, except with the permission of the Committee, be disclosed or published by any member of such committee or by any other persons. I ask that people turn off their mobile phones and I welcome our first speaker for this afternoon, Mr Stephen Jeffs.

Mr STEPHEN JEFFS: My name is Steve Jeffs. I worked in Corrective Services for 29½ years and I was made redundant. People who worked at the jail who had been there a long time formed a community within themselves which has now been split up. The restructure was poorly and unprofessionally handled. As we discovered, some staff were informed by inmates and then the local newspaper before being officially told at the staff meeting the next morning. The general manager at the time was relieved of his duties and they sent up another general manager, who worked with the staff and had a good rapport.

The decision was made in late 2011 by the commissioner to close the jail but no staff were given the opportunity and told about our future. The question is why? They transferred officers up here at a later date after the decision was made. They transferred up here at their own expense, only knowing then that they might not have a job. Overall, given the previous experience gained and proved from previous closures from Corrective Services, the manner in which Grafton was conducted and handled was appalling, with little regard to the effect on staff and respective family members.

They say part of the reason for closing it was a culture of bullying. There was the Brammer report brought out. Our elected State member has made claims of bullying by staff which he refers to via media through the report, which no-one was allowed to see, read or had access to, and also there has been no disciplinary action taken on any officers in Grafton jail regarding this report.

In April 2012 there was a threat of closure of the units area by the general manager up here then. This is a most bullying tactic by previous jail management. However, the assistant commissioner came up from Sydney and assured the staff that there would be no downsizing in Grafton jail. As to the age of the jail, it was openly published that the centre was old and unmaintainable. In fact, the only old section in the jail was One Wing, which was built in 1893 and which housed 80 inmates out of 240. The remaining and serviceable areas of the jail are in good condition and are easily maintained. The units were opened in 1989. Two Wing was later constructed, along with a detoxification and a clinic area. The fact is that the Deputy Commissioner at the time attended the centre with a news crew to broadcast to the public on the evening news that the centre was old and run down. The news crew was only granted permission to film in One Wing and no other areas within the institution.

The high cost of maintenance. The jail was actually running below the maintenance budget for 2011-12. It was reported that it was running at about \$150,000 below budget according to the maintenance officer at the institution. There have been excessive funds spent on the unnecessary concrete construction area holding the industrial waste bins, the external walls being re-tuckpointed and having towers and handrails painted. The campaign to save the jail was a community-based peaceful protest by means of a picket line with members of the public and families and friends of staff and inmates alike. We were made aware of what hurt would come to the local community and all of us. Grafton jail has been part of this town since 1893 and part of our town's history. Many people from the community had a relationship within the jail through employment of family and friends. While the campaign was on, lives were endangered and property was damaged under the direction of Corrective Services management with trucks attempting to barge into the centre.

CHAIR: Would you like the remainder of your speech to be incorporated?

Mr STEPHEN JEFFS: Yes, I would. Thank you.

... this was halted by members of the NSW Police Force due to public Safety and Concerns.

At the second time of entry to remove the inmates, the entire community was disgusted at the overkill of the NSW Government by sending the riot squad to town and the apparent intimidation tactics used on the members of the public at the picket line. Due to the peaceful protest the trucks entered without any incident.

At the departure of the trucks, the officers formed a guard of honour in Arthur Street as the trucks departed. The officers then formed in formation and marched to the front of the centre, escorted by a lone piper, then saluted the front gate as a sign of respect to the end of an era, which brought admiration from the community.

During the campaign the gaol continued to operate as normal with all officers and staff working in a professional manner and undertaking all duties as expected without question in this uncertain time.

• **Post Announcement Conclusion**

If the Department had informed staff when the decision was made late 2011 to downsize the centre, so many staff and their families would have been afforded more time to prepare for the future changes. This would have afforded more time to prepare themselves to make the transition much easier to deal with for their future and many problems would have been avoided.

No assistance from CSNSW for further training for employment outside of corrective service for those who offered to accept redundancy to move into other employment.

Mistakes were made by management, including an officer's resume being circulated with extremely personal and sensitive information. Married officers and staff involved in partnerships were told there was no guarantee of working at the same centre.

Little considerations were given to people selling their homes and attending to their family commitments within a depressed real estate here in Grafton.

The Casuals were excluded from final figures of staff that lost jobs.

The impact of staff working in new locations and establishing themselves in different communities.

Children moving into new schools and establishing new friends.

Loss of long established friends.

Partners finding new employment.

Local Businesses huge downturn in income.

Gaol staff are like extended family, we have now been split up and grieving through loss of long term friends and relationships.

MR ANDREW RICHARDS: Good afternoon Mr Chair, members of the Committee, ladies and gentleman. My name is Andrew Richards and I am a resident of Grafton—I just live south of Grafton. I clearly state that when I heard that the jail was being closed I wrote to the New South Wales Government with a question on notice: When did this statutory consultation and public interest testing take place? I have had three replies and none of the replies have told the truth. They have not answered the question that consultation did not take place. Clearly the people of Clarence and the good people who worked at the jail have all been denied natural justice. This has had a severe impact upon the Aboriginal community and considering that the Aboriginal community are not written into our Australian Constitution they should have been thinking a lot more clearly before making this adverse decision. Statutory consultation and public interest testing underpins all government decisions. How can the Government make an informed decision without hearing from the key stakeholders and any other interested party who wants to put in their two bob's worth? Clearly there are a lot of things going on within the New South Wales Government that are not favourable for people living in regional areas all over New South Wales. It is about time they removed the Newcastle Line from their map regarding their fiscal decisions. The Newcastle Line is like the imaginary Brisbane Line in the Second World War.

I would also state that it has been great that you guys have come up here to listen to the people but all I can ask is that the Committee will make a final recommendation at some stage to reopen the jail as my correspondence from the executive clearly shows that there is a high intake of people from this area from the courts. When you take people who are committing offences away from their social network and all the social services that are put there for them, how can you expect to rehabilitate those people? How can you expect that those people when they leave jail, or even when they are on probation, can get on with their lives? How can you expect that they have not been subjected to a mistake by the New South Wales Department of Corrective Services that has effectively thrown the key away on all of us here in Grafton?

Furthermore, I would just like to say to the Hon. Melinda Pavey that prior to the 100 or so people losing their jobs at Grafton we have always had regional services in Grafton because this is the regional centre and this is how it works in this area. When I came here from the Gold Coast approximately seven years ago I noticed the difference in the way that things worked. You cannot get things done in my suburb. You cannot get things done up at MacLean or Yamba. You have to come to Grafton or take a 75 kilometre or 80 kilometre journey to Coffs Harbour. The New South Wales Government has a duty of care to the people. They have taken an oath to the people. They are here to represent us, not to make decisions on our behalf without even talking to us. I have heard directly from the Aboriginal community that the elderly people who cannot go to see their relatives feel like they are being punished. Has the New South Wales Government put up some sort of transport scheme and carers for these elderly people? They did not commit the crime; their relatives did. It does not matter whether you are black, white or brindle everybody needs to be brought back to Grafton. I can guarantee you now that the people who worked at Grafton jail will be ready to go back to work tomorrow if necessary. They have been subjected to an instant decision.

In regard to the Hon. Chris Gulaptis, as far as I can say he has got solidarity with the community. He is a good guy. We must remember that when everything was dropped on Chris he was a new kid on the block. At the end of the day Chris Gulaptis is very community minded. He has got behind the drags up at Casino. He gets behind everyone. I am sure that if he had known the full impact of what they were telling him then he would not have come out and made a statement except to say, "I am going up there because they will be on strike shortly". So to the Committee, please open Grafton jail. It is historical; it is a great place. I have even visited someone there. You could say that I have even been part of New South Wales Corrective Services. I have been on probation from Queensland but on my criminal history, which I wrote about in my submission, you can clearly see the Queensland police have failed to write that I was on probation. So what sort of information and misinformation is travelling interstate, let alone what is travelling in between the departments? Basically thank you for having me. I love my community. They are all good people here but to all the nice people that you have hurt, you know. Thank you.

MR ANTHONY CRAIG: Thank you, Mr Chairman. My name is Anthony Craig. I am a registered nurse and Assistant State Secretary of the Democratic Labor Party, NSW—not the ALP. I was personally affected and lost my nursing position with the closure of Kirkconnell Correctional Centre near Bathurst. I made a commitment to the local staff and communities of Grafton, Lithgow and Bathurst on behalf of the DLP that we will do all we can to help save jobs and stop this Government's obsession with attacking country communities. The DLP took on the challenge and pushed for an upper House inquiry into the New South Wales correctional centres downsizing and the closing down of facilities to allow the local people to have a voice. I am a man of my word and the DLP is a party of principle. We got the inquiry up and running when other career politicians were telling us it would take 12 months. There was little or no consultation with prison nurses either at Kirkconnell or Grafton correctional centres by Corrective Services bureaucrats. One has to ask if they followed correct procedures and if they were transparent?

The local member for Bathurst told his community that the Kirkconnell Correctional Centre was safe and was not closing; it closed. Bad luck, move on, there was nothing he was going to do about it. Over 70 jobs were lost and \$5 million was taken out of the local small business communities of Lithgow and Bathurst. After seeing my fellow nursing colleagues walking around the clinic in a state of shock I felt disgusted and angry. As Assistant State Secretary of the DLP, I contacted our State executive team and got our party's endorsement to support prison officers and local communities affected. We rallied the local Lithgow and Bathurst communities. We put out press releases condemning this abuse of power. We attended rallies against the closure in Sydney. I took up a petition and presented it to the New South Wales Parliament, placed advertisements on local radio and newspapers and had a number of television news interviews.

The DLP policy is that there should never be any essential public service privatised or closed down—prisons, power, water, emergency services—never. We have seen what happens when the major parties try—the current electricity disaster. When I heard that Grafton had suffered the same fate I said, "Enough is enough". Again I was on the phone to our DLP team. It is a disgrace that Grafton lost over 100 jobs and millions of dollars from its local economy in closing down the jail. I jumped into my car and travelled from Lithgow to try and help. Unfortunately, some options that Grafton officers were given were to travel five hours to Cessnock for a shift or relocate. The DLP placed an advertisement in the local *Daily Examiner* and there were a number of interviews on the local Grafton radio 2GF. We also ran radio advertisements on Bathurst radio and in the *Lithgow Mercury* about the Grafton jail issue.

The DLP did what it could. We are a small party that is trying to make a difference and to get people an alternative but we cannot do it alone. Our current political system is broken and needs urgent repair. We need bureaucrats and politicians to tell the truth and to stop lying to us. I believe Corrective Services senior bureaucrats have failed in their statutory duty in the following areas: they have failed to provide a rural impact statement on all the closures they did in rural areas; they possibly breached workplace agreements concerning the Corrective Services teachers union especially in Grafton because they failed to consult; they failed to consult with major stakeholders, and various unions, nurses, business and community representatives submissions also highlight the fact that they raised serious concerns about Corrective Services and so-called consultation; and there is also some evidence to suggest that Corrective Services did willingly and knowingly set out to hide, misrepresent issues and distort the truth to convince the public that these closures were necessary and could not be reviewed.

My personal experience with senior Corrective Services management as a nurse, with over nine and a half years of faithful service to the community, over the smoking in jails issue at Lithgow is a culture of lying, providing misinformation and cover-ups. After a great deal of research I personally obtained external consultant reports via the Public Information Act on its staff and inmates exposure to second-hand smoke in New South Wales jails from 2004 to 2009. This information was suppressed by the Department of Corrective Services. Why? Because they have allowed officers, nurses and inmates to be poisoned year after year by high levels of carcinogenic second-hand smoke and ignored WHS laws—they do not care. They also stated that the Woodford riot up in Queensland in 1997 was caused by the withdrawal of tobacco products to inmates, which was a lie.

The recommendations are that the Committee refer any serious allegation of corrupt conduct, maladministration or criminal negligence to the Independent Commission Against Corruption; hold a public inquiry at Bathurst or Lithgow to allow officers and the community affected by the closure of Kirkconnell to be able to speak and be heard; and recommend that the Government reverse the decision to close Grafton and Kirkconnell and consider closing down one or two of the old jails at Long Bay and sell the land off instead. I also have some documents I would like to table to the Committee regarding second-hand smoke. It comes down to the fact of credibility of the Department Of Corrective Services senior bureaucrats. Thank you very much.

Documents tabled.

MRS JUDY RICHARDSON: If I fall in a heap it is because I have Parkinson's.

CHAIR: Would you like a chair?

MRS JUDY RICHARDSON: Yes, I would. Thank you very much. My name is Gillian Richardson but really people call me Judy. Thank you for giving me the time this afternoon. I am from the Country Women's Association. I represent the Grafton branch of the CWA and south Grafton. We are bound by our Articles to look after women and children. It was terrible what was happening and how distressed they were. I think that people have covered the area well but I would say to you that it was a lack of communication. When things had really gone their length it meant that those barricading the jails were on one side and it was, dare I say, like schoolchildren—they had one side of the playground and then the others came out at night and they wanted the other side. I suppose the officers were doing what they were told under the law but they were acting like schoolchildren. The whole thing fell apart and it made the community really look like a laughing stock. What happened is a tragedy.

We know nobody likes change. The only human being that welcomes change is a wet baby. No-one else welcomes change. We have to see that people do not welcome change. It has to be done in a better way. I ask you today—I have come especially to say—please see that they look at it from the beginning and they do it properly so that we at least are given something justified. I would say to you, particularly in relation to indigenous people, it really is a worry. If you are going to say, do I know? Yes, my eldest two sons are indigenous and came to live with me as little boys. So yes, I do know a lot about it. I also visited her Majesty's holiday camp at Long Bay and so I know about that too.

To say that I understand about children, my husband and I have 11 children, which means that we have had our share of worry with children as things happen and of course, whether they are going to be incarcerated for a time. All these things should be done in a proper manner. All right, people have to pay their service, the time that they have been found at court owing to their country, but it has to be done in a humane and caring manner. It must not be done the way it was done. And when the decision came down to nasty remarks and people took offence and then the other side of the community also took offence and so there was the name calling and friendships which had been there for years were ruined, that is very sad. We give you people the chance to run our country. The community should remember at all times that under our law we have guaranteed to take care of these people when they are incarcerated. That is our job, because they have not taken care of society themselves. But we should not have people threatening people or people mentioning these things happen. It must be done in a proper manner.

The ladies of the CWA were most concerned because it means that women and children suffer. When family life breaks down, the husbands run away and the wife is left with the children. Marriage is not easy at the best of times, is it? It is all the things you do not write down that make marriage so difficult. I think it is the same for these people and then you add to it all the worry and strain of what this brings to their lives. I ask that you consider that when you do it. Again, to the indigenous people, we ask that you consider where they come from before you send them on to another address. Just because their skin is brown does not mean to say they love each other any less than we as white people love each other.

If you could take into account all of those issues, we of the CWA would be most grateful to you. Whilst, in an ideal world, we would ask you not to make a change, we know the world is not ideal, so we ask you now to think about it and to make what changes are necessary so that this time it will be done in a better manner and that these people will feel they have been heard. Thank you. In the words of Kipling: "Of all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these: 'It might have been!'".

Mr GARY SMITH: Good afternoon, my name is Gary Smith. I have lived and worked in Grafton all my life. I have been made redundant at this time. Whenever Grafton is mentioned, people usually associate the town with the Jacaranda Festival, our big Bendy Bridge and the Grafton jail. The reason behind the downsizing of the centre is still a mystery to most people. Many questions have remained unanswered. The age of the buildings was commonly used as one of the reasons for the decision. Admittedly, one older wing was past its use-by date but the rest of the complex was fully functional and built in the last 20 or 30 years.

Cost for maintenance was also cited as a problem. The figures quoted by the Government were much higher than the figures supplied by the officer who was in charge of maintenance at the Grafton centre and who

had seen all costs involved. Did anyone compare the figures? Can they be made public to clear up this discrepancy? What is the total cost of downsizing and reconstruction of the centre? Will these figures be made public? It has been put forward to me that the costs involved could have kept the centre running for another five to 10 years.

My position at the jail was working in the print shop as part of the Corrective Services Industries [CSI] staff. CSI is a department that works towards teaching work skills and readying inmates for return to a work environment. Grafton will no longer be part of this vital step towards rehabilitation for inmates. The industry section included food services, laundry, textiles, ground and building maintenance and a print shop, altogether employing 17 officers to train 135 inmates per day. We received the devastating news of changes to the centre on 29 June. We were told it was virtually an overnight decision, advised to move or leave, and given two weeks notice. It was shocking to be notified later that this was not an overnight decision. A copy of a memorandum from the Commissioner at the time, Mr Ron Woodham, was widely distributed during the fight to save our jail. In this memorandum, Mr Woodham apologised and clearly stated that the decision to downsize was actually made in 2011. It is a sad story for those who had been employed and/or made financial commitments after that date.

You would think that decisions affecting inmates, employees, contractors and the economic stability of an entire town and the surrounding area would have been made with careful consideration and consultation. I see no evidence that this was done with any thought for the well-being of our community. Was one of the main reasons for the dramatic downsizing of Grafton jail purely political? Many millions of dollars have been spent on Cessnock jail recently which perhaps relied upon trained staff and inmates from Grafton being moved there. The unopened buildings at Cessnock have been reported at costing \$250 million. What reason can there be for such big spending on one centre and for massive cutbacks to our own jail? The print shop at Grafton jail, where I was employed, closed on 29 June. This department was not only meeting budget but it was beating budget every year. It was operated by two officers and employed 30 inmates, and also supplied cost-effective supplies to other New South Wales jails. The newly built Cessnock print facility opened four months late and has been trying to operate with two officers and three inmates.

I have never seen the Grafton and surrounding areas community react and take action like they did for the fight to save Grafton jail. It goes to show how far this will impact the whole region. I am very unlikely to ever get my job back at Grafton but I will gain some measure of satisfaction if the Committee here today does find that the downsizing of our jail was not conducted following proper measures and may have been not necessary at all. I hope any wrongdoings are revealed and the true agenda made public. This Committee is tasked with holding those persons accountable for the impact their decisions have had on us workers and the community as a whole. I thank you for your time.

Mr CRAIG HOWE: I am the Deputy Mayor of the Clarence Valley. With my wife, I am a small business owner who was directly affected by the closure of the jail. I am also a high school teacher at Grafton High School. I would like to bring two perspectives before you today, the first, as a small business owner. Our business is a cafe situated at the hospital in Arthur Street, directly across from the jail. Our shop prepared and delivered lunch orders for visitors and inmates on a Saturday and Sunday. The business was affected when the females were moved out of the jail, very quietly. Then, when the jail was closed or downsized, basically overnight we lost most of our weekend trade.

This resulted in one casual staff member losing their weekend shifts and our milko, bread and pie suppliers also losing trade, as we were no longer ordering anywhere near the same quantity from them for our weekend trade. Because this closure happened so rapidly, there was no opportunity for us to make contingency plans for the loss of trade—trade which we obviously may never get back. It was very disappointing that no impact study was done prior to this stealth-in-the-darkness-of-night closure. At no point were we consulted as to the impact or even warned of this closure.

The second perspective I bring is that of a year adviser for the 2012 Year 12 class at Grafton High School. This sudden closure and the corresponding ripping apart of people's lives obviously had a negative effect on the students who were at the same time trying to study for their Higher School Certificate exam, an already stressful time. Add to that their not knowing whether their father, in one case or both parents in another, were going to be living in Grafton or, in fact, if they would have a job. Being unable to help in any way added significant stress levels at a time when they did not need that extra pressure. One student's father was told on one day that he could stay until after the exams and on the next day was told that he had to move immediately.

Imagine the effect this had on the mental state of this young person during one of the most stressful times in their schooling.

Again, if this closure was not carried out in such an underhand and stealthy way, with adequate planning a lot of this stress may have been mitigated. It is disgraceful that absolutely no consideration was given by those who made this decision and those meant to be representing us, to the economic and emotional human impact this decision would have on our community.

Mr PAUL MCNAMARA: My name is Paul McNamara. I was employed at Grafton Correctional Centre as a teacher. I would like to address two points in the terms of reference of this inquiry: the first, being consultation; the other, being the impact of the closure on staff and families. On 29 June I was in a classroom with seven extremely agitated inmates who were concerned about the situation at Grafton and who sought advice from me on how soon they would be moved out and to where. I told them that there were always rumours of jail closures but that nothing was official. They informed me that the news of the closure and job losses was the front page story of the newspaper that day. I had not yet seen the newspaper. I was not told of the closure or of the fact that I had lost my job until the following day at the staff meeting. That is the extent of any consultation I was involved in. Both the Press and the inmates knew of the decision before I did.

Many believe the decision to close the jail was a means to get rid of a few bad eggs. I saw firsthand that Grafton could have functioned better, but that is true of any workplace. In order to remove a cancer, the Government decided to kill the patient. Not six months prior to the closure, management was congratulating the education staff at the jail about the historically high completion rate in courses. Unfortunately, in jail closures whether you do a good job or not is of no consequence—everyone loses their job. I am not seeking to blame anyone or anything. The Government has its advisers and I am sure they will provide the inquiry with their reasoning. Some blame the local member as a member of the Government and of the National Party. Perhaps he could have done more, I do not know, that is not for me to say but I have found him to be helpful, considerate and available.

While it is true Corrective Services offered me a transfer or a payout, I declined both and in the months since the announcement I have had to eke out every bit of information I required to seek redeployment as a teacher in the Clarence Valley. This process has been overly complicated and very frustrating. As an individual, you often feel small and insignificant, up against the large, unfeeling machinery of bureaucracy. This experience has been traumatic for me, my family and my extended family. I thank them for their support and strength. I also want to acknowledge the tremendous support and advice I have received from the NSW Teachers Federation. I have seen colleagues with less transferable skills than me take the redundancy payments and stay here to embark upon uncertain futures and I wish them well.

I have also seen colleagues and friends and their families pack up and leave—good people with skills who have multiple connections to the community and who were positively contributing to it. They have now left the Clarence Valley and that is the real tragedy here. Both my wife and I are professionals who relocated to the country from the city. We too were effectively being asked to remove our skills from the community. Politicians talk about the "Clever Country" but I do not know what is clever about removing skilled and employable citizens from an already stressed socio-economic region. Thank you for your time.

Mrs CAROL ORDISH: Good afternoon, Chair, Select Committee members, ladies and gentlemen behind me, I am actually just a member of the community of Grafton. Now the speed and the process used to close the Grafton jail lacked responsible management and had taken a dictatorial approach. No-one was given the opportunity to make suggestions as to how this could be done without impacting commercially and on the community as a whole until now.

As to the economic reasons for jail closure, it has been stated that the Grafton Correctional Centre is more expensive than the Cessnock Correctional Centre to run. This cannot be used as an excuse. We will always have correctional centres. However, for over 120 years the Grafton Correctional Centre has been intrinsically woven into the fabric of business and community here. The closure of the Grafton Correctional Centre and subsequent downgrade, causing the loss of approximately 100 jobs, has sent shock waves throughout the Clarence Valley. This is particularly significant as 300-plus jobs were already lost in the previous 18 months with the closure of Telstra and the abattoir.

The Clarence Valley has a population of roughly one-hundredth of Sydney's population. Over 400 jobs have been lost in the Clarence Valley, equating to probably about 36,000 jobs in Sydney. Unfortunately, a

domino effect is quickly seen in a smaller community and the Grafton Correctional Centre staff cutbacks resulted in lost jobs, people moving away for work, families leaving the district or separating to find work due to financial difficulties or to be close to their incarcerated loved ones, children taken out of schools and teachers and community assistance services being cut back. There is now fewer people so more businesses fail and more jobs are lost.

A rural impact statement is a necessity. Rural areas suffer more because people are more scattered and support structures are not as strong as the highly populated cities. Obviously this has not been taken into account. As to mental health, growth in mental health care services is extremely important here so that those working in prisons and those incarcerated have access to consultation. It is especially important for those in prison with disabilities. This has been lacking. This area needs much more recognition within Corrective Services. Staff working in prisons also need to have a more positive social climate that lowers the level of stress so that their working environment is not so difficult. There is extra pressure on Indigenous families as incarcerated members are moved away from their country, which is stressful for all family members. This requires thorough investigation for the incarcerated Indigenous community members. Prisons are not meant to destroy lives and cultivate a hopeless situation for inmates but to restore lives. Thank you.

Mr PETER ELLEM: Firstly, I would like to thank the New South Wales Legislative Council for holding this inquiry at the urging of one of your members, Mick Veitch, MLC, and for coming to the city of Grafton today to get an on-the-ground appreciation of just how important an institution Grafton jail has been to the local economy and social fabric of the Clarence Valley. A little over a year ago I was fighting a by-election as the Country Labor candidate for Clarence and one of my campaign issues was to warn of the possible privatisation or closure of Grafton jail.

My submission to this inquiry, written on behalf of Country Labor's Grafton and Lower Clarence branches, outlines how this was not hot air; we ended up with an effective closure, forced through without consultation. This inquiry hopefully will put the downsizing of Grafton jail into some statewide context and give Graftonians some answers to their questions about why this most political of decisions was made. The people never accepted this decision and instinctively rallied to protest against it, in a way seldom witnessed in such a traditionally conservative rural area.

I, today, pay tribute to the real heroes of the six-day picket outside the gates of the jail; those folk of all ages and backgrounds, who came out of their homes and camped out to defy the powers that be and to keep a vigil over their jail. This decision came from Sydney. Corrective Services senior management had wanted to break up the culture of Grafton jail—whatever that meant—and this was a convenient fit with the Liberals ideological slashing of State public sector jobs. What would Grafton-born Sir Earle Christmas Grafton Page—founder of the old Country Party and Australia's eleventh Prime Minister—have thought of the National Party's weak capitulation to the Sydney Liberals' agenda?

Sir Earle was a conviction politician; he championed the New State movement and was wary of the "Sydney octopus". The Page family had been active in calls for a New State for many years. He argued that metropolitan interests had stunted northern growth. The New State movement in the end did not prevail but its spirit lives on from time to time, as it did in the people's picket line. The State member for Clarence's evidence to this inquiry in Sydney and his recent comments to the *Daily Examiner* are unconvincing and smack of revisionism. Regardless of when the member of Parliament was told of the plan to axe X number of local jobs, he should have instinctively known that the right thing to do was to fight for those jobs. Instead, he was quite prepared to sell out Grafton. It should be remembered that when this fellow was Mayor of Maclean Shire Council he denigrated Grafton City Council when it suited his political campaign against council amalgamation. And what can we make of the State member for Clarence's quote to the *Daily Examiner* in recent weeks:

I was in the middle of an accident. It was an exceptional set of circumstances and everyone was on holidays, including the Premier.

The electorate then was looking for exceptional leadership, but it was not to be found. And the leaders of The Nationals, the party that so many of the electorate voted for in March 2011, were absent and silent as this betrayal of the bush was cravenly played out. Thank you.

Ms CHRISTINE DRAYDEN-THOMPSON: I thank the Committee for hearing our concerns. I was the psychologist at Grafton Correctional Centre for 21 years and four months prior to being made redundant, which I did not want. Initially I would like to comment on personal effects of the closure. Financially, I took a

car under salary sacrifice, as did others when Mr Woodham said he knew at the time they were closing but did not tell us so financially it was very difficult for us and others and people who bought houses.

Although I was offered employment at other jails, I was unable to transfer and Kempsey is a 3½ hour drive—not a possible commute. My husband has employment in Grafton, both my parents and my mother-in-law live here and they rely on us considerably. My son is in year 12 this year. Many of the staff, like myself, are second, third or even fourth generation, as opposed to what was said that none of us live in the area. My grandfather was delivered by Sir Earle Page. My son just completed year 12 exams, however since June has had to live with all the stress and anxiety within his own family and with his friends. The fact that my son called his music composition for the Higher School Certificate "Prison Requiem" gives you some idea of the impact that it has had on some of these young people.

Although we were given the excuse the closure was because Cessnock had to open, that is a bit of a furphy. Being forced to take the redundancy was a great sadness for me, as I can no longer work in a correctional facility, where my skills and experience of over 21 years would be of the greatest benefit. Another concern is that what was once a very well run correctional centre is no longer. If current staff were not afraid to talk they would tell you of the many current problems in the transitional centre. Inmates have been moved to other jails prior to being classified and at risk or protection people placed in general discipline. The whole closure was done with no planning and this is evident in the lack of procedure and direction in the current system.

Many staff noted the decline over the last six years and they have remarked that the morale in the jail has plummeted over this time. Prior to that, it was a well run jail. Inmates could access educational and personal development programs. Some said that this mismanagement was being done on purpose to effect closure. With regard to the decline in personal development courses, there is evidence that drug and alcohol workers continually requested to run programs but were refused. If inmates complained they were transferred to other centres so they no longer complained about lack of services, particularly Koori inmates as they did not want to be moved out of country. As the psychologist I was told not to continue with a mindfulness program, which had been really effective.

I observed a senior education officer harassed with spurious allegations until she finally retired. Under her management there were no complaints about educational or vocational courses, and custodial officers have commented that the teachers were always busy. Not so over the last couple of years. It was suggested that the education service was run down on purpose. An example regarding the custodial officers concerned their worry that rules were being disregarded for inmates with powerful or connected family. When they made protected disclosures to the Independent Commission Against Corruption, they were later told by department staff at a full staff meeting that "there is no such thing as protected disclosure". Staff were ignored by senior management when we complained, saying we were the troublemakers. We have been continually threatened that "they will close the gaol if you complain".

In the instance of the inquiry into the death in custody of inmate Klum, the court recently found that the allegations made by management against officers had been false. It is interesting that when our complaints are heard by an independent body, we are validated. Over the last 21 years that I have worked here, for the first 15 there were about six deaths in custody; there have been about the same number in the last six years. When non-custodial staff lodged a grievance with the department about their treatment by management, which included serious issues of discrimination, we were told that their investigation found that it was us doing the bullying. We were told the outcome by Luke Grant at a full staff meeting, even though the grievance process is supposed to be confidential. He also stated that the investigation cost the department \$60,000. Some of the claims of bullying and harassment, when dealt with on an individual basis by the WorkCover process, were found by those independent arbiters to be valid and were accepted.

However, the department disregarded this and their investigation found that it was us who were doing the bullying. Interestingly, though, we received no reprimand, caution or any punishment, thus ensuring that we would not appeal the decision with an independent arbiter. I would just like to remind the Committee of the reaction of the people on the picket line. They were not the actions of people who were bullies, as we have been labelled. There were staff and inmates' families, businesspeople and politicians. They all came together to support the institution. As the trucks were being driven out of the jail, the inmates banged and yelled but the people, bullies that they are, turned their backs and quietly cried. Thank you.

MR JOHN HEFFERNAN: My name is John Heffernan. By way of background I was employed by the New South Wales Department of Corrective Services for 30 years, commencing in 1975. At the end of my retirement in 2000, I held the rank of superintendent and I had occupied the position of Governor of Grafton Correctional Centre for approximately three years. In an effort to combat the negative publicity generated at the time of the announcement to downsize the Grafton Correctional Centre, the then deputy commissioner invited the media into the new section at Cessnock. He then took the media on a tour of One Wing at Grafton.

At the time the deputy commissioner highlighted the differences between the two centres and made reference to the poor conditions at Grafton. This was a deceptive and completely misleading propaganda exercise. Had he invited the media into the minimum security section of Grafton, which he closed down completely, it would have painted a far different picture. Taken in isolation I concede that this is not a major event; however, when combined with the other propaganda being circulated at the time—alleged inefficiencies, the age of the centre et cetera—it further compounds the lack of integrity and the misinformation that was circulated at that time.

I believe the Committee visited the centre this morning. Consequently, the Committee has no doubt seen the number one accommodation wing. There is no denying it is old and totally outmoded by today's standards of prison accommodation. In simple terms what should have happened was that One Wing should have been shut down, refurbished and then reopened. Such a move would have caused the least disruption to staff and virtually had no impact on the local community. Instead, because of one accommodation unit that housed approximately 80 inmates we threw the baby out with the bathwater and in effect closed the centre.

I read with interest the report of the Committee's first meeting, which was conducted on 23 November 2012. I note that there was extensive questioning of the department in relation to the lack of involvement of the local member on departmental community consultative committees. The departmental response appeared to indicate that such involvement was certainly not discouraged and, if anything, welcomed. In my experience I find such an assertion difficult to accept. To explain I give the following as an example. In the year 2000, when I was Governor of Tamworth Correctional Centre, I approached the then local member, Tony Windsor, to determine if he would consider becoming a member of the community consultative committee. Mr Windsor appeared interested in the proposition; however, when I discussed the matter with the then regional commander, later to become deputy commissioner, I was told categorically, "That won't be happening." During further discussions I was left in no doubt that the regional commander was sensitive to the fact that the local MP was not a member of the government at that time.

It has been alleged that a culture existed within the Grafton Correctional Centre which resulted in high levels of sick leave and workers compensation. Did such a culture exist at Grafton? I am not going to stand here in front of you today and deny that such a culture existed; however, it had nothing to do with either the age of the centre or the architecture of the centre, as has been suggested. Indeed, the culture that existed within Grafton was no different to the culture that I witnessed in every correctional centre that I worked in and managed over my 30-year career.

Being a correctional officer is a stressful and dangerous occupation. Every maximum and medium security jail throughout the State experiences attendance problems and, as a consequence, high levels of overtime. There is no denying that Grafton was probably in the high-end bracket when it comes to absenteeism; however, high level correctional officer absenteeism is not a problem unique to Grafton, nor the New South Wales correctional system for that matter. Research indicates that an elevated level of staff absenteeism is a worldwide problem for those who work face-to-face with prisoners. In my opinion the Grafton so-called culture was just another part of the propaganda campaign circulated at the time to justify the partial closure.

Finally, may I say that during my 30 years of service with the New South Wales Department of Correctional Services I witnessed occasions where the department created a set of circumstances to ensure a particular outcome—if members of the Committee would like me to supply examples of that assertion I would be more than happy to do so. Having said that, I feel the partial closure of Grafton Correctional Centre is simply another example of such tactics. I believe that without due regard for the staff who worked within the centre or the local community, the department made a decision to sacrifice Grafton. Then, without any regard for the impact that such a decision would have on the local community and without any consideration of the historical significance that the jail holds within that community, the Government endorsed that decision. I can only hope that the Government now comes to realise that it has made a decision based on distorted facts and flawed information and as a consequence now reverses that decision. Thank you.

MR JOHN PULLINGER: A bit of background. In the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s I had a hardware shop here in Grafton that supplied the jail—the bits that the jail wanted and also for the things that the inmates wanted to buy. The prison officers used to come to the shop and buy the stuff and then head on their way. They said in 1979 that it was all ending and they would no longer be buying—their role had changed. That meant a fair bit to me because they were a good customer to me and to an awful lot of other shopkeepers in town. So I did the rounds and then put a proposal to the then Governor that I would take over the supply of goods. I would interview the crims on Tuesdays, buy the stuff on Wednesdays and deliver it on Thursdays at no cost to the department and no staff involved. It would all be at my expense and I would charge the inmates a 5 per cent delivery fee. That was how it worked, and up until June this year that is what happened. There were a few breaks in between—I changed careers and came back and did that—but it was a hobby business for me actually. That was what it was.

To get the thing in place I was interviewed by at least 12 different people from the Department of Corrective Services over a three to four-month period, and then I was given a trial period. Interestingly, in June 2012 it was still a trial period without a contract. The department had a thing about things like television set sizes—34 centimetres was the size. Unfortunately, when the flat screens came in they were 35 centimetres in diameter on the diagonal. So I just said, "Are we right to supply these because they are the only ones available?" It took six months to get an approval through head office. In fact, every time I approached head office or I asked anybody to approach head office on my behalf no matter how basic the question it usually took three to six months to get an answer, and it was usually not a very decisive answer either. The department has not been renowned in my books for prompt decision-making.

That history of slow decision-making or non-decision-making makes me beg the question: How did they get about this detailed planning to close the joint so effectively, with the strategies lining up and the contingency plans and one thing after another, in such a short time? Reportedly there was a very, very short time. The local member did not know about it until, what, two days before hand. The Deputy Premier claims he did not know about it. So how did they go about getting all this planning together including the logistics, the riot squad and all those things? To me it sounds like it was a long-term plan. Someone just mentioned today—I had not heard this before—that it goes back to 2011 that they were talking about it. But why and why was it not made public? Why were people not consulted? Was there a benefit or an outcome desired by someone in the department perhaps? What did senior management have?

I obviously came into contact with some of these blokes here that were prison officers and they were less than impressed with the ex-commissioner. There was always talk that if he wanted anything and they did not agree with it then he was going to close the joint down. It was fair to say that they were rather looking forward to a new commissioner, someone they could work with in a more positive fashion. Was it purely coincidental that at the same time that he was finishing up the decision to close the place was activated as a final gesture? I do not know. I have never met the man. I have never been asked to do anything by him or in his name but I did find the timing pretty strange. I think the Committee should be looking at that timing and the coincidence of it.

The closure of the jail ended the business, it was finished. I am 69 and there are not a lot of people queuing up to offer me work. So it is all over, Red Rover for me. But my purchases on behalf the inmates were over \$100,000 per year and for my colleague who did the groceries and foodstuffs it was closer to \$400,000 per year. He is also redundant now; he is an involuntary retiree. The department also undertook to take back the surplus stock—stock that you would not normally sell but which we had to buy-in especially for the jail. They said they would take it all at cost, and that was fine, but they refused to give an order number. Anything you supply to the Department of Corrective Services without an order number will not be paid for, so there is a problem there. I have not been back to the jail since the closure but I am told that the usually spotless newer areas are deteriorating rapidly as people who do not have an interest in them are staying there overnight—why should they clean them up?

The work that was done round place by inmates is no longer being done, although I did notice a flurry of activity in the last couple of days before the Committee arrived to freshen the place up. Perhaps the Committee could come back on a more regular basis. Great emphasis has been placed on the loss of the prison officers' jobs and rightly so, but there are lots of other people such as ancillary staff. In fact, a hell of a lot of people worked up there as casuals. Someone said they had been a casual for 13 years—working a full week every week but casual. Whoever instigated the closure needs to have their motives vigorously scrutinised, that is the role of the Committee, and the reopening of the joint is the Committee's challenge. Thank you.

CHAIR: That concludes the public forum. I thank you all for being here today. The Committee realises that this is your life and the pulse in your community. I hope the conclusion of the inquiry will be reflective of some of the hopes and feedback that the Committee has received. On behalf of the Committee I wish you all the best for Christmas.

(Public forum concluded)

(The Committee adjourned at 4.26 p.m.)
