

YOUTH DETENTION — UNIT 18, CASUARINA PRISON

798. Ms L. METTAM to the Minister for Corrective Services:

I refer to the minister's admission that unit 18 is not fit for purpose and his quotes in an ABC article that it is "not yet what I want it to be" and "There's a small cohort for whom we don't currently have infrastructure that's suitable". Given that the government ignored repeated warnings that the children incarcerated in unit 18 experience intolerable levels of distress and that the death of Cleveland Dodd was entirely preventable, will he move to immediately close this facility?

Mr P. PAPALIA replied:

With regard to warnings, member, I will refer to one that came from the Liberal Party spokesperson. In a 1 January article on ABC online news—the interview was also played on the television news, I believe—the relevant spokesperson said —

"We have seen a litany of issues at Banksia Hill Detention Centre which shows that that facility is simply not working," ...

The opposition wants us to shut unit 18 and return its detainees to Banksia Hill Detention Centre. The question is: which set of advice from the Leader of the Liberal Party should I be taking—shutting unit 18 today or shutting Banksia Hill, as was called for in January? We confront a situation that we inherited in many respects. Again, referencing advice, I was there in 2012 when the former Liberal–National government shut Rangeview Remand Centre. I was there. Google it; I had something to say about it. I suggested to the government at the time that it may regret doing that and that we would see a deterioration in the one remaining detention facility, and I was right. We are confronted with a situation now in which over the last decade or so, there has been a significant shift in one cohort of detainees. It is a relatively small cohort. Today, it is about 10. It is not 10 in unit 18. Meanwhile, there are about 66 other detainees in Banksia Hill. That small cohort of around 10 is extremely challenging. They are challenging, complex and frequently very, very dangerous. They would disrupt everybody else if they were in Banksia Hill. They would be a threat to themselves, other juvenile detainees and staff. In the 12 months to June this year, there were 459 assaults on staff in juvenile detention facilities. That is not acceptable.

The Premier and I announced a range of measures in June in our response to juvenile detention. Firstly, we have conducted a review into juvenile infrastructure. We have announced the intent to bring on more staff, including prison officers, in the near term to provide additional safety. We have engaged with an Aboriginal health provider to enhance even further health provision inside the facility. We are talking to Derbarl Yerrigan Health Service about that. We are talking to Telethon Kids Institute about getting it back into the detention estate to assist and renew its research. We are very much focused on having it provide us with tailored solutions for individuals. We are creating an Aboriginal mentor scheme of elders and younger people to mentor staff and juveniles. Also, we announced a very focused policy with respect to moving juveniles between unit 18, which is more secure and an Australian standard maximum security men's unit inside Casuarina Prison, and Banksia Hill. We have said that we will refrain from shuttling detainees backwards and forwards. There is still a process by which they can move back if they are assessed by a multidisciplinary team, but for their safety and the safety of everybody else, it is necessary that they have a suitable facility. That is all we have got. After the May riots, during which one-quarter of the buildings were burnt down, there is no alternative. If we move them back into the population at Banksia Hill, it would be disruptive and dangerous for other juveniles and staff.