

PRISONER TREATMENT PROGRAMS

98. Mr J.M. FRANCIS to the Minister for Corrective Services:

I understand that the Liberal–National government has invested heavily in building new prisons, with a \$655 million capital works program to address the chronic underfunding of prisons by the previous government. Can the minister inform the house of the dramatic improvement in the delivery of treatment programs designed to reduce the likelihood of prisoners reoffending once they are released from prison?

Mr D.T. REDMAN replied:

I thank the member for Jandakot for the question. He has an ongoing interest in these matters because there is a prison in his electorate. Clearly the member wants to understand the challenges that we face and the very good work that the Liberal–National government is doing in this space. There is no doubt that the prison population is rising, and the Liberal–National government makes no apologies for being tough on crime. There is an expectation from the community that we will be tough and it is an expectation that this government is delivering on. The significant capital investment we are putting into prisons is our strategy to respond to the issues of prison infrastructure in Western Australia. The \$665 million program is a significant program.

Mr D.A. Templeman interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Mandurah, if you are going to practice ventriloquism in this place, I suggest you rehearse it outside before you come in here. I formally call you for the second time today.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: Once that program is fully delivered, there will be an extra 2 500 beds in our prison system. The point I want to make in response to the question is that we are not simply putting in prisoners and warehousing them. It is not as simple as that. We have an equal focus on investing in programs in prisons. I think it is a really important point to note that in 2007–08, during the last year of the previous government, 869 prisoners were participating in intensive programs, including programs for addictions, sexual offending, violent offending and cognitive skills. The strong focus by this government has meant that in the first quarter of this financial year, 599 prisoners took part in such programs. That is nearly 600 in just three months compared with 869 for the whole final year of the program of the last Labor government. Our target is to have an extra 2 500 programs within our prison system. We are focusing on putting the effort into our prison system to ensure that when the prisoners get out, they will have every chance of making a positive contribution to society and hopefully will not make their way back into the prison system. We also have seen the significant amount of unmet demand in prison programs go down by putting in place programs in prisons right across Western Australia. Last year the Department of Corrective Services implemented a new model for program delivery that was rolled out across the state. Eight service delivery teams across WA managed programs in prisons and in the community, according to the local needs. I also highlight that the department is improving the delivery of Aboriginal-specific programs in prisons. We all know that the Indigenous community is grossly over-represented in our prison system and therefore it is very appropriate that we target programs to respond to that. For example, there was a trial of an Indigenous sex offending program at Greenough Regional Prison last year. All those things help us to target what we need to do in prisons by providing programs to ensure that once prisoners get out of the prison system, we make every effort to keep them out of prison and help them make a contribution to society. Although the Liberal–National government has a tough focus on crime, which we make no apology for, we do not simply warehouse prisoners. We ensure every effort is put into programs in the prison system. The numbers speak for themselves. It far outweighs what happened in the last year of the former government. At least we can stand on our record in the prison system, which the last government never ever did.