

PRISON MUSTER — PRISONER ASSAULTS AND SEXUAL ASSAULTS

854. Mr P. PAPALIA to the Minister for Corrective Services:

I refer to the exponential growth of the prison muster that the minister has overseen, and the consequent move to accept double-bunking as the norm, housing as many as eight prisoners in one cell. What measures are being taken to ensure no escalation in the prevalence of assault and sexual assault amongst prisoners?

Mr C.C. PORTER replied:

I thank the member for his question. I begin by asking him whether he is suggesting that there is such an increase as things presently stand.

Ms M.M. Quirk: You're answering the questions.

Mr C.C. PORTER: I am asking whether there is a problem I should be addressing.

Several members interjected.

Mr C.C. PORTER: Is the member suggesting that, notwithstanding an overcrowded prison system, the government's management of the system is such that there has been an increase in assaults and sexual assaults?

Mr P. Papalia: No; that's not what I'm suggesting.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Mr P. Papalia: I am concerned because it relates to duty of care, and in light of my assumption that you are considering outsourcing management of the Eastern Goldfields Regional Prison, I am concerned about whether you have taken this into account.

Mr C.C. PORTER: We are all concerned; I am concerned about the prison system. The government is building 2 200 beds into the prison system.

Ms M.M. Quirk interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Girrawheen!

Mr C.C. PORTER: When the Labor Party went to the election, its plan for increasing the number of beds in the prison system was limited to the 100 beds for Derby. The Labor Party's concern translates into 100 beds; our concern translates into 2 200 beds. With regard to the situation in which we currently find ourselves, the Inspector of Custodial Services recently released a very interesting report on the inspection of Wooroloo Prison Farm. There are some positives and negatives in that report. He said that the system had become increasingly overcrowded and gridlocked during 2009, but that much of the increase in numbers was entirely foreseeable and should have been planned for and funded by governments dating back many years. He said that the recent parole changes had exacerbated the problem, but did not create the problem. When we got into government, we went to the cupboard that was labelled "plans for increasing prison population", opened it up and found a 100-bed plan in there. We have managed in a very short time to plan for 2 200 beds, which will alleviate the short-term and medium-term problems we are currently experiencing. I share the member's concerns. If he wants to give me any kind of evidence that we are not properly running the prison system, notwithstanding the difficult circumstances that were left to us —

Mr E.S. Ripper: You haven't got an answer. Answer the question?

Mr C.C. PORTER: I advise the Leader of the Opposition that there is no question. Am I concerned? Yes, I am. Do members opposite want to show me a specific problem —

Mr E.S. Ripper: Have the number of assaults and sexual assaults increased? That is the question. Answer it.

Mr C.C. PORTER: Is the member suggesting that with respect to overcrowding the level of assaults and sexual assaults is higher now than it was under their government? Is that what they are suggesting.

Mr P. Papalia: You tell me.

Mr C.C. PORTER: What we are doing is planning for a prison population, which is something that the previous government was unwilling or unable to do.