

ALBANY REGIONAL PRISON — INSPECTOR OF CUSTODIAL SERVICES REPORT

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

Thank you, Mr Speaker —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Mandurah, I formally call you to order for the second time today. Sometimes you might want to look in another direction, member for Mandurah. Member for West Swan, I formally call you to order for the first time today. Member for Pilbara, I formally call you to order for the second time today.

Mr T.G. Stephens: Thank you.

The SPEAKER: I do not need to be thanked, member for Pilbara. I do not need to be thanked in this place at all.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: Yesterday, the Inspector of Custodial Services released a report on the operations of Albany Regional Prison. Can the minister please outline to the house the inspector's findings and what measures are being taken to respond to the inspector's report?

Mr M.J. COWPER replied:

To the people of Western Australia and the people in the chamber here, let it be known that the Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services' latest report into Albany prison states that it is the state's best performing prison. The inspector noted that Albany prison has an excellent track record in terms of security and safety. It provides a positive environment. The inspector also noted that the prisoners are settled and have positive and appropriate social relationships with staff.

When I was in Albany last week, I saw firsthand the wonderful work that is being done down there. I visited the workshop, where they work on metals. It is very encouraging to see people participating in trying to improve their lot. There is a fine woods school. For those members here who are particularly interested, they turn rough-cut timber into fantastic furniture that would be the pride of anyone's place. The work they are doing is fantastic. They are also doing great work in the community such as fixing the plaques on the local war memorial. I am sure members of this place would appreciate that. I am sure the people of Albany appreciate it, even though the member for Albany does not appreciate it. A particular point that was made by the Inspector of Custodial Services was that Albany prison has strong community links. That is evidenced by some of the very good projects that I just mentioned.

The opening of the new 128-bed centre in February of this year has provided an opportunity for much-needed refurbishment of some of the older units and the yard at the prison —

Mr P.B. Watson interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Albany, perhaps you might get to your feet and ask some of these questions. It might be a preferable way to operate in this place. I formally call you to order for the second time today.

Mr M.J. COWPER: The 128-bed centre was opened in February this year. I also spoke to the staff at that location. They said that they were very pleased with the functionality of that centre. This is the first time since the closure of the Fremantle Prison that we have been able to get ahead of the prison numbers so that we can do some refurbishment in that space. We have a total capacity of 5 136 prisoners, and as of today we have 4 936. That gives us an opportunity to have 200 additional beds across the space.

It is interesting to hear the member for Albany talk about overcrowding in our prisons. On this morning's news, I heard the shadow minister, the member for Cockburn, have a shot at his counterparts, and I would not mind putting on record that the member said that it is not really a matter of providing a solution at the state level. It is commonwealth prisoners who have been filling up our prisons. In fact, we have 108 Indonesian prisoners, 31 of whom are in Albany. The commonwealth has to provide a solution to that and help the state with housing those prisoners. We have had up to 185 Indonesian prisoners in our care. For those who do not know, these Indonesian prisoners are mostly people smugglers who are prosecuted under federal legislation. Because the federal government does not operate prisons, they are required to be housed by the people of the states. I will give members a guess about who carries the biggest burden in this matter. We had 185 prisoners in our system. If we work that out, at about \$300 a day, it comes across as a large impost on this state.

The former Attorney General the member for Bateman went in to bat for Western Australia and said that it is about time the rest of the country started sharing some of that burden. If members opposite are so concerned about the allegation of overcrowding, they could get out there and perhaps write to the minister. I want to ask a question of the member for Cockburn: has he actually written to his federal counterpart and complained about

this? I will bet he has not. As he always does, he comes in here bleating away and carrying on like a pork chop, but he does not actually go and look at the facts. The facts are that unless this state —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Mr M.J. COWPER: Let us just look at the facts.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Cockburn, I formally call you to order for the first and second times today. Member for Mandurah, you are definitely lifting the standards. I formally call you to order for the second time today. Minister, you are going to invite interjection if you refer to members by the name of their seat. I suggest that you rapidly reach a conclusion to the answer to this question.

Mr M.J. COWPER: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I think it needs to be pointed out to the house that under the previous government's regime only 300 additional beds were added to the capacity in eight years. Since the Liberal–National government came to power, 2 500 new beds have been added to the capacity. The people of Western Australia said to this government that they want their streets to be safe and they want the criminals off the streets. The police have been doing their job and the courts have been doing their job. That meant that we needed to build additional capacity—something that the previous government had no concept of.