

HAKEA PRISON — STABBING INCIDENT

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

Minister, I was dismayed and concerned to hear of the incident over the weekend at Hakea Prison in which guards were stabbed by a prisoner. I grew more concerned when I heard members opposite portray the incident as a result of this government's tough-on-crime agenda. Can the minister please update the house on the progress of this specific incident and this government's excellent prison expansion plan and clarify whether members opposite have again been caught out misleading the community?

**Mr C.C. PORTER replied:**

I thank the member for some notice of this question, which is somewhat longer than I remembered it being.

Several members interjected.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** This is a serious matter and there was a very serious incident in unit 3 at Hakea Prison, perhaps the most serious incident involving assault that has occurred in the time I have been minister. I understand a prisoner has now been charged with one-times obstructing a public officer, one-times assaulting a public officer and one-times an unlawful assault occasioning bodily harm. The first prison guard received injuries of the type of a laceration to the right elbow and a second prison guard —

**Ms M.M. Quirk:** Did they use a Taser?

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** No. A second prison guard was struck to the neck with an improvised weapon, resulting in a significant wound, which required surgery. I am sure everyone present wishes that prison officer the best in his recovery. The improvised weapon in this incident was a 26-centimetre sharpened toilet brush. Perhaps, predictably, the calls from at least one member opposite were to blame that incident on overcrowding. I would like to put to the house four facts about that claim. The first is yes, there has been growth in the prison population under this government, just as there was very steady growth in the prison population under the previous government. When we measure the growth under the previous government between 2004 and 2008, the average yearly growth was about 5.12 per cent. In the past two years, over the course of this government, the average yearly growth is about 7.5 per cent. Yes, the growth under this government is larger, but not significantly larger than occurred under the previous government. The salient difference under this government is that we have embarked on a very large building program.

I might just follow the lead of the Minister for Commerce's great success with graphs yesterday: the red line on this graph represents the capacity of our prison system —

**Mr P.C. Tinley:** Yours is laminated; that's good.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** Indeed; I have very efficient staff.

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Members!

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** The red line represents the building programs and the bed capacity and the blue line represents the growth in the prison population. Members will note there has been a very significant decrease in the past seven to nine months. The gap between operational capacity and the actual prisoner population means that we have spare beds in the system at the moment. When I first became the minister, the operational capacity could not be measured. For the first time we have the ability to undertake maintenance and other important aspects —

**Mr E.S. Ripper:** Will you table that graph?

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** Yes, I am very happy to table the graph.

The second point is that the operational capacity at Hakea is well and truly above the population at Hakea at the moment. Hakea also has excess capacity. The next point I make on this idea of a crisis of overcrowding, as the member for Warnbro —

**Mr P. Papalia** interjected.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** We add to prisons all the time. To measure the design of, say, Casuarina after two new wings were added to it is not a measure.

**Mr P. Papalia** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Thank you, members!

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** The second graph shows in green the growth of the prison population from the point in time —

**Mr E.S. Ripper:** Will you table that as well?

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** Indeed. It shows the point in time tracing back to when Labor took office in 2001. Members will note the blue trend line drawn from the time Labor took government in 2001 to when it lost the election in 2008. When we extrapolate that trend line, it can be seen that where we would have expected the growth to have been and where it is now is very close. It shows that the prison population grows in what analysts would say is a lumpy fashion. But it is steady and strong growth most closely correlated to the increase in the number of police officers under both governments. There has been growth under both governments.

The final point I make is with respect to key performance indicators, which we watch very closely. There are two KPIs for prisoners assaulted—that is, prisoner on prisoner assaults.

**Mr E.S. Ripper:** Now you seem to be arguing our policies are basically the same. Is that what you are arguing? For a while there I thought you were arguing we are all on the same track.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** I will get to the Labor policy in a moment if the Leader of the Opposition would like.

**Mr E.S. Ripper:** That'll be interesting.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** As I understand it—maybe I am being a little bit expansive—the member for Warnbro's hopeful Labor policy is to take half the money we have allocated to the future prison budget, commission a committee to work out some way that is yet undefined and spend it now. That begs the question: if that blue trend line continued, as we might expect it will do and as it has done for the past 20 years, what do we do with the extra prisoners we might reasonably expect? The policy of members opposite, as far as I can discern, which might be of interest to the member for Kalgoorlie, is not to build the eastern Goldfields regional prison, but to have a committee and hope for the best. That is not a policy. Finally, we keep very close tabs on our key performance indicators under this government. There are two benchmarks, one of which is the percentage of prisoners assaulted in prisons. Our benchmark is three per cent. From January and February until now we have been well and truly under that benchmark. The figures have been 0.75, 0.9, 0.7, 0.9, 0.44, 0.6, 0.46, 0.51 and 0.74. That is hardly chaos or a crisis. The benchmark for the number of staff assaulted in prisons is less than two per cent. Those figures as a percentage are 0.13, 0.08, 0.08, 0.1, 0.11, 0.19, 0.22, 0.30 and 0.08. Although this was a tragic incident, it needs to be kept in context. The prison system is neither overcrowded, nor is it being operated in a fashion that does anything other than meet all of our benchmarks.

**The SPEAKER:** I simply rise to note that the Attorney General has tabled two documents for the remainder of this day's sitting. Are they to be tabled permanently, Attorney General?

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** Yes.

**The SPEAKER:** They are tabled permanently.

[See papers 2862 and 2863.]