

PRISONS — OVERCROWDING

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

I refer to media reports that the Inspector of Custodial Services has likened conditions in Western Australia's gridlocked jails to the tension and stress shown in the lead-up to the serious incident at Casuarina Prison a decade ago.

- (1) In light of the inspector's concerns that tensions are rising and will be exacerbated by summer heat, what specific measures has the minister taken to protect our prison officers and other workers in the prison system?
- (2) What additional resources and staff has the minister made available to deal with the dramatic increase in the rate of growth in the prison muster that has followed the minister's appointment of the new chair of the Prisoners Review Board in April this year?

Mr C.C. PORTER replied:

- (1)-(2) I know that the member for Warnbro has been waiting for weeks to ask that question and I am very pleased to finally receive it. I am putting down my notes because it is an interesting question. We have a challenging situation in the prison system —

Mr P. Papalia: Challenging!

Mr C.C. PORTER: It is mostly challenging because the previous government did not build prisons! That left us with something of a challenge but we are dealing with that challenge. The first way we are dealing with the challenge is with the not terribly unremarkable policy of building prisons! That is what we will do: \$656 million —

Mr E.S. Ripper interjected.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition!

Mr C.C. PORTER: We have \$656 million that will put 2 200 beds into the system, which is the —

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Warnbro!

Mr C.C. PORTER: It will be the biggest expansion of the prison system in the history of the state.

Several members interjected.

Mr C.C. PORTER: Member for Armadale, that is particularly the point of view held by members opposite—that is, that building prisons is not a contribution. That is why we have the challenge.

Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan: Does it reduce crime: where is the evidence?

Mr C.C. PORTER: Recently, there was some very interesting research from New South Wales academics that said that the increased incarceration of people for property offences could decrease the number of property offences in New South Wales by between 10 000 and 14 000 a year, depending on the increase in sentence. Do prisons decrease sentencing? Of course they do.

Mr P. Papalia: Did the minister read the speech the Chief Justice made on Monday?

Mr C.C. PORTER: I think I read virtually everything that the Chief Justice puts out. I will get back to the member's original question, which was: will the building program cope with the prison numbers? Yes, it will; there is no question about that.

Mr P. Papalia: That's not what the inspector said!

Mr C.C. PORTER: The member is referring to a draft report of the inspector that was sent to me and others and leaked to the media—I can assure the member it was not by me; who knows who it was by? I have looked through that report and I will give a very fulsome response to it, because in many respects it has a number of errors, if I might be so bold as to say so in this place, including the fact that it omits to properly mention the build at Acacia Prison, which is 367 beds. However, I will not comment on that report in detail now because the draft will be responded to in due course.

Mr E.S. Ripper: You're so smug and so arrogant!

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition!

Mr C.C. PORTER: There is a difference between knowing a little more on a subject than the Leader of the Opposition and arrogance!

Several members interjected.

Mr C.C. PORTER: It is, because if it were arrogance, the reverse would be true in that if people knew less, they would be humble. That never happens!

The building program will cope with the growth. As we have seen, we are delivering better services to a prison system that, yes, is overcrowded as things presently stand. However, we are still measuring it and managing it better than what occurred under the last government.

I think the final part to the member's question was: what will we do to protect prison officers? One of the most important things we did to protect prison officers was to introduce mandatory sentencing for assaults on prison officers, which of course was opposed by members opposite.