

INDIGENOUS INCARCERATION RATES

**914. MR N.W. MORTON to the Minister for Corrective Services:**

This government has made a strong commitment to reducing Aboriginal incarceration. Can the minister please outline what the Department of Corrective Services is doing to meet this commitment for young offenders, and what results are being achieved?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS replied:**

I thank the member for Forrestfield for his question; this is a really important issue. In fact, it has been my personal key priority since the day I became the minister. I remember on the day I became a minister doing a press conference on the steps of Government House, and I was asked what my key priority was as the Minister for Corrective Services, and I said that it would be to address the rates of Aboriginal incarceration in Western Australia and, in particular, the rate of juvenile males who are incarcerated in this state.

**Ms M.M. Quirk** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Girrawheen!

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** That is my key priority and it is worth reflecting on how we have done that in the last couple of years. It started with a leadership change at the Department of Corrective Services. It was very overdue and was howled down by the opposition at the time. It started by establishing the Youth Justice Board to look at new ways of providing youth justice services in Western Australia.

**Mr P. Papalia** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Warnbro!

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I always said that if the government kept doing things the same way, it would keep getting the same results.

**Mr P. Papalia** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Warnbro, I call you to order for the first time.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** We gave \$4 million of initial seed capital to the Youth Justice Innovation Fund so that the Youth Justice Board could look at providing real tangible solutions to address the issue of Aboriginal juvenile incarcerations in Western Australia. Since then, we have seen some great contracts going out to organisations such as the Wirrpanda Foundation for longitudinal mentoring, the Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia for the court support program, and partnering with the Telethon Kids Institute to try to find a significant and strong foetal alcohol spectrum disorder screening tool. I am always reluctant to use the population numbers, because I understand and admit that they can fluctuate and change. The day the government changed in 2008—keep in mind that although about 40 per cent of the adult prison population is Indigenous —

**Mr P. Papalia:** Forty-five per cent growth!

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** About 40 per cent. It is not the member for Warnbro's question.

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Warnbro, I am just telling you now, calm down.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** Forty per cent of the adult prison population is Indigenous; in the juvenile estate, it is almost 90 per cent. So when I look at the numbers and how they have changed, in 2008 when the government changed, there were 157 juveniles incarcerated in Western Australia. In early 2013—about the time of the riot at Banksia Hill—there were around 220; today, it is about 130, 132. We have made significant inroads in reducing the number of young Aboriginal males in the prisons in Western Australia. In fact, we are at one of the lowest records that we have seen —

**Mr P. Papalia:** Adults?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I said juveniles.

**Mr P. Papalia:** You said “young Aboriginal males”.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** Juveniles—juveniles!

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Thank you. Member for Warnbro! Right, a quick answer.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** What I will say is that the numbers we are at now as far as Aboriginal male—and female for that matter—in juvenile detention in Western Australia is far lower than it was when the Labor Party lost

government in 2008, so members opposite have absolutely nothing to be proud of either—they have absolutely nothing to be proud of. We have a better record in this area than the Labor Party ever had.

In closing, can I say that these things do not happen without the efforts of a lot of very dedicated people. The Youth Justice Board —

**Mr P. Papalia** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Warnbro, I call you to order for the second time.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** The Youth Justice Board is made up of a team of very dedicated volunteers. They are not paid, like other government committee members are paid; they are volunteers. They are doing a wonderful job and they are obviously getting some great results, and I want to thank them all personally for their efforts.