

PRISONS — CAPACITY

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

Mr Speaker, if I can acknowledge —

Several members interjected.

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

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** If I can acknowledge the Leader of the Opposition's —

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Take a seat. I formally call the member for Cockburn, the Leader of the Opposition and the member for Warnbro for the first time. I have given the call to you, member for Jandakot.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. If I could acknowledge the —

*Point of Order*

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Point of order!

**The SPEAKER:** It had better be a good point of order, member for Rockingham.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I assume that the member for Jandakot is about to undertake some sort of childish preamble and I would like to put in place a preventive point of order to try to get him to desist!

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Rockingham, I will give people in this place an opportunity every time to raise a point of order, but before I have even heard from the member for Jandakot is somewhat of a challenge, even for me!

*Questions without Notice Resumed*

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I was merely going to acknowledge in good faith the visit yesterday by the Leader of the Opposition to my electorate. The residents down in Aubin Grove who have joined the Aubin Grove branch of the Labor Party think he is the best Labor leader ever, so that is great!

Several members interjected.

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

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** It is great that this government is expanding and restoring this state's significantly neglected custodial infrastructure through a historically high allocation of funding. Can the minister please update the house on some of the works that are being undertaken to expand our state's prison capacity, some of the design principles behind these expanded facilities, and what is the current prison population in the state of Western Australia?

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

I thank the member for the question, and for the predictive assessment of the question. The only difference between the member for Rockingham and Nostradamus is that Nostradamus sometimes got it right!

Several members interjected.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** Everyone is a critic!

Several members interjected.

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

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** I thank the member for his question. It is interesting to note that in October 2009—only a year ago—we were experiencing a shortfall of 137 beds between the operational capacity of the prison system and the actual population. What that 137 beds meant was, very unfortunately, mattresses on the floors for prisoners. Obviously, when there is a shortfall between operational bed capacity and population, we have safety concerns, health concerns and management and administration concerns. Just to give a picture of how strong those concerns are, one of the things that we found we were unable to do one year ago was perform regular maintenance on prison facilities because of the fact that we had the shortfall in the operational capacity of beds. As at 18 October 2010, the prison population was 4 532 and the operational capacity was 5 107. Notwithstanding the many sort of shrill calls about overcrowding and a crisis, as of 18 October 2010 we now have an operational capacity that exceeds the population by 575 beds. What that means now is that safety, health and management concerns have been alleviated. When we look at all the key performance indicators across the prison system, the

prison system now, I would argue, is being better run than it ever has been. It is also the case that we are able to undertake regular maintenance on all the facilities. The reason that we have been able —

**Mr P. Papalia** interjected.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** This is what the member for Warnbro has said in the past year. The opposition spokesman for corrective services has variously described the situation as “a crisis on our hands”, “looming prison crisis”, “it is a crisis”, “crisis looms”, “the government took petrol out, poured it all over it and lit a match”, “absolute crisis”, “spiralling out of control”, “crisis of overcrowding”, “groaning under the weight of overcrowding”, “now a crisis”, “at breaking point”, “a sense of chaos”, “massively overcrowded and getting worse every day”, “prison chaos” and “beset by massive overcrowding”. The crisis is the overuse of the word “crisis”! I say to the member for Warnbro that when we came to government, the prison population was 3 933. In October 2010, it was 4 532. Over a two-year period, that represents an annual prison population growth of 7.5 per cent. If we look at the four years of the previous government on a very generous calendar year measurement, the overall growth in the prison population was 5.12 per cent, which means we have a two per cent crisis on our hands. The statement has been done to death and is an inaccurate reflection of what the government is currently achieving. We set ourselves a goal of 2 590 beds with an expenditure of \$656 million; by June this year, we had placed 937 beds into the system. Of those, 120 were at Karnet Prison Farm, using demountables; 80 at Pardelup Prison Farm, with a complete refurbishment; 79 at Wooroloo Prison Farm, with new and refurbished facilities; 20 at Greenough Regional Prison, using demountables; and the rest using very cost effective double-bunking. The next phase will be 640 beds. We had originally considered using demountables; we are now using purpose-built tilt-up construction methods at Casuarina Prison, Hakea Prison and Albany Regional Prison, which have bed capacities of 256, 256 and 128 respectively. The latter two will come online in February 2001, and Casuarina in April 2011. This all means that, although the government inherited overcrowding and there has been a growth in the prison population commensurate to that which occurred during the four years of the previous Labor government, we have actually made the decision to plan for the expected growth. We are now finding that the sense of crisis, if it ever existed—it would have been the longest crisis in history—has now been alleviated. There is one very good way to determine whether there ever was a crisis in the prison system, and that is by how many questions about crises have been asked by the member for Warnbro of the Minister for Corrective Services over a two-year period.