

POLICE SERIOUS AND ORGANISED CRIME DIVISION — PRISON TEAM

705. Mrs G.J. GODFREY to the Minister for Corrective Services:

I recently read with interest the creation of a permanent police prison team within WA Police's serious and organised crime division. Can the minister outline to the house why the government has taken this action and the scope of this new unit?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS replied:

I thank the member for Belmont for her question. I have made it clear for some time that I have serious concerns about the levels of criminal activity within the prison environment, from visitors into the prison and the conduct of prisoners in prison through to also, unfortunately, a handful of police officers. In September last year, through the Minister for Police, I asked for a conversation to take place with the Commissioner of Police, Dr Karl O'Callaghan. In a number of conversations with the commissioner, I outlined my concerns about criminal activity within the Department of Corrective Services and within prisons. After all, people are not sent to prison to conduct themselves in a way that continues to break the law; they are sent to prison so that they can break their drug habits and certainly not to carry on organised crime circles. As a result, task force Ulysses was formed. It ran for about six months. It involved undercover officers from Western Australia Police and the Department of Corrective Services.

Mrs M.H. Roberts interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Midland, you are not answering the question. I call you to order for the first time.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: As a result, 73 individuals were charged with criminal offences—unfortunately, three of them were prison officers. A number of prison officers were also disciplined, with administrative sanctions against them. Those proceedings will continue. We are serious about trying to clean up the prison system in Western Australia. The problems in the prison system are not problems that have just come about in the last 10 to 20 years; they have existed for decades. Everyone has known about it, but we are absolutely committed to try to tackle this problem. Key to this is the ability of the Commissioner of Corrective Services to compel prison officers and youth custodial officers to answer questions about their conduct and also for him to dismiss officers when he has lost confidence in their ability to conduct their job in a professional manner and with complete integrity. The bottom line is that the Custodial Legislation (Officers Discipline) Amendment Bill 2013 has been stalled. The Legislative Council has referred it to a committee. Unfortunately, one side of this house is keen to rid our prison system of corruption while the other side is more interested in running a protection racket for shonky prison officers. I can only encourage the opposition to get off its backside and pass that bill. Every day that it continues to run that dodgy —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Please finish.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: Every day that goes past, we all know that the opposition is more interested in running a protection racket for dodgy prison officers than standing up for integrity and the standards expected by the people of Western Australia in the Department of Corrective Services.