

ACACIA PRISON — EXPANSION

250. Mr F.A. ALBAN to the Minister for Corrective Services:

I understand that the transfer of prisoners to Acacia Prison following the \$126 million expansion is going well. Can the minister provide an update to the house on how this program has been implemented?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS replied:

I thank the member for his question and for his interest in the prison system.

On 5 January this year, the expansion at Acacia Prison in the hills was completed. The 387-bed expansion cost \$126 million. The Department of Corrective Services along with Serco have developed a fill strategy so that we can start moving the medium-security prisoners from other parts of the estate into what will now be the biggest prison in Australia with almost 1 400 beds. As of 19 March last week, the prison population at Acacia was 1 288, an increase of 289.

I am proud of the comparison of the cost per prisoner per day between the private prison system and the public prison system. The average cost per prisoner per day at Acacia is \$157, and in the public prison system—as a rough comparison—it is \$378; that is a significant saving to the taxpayers of Western Australia.

Interestingly, last week the Economic Regulation Authority released a discussion paper on a few different options for the future of different corrections facilities. It found that contracts between the Department of Corrective Services and Serco, the private provider in Western Australia, for facilities at Acacia Prison and Wandoo Reintegration Facility provided a greater level of scrutiny and transparency than those in the public prison system. The opposition has continually castigated the government on this matter, even though it gave Serco the contract to run Acacia Prison when it was in government. The opposition has said that the government continually hides behind that contract to avoid scrutiny. Having said that, I welcome the comments made by the member for Warnbro, the shadow minister, last week that the ERA proposal for service level agreements between the Department of Corrective Services and public prisons seemed reasonable. Well done, member for Warnbro! Congratulations on realising what is so obvious to everyone on this side of the house. I will give one point of comparison to show why privately run prisons get better value for money for taxpayers than the public prison system. We just have to look at one key performance indicator—for example, the workers' compensation injury rates. In the public prison system we have got the number of prison officers on current workers' compensation claims down to 16 per cent and for youth custodial officers we have got it down to 22 per cent. Does anyone want to guess what the workers' compensation claim rate is in the private prison system? It is one per cent. Obviously, there is an awful lot that the public prison system can learn from the private prison system, which is why we believe in contestability, and why there is still a lot of room to reform the public prison system and get better value for money for the taxpayers of Western Australia.