

INDIGENOUS INCARCERATION RATES

1017. Mr I.C. BLAYNEY to the Minister for Corrective Services:

This government made a commitment to reducing the rate of Aboriginal incarceration. The minister spoke recently in this house of reforms in youth justice. How is the minister addressing this commitment in the adult justice system?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS replied:

Before I start, because no-one from the Labor Party has the common courtesy to do so, can I please acknowledge the presence today in the public gallery of Hon Jim McGinty. Jim, it's good to see you, mate. Thanks for the dangerous sexual offenders legislation.

Last week I spoke about the inroads that we are making to reduce the rate of Aboriginal incarceration amongst juveniles. We have made some significant inroads, but obviously we have a bit of work still to go. We have made some significant progress. We are now at a way better level than we have seen in the last 10 years. It is worth reflecting on what we are doing with the Aboriginal population and the adult estate.

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Warnbro, I can hear everything you are saying up here; stop it.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: We are doing a lot in this space. We are committed to trying to address the issue of Aboriginal incarceration amongst adults in Western Australia, just as we are for Aboriginal incarceration amongst juveniles. We have to look at the things that drive Aboriginal people into prisons in the first place. A lot of things happen in someone's life before they get into the corrections system, but once they get there, we have an obligation to try to stop them from coming back through the revolving door.

Ms M.M. Quirk interjected.

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

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: One of the key ways that we are doing that is by looking at the things that cause Aboriginal offenders to breach things such as their parole conditions that see them come back. Of course, one of the main ones is with offences for drivers' licences, which is why we invested \$5 million a couple of years ago into a remote Aboriginal driver program. So far, over 800 prisoners have been referred to that program. Aboriginal prisoners in regional Western Australia can come as close to ticking as many of the boxes that are required so that when they are released, they either have a driver's licence or almost have a driver's licence, if it is applicable. That is one of the first things they will not breach on.

There is also the Fairbridge Bindjareb Project. We have 76 prisoners going through that at the moment so that they are job-ready for industrial positions when they get out, such as truck driving and other job skills that will ensure that they are employed. In fact, over the last couple of years only seven prisoners have returned to prison once they have completed that program. Obviously that is working. There is the Fresh Start program at the Vocational, Training and Employment Centre up in Roebourne, which is in conjunction with Fortescue Metals and Andrew Forrest. He made a commitment that if people get qualifications, he will make sure that they get a job with Fortescue on their release. Obviously, that is also working. There is also the Wandoo Reintegration Facility, where we look at the number of Aboriginal inmates who have returned to prison upon their release, and so far—touch wood—the rate of reoffending has been zero per cent. Once they have finished their courses, zero per cent of Aboriginal prisoners who have been released from Wandoo have reoffended.

Mr P. Papalia: That is because they all escaped and you sent them to another prison!

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: Does the member want to talk about escapes? He does not want to talk about Greenough escapes. You do not want to talk about escapes from public prisons, do you, mate? The point is, there is so much happening —

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Warnbro, I call you to order for the first time. A quick answer please, minister; wind it up.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: There is so much happening. In the future, of course, there is the new women's remand and reintegration facility that will commence next year at units 11 and 12 at Hakea. We will have specific programs to deliver services to Aboriginal women so that we can do everything we can to stop them from reoffending upon release as well. There is the Kimberley corrections plan, and the Think First Cognitive Skills program; we are doing so many things. The key message though is that, under a Labor government, all these

things would be axed because we know that it does not believe in anything being privatised. We know that members opposite would bring back in-house any programs that work and are currently privately run. It would be an absolute travesty if the Labor Party ever won government and it started winding back programs that deliver results in stopping Aboriginal people returning to prison, regardless of who delivers them.