

INDIGENOUS PRISONERS — OVERREPRESENTATION IN SYSTEM

1163. Hon Giz Watson to the Parliamentary Secretary representing the Minister for Corrective Services

I refer to page 759 of the Corrective Services Budget 2009-2010, and I ask -

- (1) The Government has stated that the development of new prison infrastructure in the Kimberley and Goldfields regions are key ways in which the critical issue of indigenous incarceration rates are being addressed. How does adding 150 beds to the West Kimberley Prison, and constructing a new prison in the Eastern Goldfields address the problem of overrepresentation of Indigenous persons in Western Australia prisons?
- (2) New work camps are being planned for Warburton and the Wheatbelt, as well as being built in the Kimberley. Has money been allocated towards the inspections of these work camps to ensure that they satisfy standards?
- (3) The Government has stated that the budget includes a direction of emphasizing Indigenous perspective in departmental endeavours. Where is this evidenced in the budget figures?

Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN replied:

- (1) The international research on imprisonment indicates that the many complex dynamics that lead people to commit and offence and enter criminal justice system are beyond the control and capabilities of prison alone to address.

However, while prisons alone are not the answer, the Government also recognises the positive roles prisons can play in assisting with offender rehabilitation as well as providing sometimes unmet social needs.

Western Australia is currently recognised as having developed the best prison in the world for women prisoners, at Boronia. The same planning processes have been undertaken in the planning for the West Kimberley Regional Prison in Derby. This planning recognises that for many regional Indigenous offenders, prisons can provide the opportunity to address sometimes unmet social needs, such as health care and education. More often than not these offenders have histories of neglect and abuse with drug and alcohol addictions, and exposure to self harm and suicide.

The location of the West Kimberley Regional Prison and Eastern Goldfields Regional Prison enables a connection with the community to reduce alienation from the criminal justice system. Suitably assessed prisoners will participate in community work to make reparation for their crimes, whilst at the same time learning skills that are essential for successful reintegration into the community. Addressing essential areas such as health, education, work skills, life skills as well as programs designed to address offending behaviour together with re-entry assistance through providing transport, gaining a driver's licence, obtaining accommodation, maintaining family connections and securing employment have been evidenced to dramatically reduce reoffending rates.

Additionally, increasing the prison capacity in these regions, as the Government is doing, enables more prisoners to be located "in country" which is a positive and contributing factor in reducing recidivism rates for regional indigenous offenders.

In essence, the facilities in Derby and the Goldfields will provide appropriate and necessary information in which offender based programs, and employment and skills programs, can be delivered. For instance, the infrastructure presently available in the Goldfields is not sufficiently maintained to allow for the best practice delivery of employment and offender programs. Further, at any given point in time, various numbers of prisoners from the Goldfields and the Kimberley are forced to be incarcerated in Perth. Delivering employment programs to prisoners in Perth to equip them with what is suitable for their repatriation in the Kimberley or Goldfields is a very difficult logistical exercise, whereas employment and skills training and appropriate repatriation delivered to prisoners released to their local community will be far more successful.

Clearly the prisons alone will not be able to address all of the many and varied issues faced by the totality of Indigenous offenders. Very close ties with regional education, health, housing and employment need to be fostered and strengthened. It is only then that these needs may be able to be addressed prior to imprisonment.

- (2) This question is best answered by Government from the perspective of the Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services.

- (3) The most significant items contained in the 2009/10 budget figures which emphasise an Indigenous perspective in the Department of Corrective Services endeavours are the investments in new facilities in the West Kimberley (Derby) and Eastern Goldfields, and additional regional work camps in Wyndham, Warburton and the Wheatbelt. These projects provide facilities and services that cater for the specific cultural and rehabilitative needs of Aboriginal offenders.

The funding for the Eastern Goldfields and Regional Work Camps is included in the Custodial Infrastructure Program — Administered Equity line of the Asset Investment program. The Regional Youth Justice Strategy will play an important role in diverting young Aboriginal offenders from further contact with the justice system. Funding for this initiative is included in the Department's Service Appropriations.