



## Attorney General; Minister for Corrective Services

Our ref: 35-02091

Ms Kristine Klugman  
President  
Civil Liberties Australian Inc.  
PO Box 7438  
FISHER ACT 2611

Dear Ms Klugman

Thank you for your letter received in my office on 29 January 2009.

Reducing the rates of imprisonment in Western Australia (WA) prisons is a complex issue and I welcome your support. The Department of Corrective Services (the Department) and I are committed in assisting offenders to rehabilitate and reintegrate into the community and acknowledge the importance of community support in doing so.

As a preliminary point, I would however seek to address your view that I am capable of reducing rates of indigenous imprisonment on a yearly basis by a specific amount. As you would be aware, the causes of the comparatively high rates of indigenous offending and incarceration are complex and involve a variety of societal factors and indicators. As Minister for Corrective Services, I consider that the principal area in which I can seek to have some impact is with respect to the proper delivery of programs aimed at reducing recidivism amongst offenders. I would note, however, that any realistically achievable improvement in program delivery is only one relevant factor, whilst many other matters which have bearing on the issue are beyond my portfolio responsibilities.

I would however like to advise you of some of the following initiatives and strategies the Department is currently utilising in an effort to reduce rates of imprisonment in WA.

A recent review of the delivery of offender programs within the Department identified the need for a greater emphasis on Aboriginal program delivery. The Department has responded by establishing a unit specifically charged with increasing the delivery of programs to Aboriginal offenders. This unit will also have responsibility for building the capacity of Aboriginal organisations to deliver programs to Aboriginal offenders in prisons and the community.

Support and assistance to men, and women, is important both in custody and whilst subject to community supervision. Therapeutic programs, as provided by the Department, do work from a strengths based premise. Many new programs incorporate the Good Lives Model – improving the whole person in order to reduce risk, for example, increasing self-esteem and positive relationships. All staff believe that working in this positive manner works towards assisting both men and women who are in the criminal justice system to become better people as such, not return to a life of offending, thus reducing the rate of imprisonment.

Coupled with this is the work undertaken to increase literacy and employment skills, and to improve the health status of all offenders. The Department recognizes and supports many

community initiatives that also provide support and assistance to offenders. Such initiatives, whether internal or external to the Department, are reviewed and updated as new research presents improved practices to address the issue of offending behavior.

In October 2007, the WA Government allocated \$32.688 million over four years to fund eight innovative strategies with the aim of delivering offenders from custody; reducing the length of time spent in custody; and reducing the likelihood of reoffending.

One of those strategies, the Prisoner Employment Program, placed Employment Coordinators at each of the minimum security prisons through the state, including the regional areas of Broome, Roebourne, Geraldton, Eastern Goldfields and Bunbury. Their role is to engage employers, employment agencies and educational/vocational training providers in the program and assist offenders to participate in employment-related activities, including paid employment in the community prior to release from prison. The aim of the program is to enhance prisoners' prospects of employment upon release and reduce the likelihood of reoffending and returning to custody.

The expansion of offender programs will provide offenders with increased opportunities to address their offending behavior. The provision of re-entry programs and services is doubling. Such programs and services are aimed at increasing offenders' chances of a smooth re-integration into the community and subsequently adopting law-abiding lifestyles.

Expanding the use of work camps for minimum security offenders will provide more opportunity with education and programs as well as contact with the local community with the view to giving back to the community and becoming a valuable member of the community upon release. Increasing occupancy and increasing community sentencing (Repay WA) will provide a viable sentencing option and will also increase the amount of community reparation work being completed by non-custodial offenders.

Thank you for raising your concerns with me and for sharing your thoughts regarding lowering the rates of imprisonment in WA. As demonstrated above, the Department is pursuing a range of strategies in addressing the issue and your comments are noted.

Yours sincerely



Hon C. Christian Porter MLA  
ATTORNEY GENERAL; MINISTER FOR CORRECTIVE SERVICES

18 MAY 2009