



**PORT LINCOLN PRISON
29 April 2009**

Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders) (15:32): Port Lincoln Prison has been allocated \$4 million to establish four nine-bed cottages to accommodate 36 low security prisoners as part of the \$65 million package from the state government to expand prisons to accommodate more offenders while we wait for the proposed new Murray Bridge Prison. The self-contained cottages will be adjacent to the main prison and provide prisoners with the opportunity to develop basic living skills prior to release. This will provide an environment that requires group cooperation, planning, acceptance and sharing of resources. It will assist in preparing individuals for their transition into the community by living independently, taking responsibility and building self-esteem.

While it is appreciated that the government is allocating funds to relieve bed space pressures in the prisons in a way that progresses and prepares prisoners for release, there is considerably more that could be done.

Following the Black Tuesday bushfires on Eyre Peninsula in January 2005, Port Lincoln and Port Augusta prisoners were used to assist in the recovery process, completing duties such as reconstructing fencing along properties that bordered on national parks, repairing farm sheds and stockyards, planting trees and clearing trees that were a safety risk along roadways. This work was highly valued by the community, particularly those affected by the fires.

The project was coordinated in partnership with the Department for Environment and Heritage and the management and staff of Port Lincoln Prison. It should also be noted that this project was funded for 18 months, and during this period there were no incidents associated with the project. There was overwhelming community support for prisoner participation. The Port Lincoln Prison was proactive in initiating rehabilitation activities for prisoners through community based activities and work projects. Port Lincoln Prison has previously been unable to provide suitable accommodation for low security prisoners who are, in a sense, preparing for release either in Port Lincoln or returning to their town and family.

An article in *Debate* magazine, Issue 4, March 2009 stated that, currently, over one-third of prisoners will reoffend within two years of being released, and the majority of all prisoners will reoffend at some point in their lives. One could presume from that statement that prisoners will never change their ways. If you related this to a builder with poor education, lack of tools, low self-esteem and a lack of work, you would see that there is a correlation.

Prisoners have been living in a community that provides for their every need but does very little towards providing the tools they need to change their lifestyle and survive in the broader community. While the government allocates funds for 'super prisons', it never mentions that one day the majority of these 'people' will be released. There is no funding for the resources required for programs, medical services, counselling, employable skills training and particularly parenting and relationship building.

The end result is that people are released from prison with a stigma, little or no support networks, low self-esteem and are ill-prepared for what society presents to them. Some have come to believe that they have no value, that there are no alternatives, nothing has changed, and they perceive that returning to criminal behaviour is the only choice for survival.

Life outside for the prisoner is not easy. They have 'paid their price'; however, having a criminal history causes obstacles in gaining accommodation, employment, forming new relationships and making a new life. Prisoner release in a small community can be magnified and opportunities diminish when one is a repeat offender.

Rehabilitation programs such as the bushfire project not only help prisoners to build skills and to gain valuable experience but they also help the prisoners to gain a sense of self-worth, pride and achievement. Most importantly, it gives the community reassurance that these prisoners are, in fact, human beings who can help the community and are willing to do so. It helps to ease prisoners back into the community, building trust between them and society.

The Port Lincoln Prison Farm is a project that has been successful, and I would like to see more projects like it, with more prisoners involved. In September 2008, up to 17 prisoners were working at the farm performing a variety of jobs in hydroponics, livestock management and cropping. The fresh produce grown is provided to local businesses. Through this program, prisoners have had a chance to learn farming techniques, how to drive, operate and service heavy machinery, and to gain certificates in operations—valuable transferable skills that they can use once released into the community. The prisoners involved in this project are happy to be employed and enjoy being kept constructive and busy, and their work is appreciated by others.

Currently, the Port Lincoln prison is overcrowded, as are most prisons, typical of the Labor government's current 'rack 'em, pack 'em and stack 'em' approach. This overcrowding problem is enhanced by the fact that the prisoners have little or no organised activity and no purpose for being. Boredom creates more problems
TIME EXPIRED

Speech notes continue

.....fighting amongst prisoners and negative attitudes. The riots in October, 2008 at Port Augusta Prison are a tribute to this. The policy of Correctional Services is for "safe, secure and humane containment". It is questionable if this can be maintained with the current Governments ignorant, narrow view of who and what they are dealing with.

With the proposed expansion to the Port Lincoln Prison due to commence next year it is an opportunity to provide low security prisoners with work experience and career skills that are transferable in the community. I urge the government to employ prisoners in a "Traineeship" that is accredited through TAFE in the construction of the cottages. This type of opportunity has been tried and tested successfully in Cadell Training Centre. This would not only give prisoners work experience but also a sense of ownership and pride in the buildings.

There are many options and opportunities for prisoners to be rehabilitated and to gain valuable and vital life skills while still in prison. The Government needs to look at the bigger picture and consequences of actions which are non productive and can have destructive outcomes for ex-offenders, families and the community. The allocation of funding for rehabilitation programs is an investment in the future and should be seen as just as important as security systems, "extra bars on windows" and high walls.

It is well known the cost of accommodating a prisoner per year is exorbitant. The government's announced package, including the extra beds allocated to Mount Gambier and Pt Augusta, works out to \$176,151.76 per bed. If the Government was to spend money on prevention (which is based on facts that have been identified by community leaders and academics related to community housing, mental health issues, skilled tradesmen shortages and education), rather than focusing on spending \$175, 151.76 for new beds to house the growing number of offenders, the money would be well spent.

Rehabilitation of prisoners should be considered an investment by this government, an investment in the safety of our communities and the prevention of crime. ENDS