Tuesday 17 October 2017

MOTION

Tasmanian Prison Service - Operation and Management

[11.31 a.m.]  
Mr DEAN (Windermere) - Mr Deputy President, I move -

That the Council consider the operation and management of the Tasmanian Prison Service with a focus on the following:

(1) Prisoner and detainee numbers (that is those persons held on remand and/or serving sentences of imprisonment) and, prisoner and detainee management issues;

(2) Tasmanian Prison Service staffing and human resources, including strategies to manage staff (Correctional Officer) shortages, in particular in relation to the Risdon Prison Complex and the use of 'lockdowns'; and

(3) The future direction of strategies to manage the Tasmanian Prison Service infrastructure.

Before I talk about the Tasmanian position, some of the problems currently being experienced in our prison are not unique. I just received this morning - and other members might have done as well - a printout about some of the issues currently arising in Western Australian prisons. This document is headed, 'Five prison officers step down rather than be sacked'. It relates to drug testing in the prisons in Western Australia. In this instance, reviewers said that since drug testing commenced this year, five correctional officers proved positive for cannabis -

Prisoners were subjected to 8992 drug tests since January 1, with 513 positive results, including 344 for cannabis and 153 for buprenorphine, a replacement in the treatment of heroin and methadone dependence.

I asked a question in this place about whether we are drug testing to a similar extent in our prisons that prisons in some of the other states are. If so, what are some of the results? I suspect if it is happening in Western Australia, it is happening here as well: that high numbers of prisoners are reading positive to drug testing. They are in a prison, for goodness' sake, and they have easy access to drugs. As I said, I suspect we would have something similar here. I would be very surprised if we have not. It just defies common sense.
Ms Rattray - Maybe you should put a question on notice about that.

Mr DEAN - Yes, the member is right. We need to ask the question. I will do that, but if I can get the answer through this process, well and good.

If you look at the prisons in Western Australia, a high number of assaults are occurring within prison - prisoner on prisoner and prisoner on staff and so on. The numbers are quite high; it is quite horrific. I will be interested to see what some of the figures are here. I will be asking the question again about whether we will see a change in that area and get on top it. As I will explain later, working in a prison is not easy, and we should all recognise that.

Mr Finch - Through you, Mr Deputy President, when the honourable member referred to the media coverage on the issue, I thought he might have been going to overcrowding, which I expect he will talk about. That seems to be where we see a lot of headlines. When a prison becomes overcrowded, tensions start to mount and trouble occurs.

Mr DEAN - Absolutely. I certainly appreciate the honourable member raising that. I certainly will touch on that and I am opening it up as best I can in this process.

I brought this motion on because of the recent publicity in media reports regarding a combination of overcrowding, understaffing, poor management, claims of prisoner lockdowns and unrest within the prison. In raising these issues I have not had - and I make this perfectly clear - a recent discussion with the minister, or anybody within Corrective Services to confirm or deny a lot of the allegations and claims that have been made. I am simply raising these issues because they have been raised with me or with the Government Administration Committee B.

Some of these claims have been put forward by the Opposition, the Greens and the unions - CPSU and United Voice. The CPSU briefed Government Administration Committee B members on 19 September 2017 on myriad concerns involving the prison. This motion comes out of a Government Administration Committee B meeting and a desire for the committee to put on record concerns raised regarding current perceived and known problems impacting on the prison.

An inquiry by the committee may have been a better way to go. The committee considered all of this but its position was that because the issues were of significant concern, a motion was probably the quickest and best way to air some of the issues raised frequently. This motion will also provide the Government with an opportunity to either refute, allay or explain the issues currently confronting the prison, should the Government want to do so.
Also, currently any inquiry at this stage would be delayed for quite a long period. The committee took notice of that. Therefore, hearings and findings likely would be superseded by the passage of time, with changes occurring in the meantime. We know there must be an election in March next year or before that, so it is reasonable to assume that parliament will be prorogued perhaps late in January or early February. That being the case, any inquiry the committee wants to undertake in this circumstance probably would not commence until May or June next year, which is going into the budget period. Any findings of the committee would not come back to this place until the end of 2018 - far too long. That is what the committee considered when we talked about bringing this motion forward. This motion has been run by the members of the committee. While that is a confidential meeting, provision has been made for those matters to be raised here today.

I have had much history with the prison, as has the member for Rosevears. I am not sure when we first started; I think it was back in 2009, probably earlier than that, when we first looked closely at some of the issues arising within the prison, particularly relating to overtime. Overtime was clearly getting out of hand. It was escalating at almost $1 million a year over that period. Overtime was increasing in each budget session for a number of years over and above projected overtime. It is not just big overtime itself, it was over and above projected overtime.

Mr Finch - Even though at each budget Estimates we highlighted our concern with the overtime, it still went on. It was a culture of factoring that overtime into the normal salary process.

Mr DEAN - It was. The thing that really upset us - the member and myself in particular, and probably other members too - was that there appeared to be no control and no interest in controlling it. It was being let go ad hoc, and hence we moved for that inquiry and the report in relation to it.

Mr Finch - I think we got to $4 million.

Mr DEAN - It was $5 million-plus.

Mr Finch - Why wouldn't you just hire more staff to cover that need for the extra work, which puts a lot of pressure on people's lives?

Mr DEAN - That is exactly what we suggested at the time.

Mr Finch - On the officers' lives if they are working overtime.

Mr DEAN - It was. It got to, at one stage, $5 million-plus over and above the projected overtime amount. We said, 'Enough is enough'. We could not convince
the ministers that they needed to do anything about it. They simply accepted what was happening. That is when we elected to have an inquiry into it.

On 29 March 2012 there was the committee inquiry into the management of overtime. An interim report was tabled in May 2013 and the final report came out in November 2013.

While the report related to overtime, it was about the whole culture of the prison, its management and administration, which was adding to and causing this overtime to get out of hand.

The problems existing now, or perceived by some as existing, in the prison are not dissimilar to those giving rise to that previous inquiry we undertook: staffing issues and management strategies. The recommendations made in that report were -

The Committee RECOMMENDS that -

The Minister for Corrective Services tables, at least twice a year, a detailed report on the progress being made in reducing short-notice absences and in implementing all aspects of the cultural change process at the TPS, with particular reference to their impact on reducing overtime costs.

I have included there now 'not done'. We do not see that. The only time we really see that is at budget Estimates when we get the chance to question - and I will talk a bit more about that in a minute - or whenever we have a briefing. We did have a briefing from the Prison Service earlier this year.

The next recommendation was -

The relevant Legislative Council Budget Estimates Committee give special attention to examining the level of short-notice absences and the progress of the cultural change process at the TPS and their impact on reducing overtime costs;

In relation to that recommendation, we have asked questions at Estimates hearings. My feeling from that - other members will speak for themselves - was that everything was going along well. There were no real concerns at the prison; they were on top of issues; overtime was dropping right off, absences were under control; workers comp was under control - all of these things were going along well. That is the feeling I got from the information coming back from the Estimates process.
Ms Forrest - That was this year.

Mr DEAN - This year and the previous year, and the year before that as well.

Ms Forrest - Nothing to see here.

Mr DEAN - Nothing to see here. Another recommendation was -

Subject to the outcomes of the Legislative Council Budget Estimates Committee process, the relevant Legislative Council's Government Administration Committee re-establish this inquiry within two years.

It has not been done, but we have talked about it. Another recommendation was -

The State Government continues to fund, as a priority, the completion of the infrastructure redevelopment at the Risdon Prison and the full implementation of training and associated programs for inmates to assist in the reduction of overtime costs within the TPS.

I am not sure where that has gone to. I know there has been infrastructure spending and this was the recommendation in 2013 - four years ago. I suspect there have been lots of add-ons and changes since that time. Is it helping in the management of the prisoner situation at Risdon Prison? I do not think it can be, or I would have thought we would have noticed significant changes and differences in the culture of the TPS.

While the recommendations are predominantly overtime-related, if addressed appropriately they would positively impact on prison management and staffing levels. I want to hear members' positions. I am not trying to relate this only to overtime - this relates to everything else at the present. It relates to absences, morale and all those issues that cause and create really significant issues in any workplace. It is not unique to the prison - it happens in other organisations. Using financial year 2016-17, what was the overtime position? We have no annual report yet on whether we have an update. It is now October and we should have that figure and report for it.

Mr Finch - Talking about overtime, you might recall my story: when I joined the ABC in 1974, virtually everybody there earned 50 per cent again of their salary on overtime - everybody throughout the organisation throughout Australia - and management came down and said 'Stop overtime. Nobody is to be paid overtime', and it stopped at that point.
Mr DEAN - A hard line is required. It also existed in the police service. If you allow it to continue, after a time employees cannot exist and live to their standards without a certain amount of overtime. It becomes a part of their paid package that they must get x amount of overtime each pay. This is the culture we have to change and shift.

We were told of the extra in the previous quarterly financial year return. The members for Apsley and Murchison are always onto these points. The Department of Justice asked us to sign off on a $1.9 million increase. Delving deeper in discussion after the report, we found the answer was that about $1 million was to cover extra overtime payments. It was the quarterly return at the beginning of this year.

On the 19 September, the Community and Public Sector Union and United Voice provided a written handout to Government Administration Committee B members which outlined their concerns regarding the prison, prisoner numbers, management, safety issues and the security of the prison and other issues in the report. The document was not provided with any form of protection and when asked whether it could be on the public record, they indicated that, yes, it could be made public.

Other members might want to take some of the issues raised further. The first thing raised in the document was understaffing, and I quote -

On Saturday 2 September RPC operated 10 staff short of normal staffing. On Sunday 3 September, it operated 11 staff short. On 4 September it operated 5 short and on 7 September it was effectively 13 short at roll call and after training was cancelled and Officers redeployed from outstations, it operated 9 short.

Before sick call on Saturday 16 September, RPC was 11 short and on Sunday 17 September, 17 short. These numbers are after all Officers available for recall had been recalled.

It is claimed understaffing and failing to have correctional officers available for recall is causing the need for lockdowns, which in turn cause unrest and aggravation among detainees. This is fallout from not having enough officers on duty at any one time. The prisoners suffer. I am not saying prisoners should not suffer; it is not a holiday camp and many are in there because they have committed serious crime, so I am not suggesting that at all.

Ms Forrest - They still have rights.
**Mr DEAN** - They still have rights; they have human rights. They are in a prison and part of the rehabilitation process of being in prison is having activity, getting out, not being in lockdown. That is the consideration.

**Ms Forrest** - Rehabilitation is a good thing.

**Mr DEAN** - Absolutely, I could not agree more. If you are going to continue to keep prisoners in a lockdown situation, it is not going to help their morale at all. It dehumanises them and it does a lot of other things. The likely outcome from all of this is rioting on a lesser scale, other upheavals and other activities. That is what comes from that.

The union is further saying that the causes of short-term staffing are not all about sickness. It includes a combination of other things, one of which is the poor management of workers compensation. They have told us that on 19 September 2017 between 36 and 42 officers were off on workers compensation. Those numbers were provided to us by the CPSU and United Voice. Were those figures correct at that date? It appears to be a high number. Full-time staff at the prison were only 441.78 as at 30 June 2016. I have taken these figures from the annual report. I suspect most, if not all, on workers compensation would be those directly employed on the floor as correctional officers. There would be some others, quite obviously, but it suggests that is where the majority of them come from.

Mr Deputy President, if we had about 40 on workers compensation as at 19 September 2017, how many others would have been on sick leave, recreational leave and other leave at that time? So some 40-plus when you add all these others to it - my guess would be about 60 to 70 absent for a workplace of 441-plus members. That is a large number of people. Maybe the prison could tell us on that day - 19 September 2017 - how many members were actually away from the workplace on sick leave, annual leave, special leave and all those other things that occur. What is the projected number of personnel on leave at any one time?

The union is of the view that workers compensation is poorly managed. It cites limited opportunities for quick return to work programs. Members of the committee would remember some of the information given to us at the meeting: they said there were opportunities for members to be back at work, but they were not being given the opportunity to be back at work or in a safe work place in their circumstances - that they could not be given a place.

A further suggestion made to the committee was that workers compensation figures were possibly being downplayed. There were reports that injured workers were being asked to take personal leave and that the department would meet the costs of treatment separately. That is information given to us about the members. I have not checked this claim at all. I am not suggesting it is happening,
but perhaps the Leader might like to address it. As I said, I have not followed it up with Corrective Services or with the minister.

Another matter referred to by the union and United Voice was 'insufficient establishment' -

Over the past few years, TPS has needed to respond to rising numbers of inmates, external reviews, coroner's reports, critical incidents, issues with sentence management etc.

It is suggested here that these circumstances have created extra jobs without employment increases. In other words, spreading the current numbers thinner and disrupting the capacity to cover for unscheduled leave at the expense of inmates, again creating lockdowns.

Low morale is referred to again, and the fact that communication is poor by middle and senior managers. Is that not what we heard during our inquiry? Members will remember - there was a lack of communication between the work people, the Correctional Officers and the next level and the next level above that.

Members on the committee would remember reports from New South Wales on how they had fixed this problem. Those reports were passed to Correctional Services here. I quote -

For those of you who recall our inquiry quarter 2012-2013, you all remember our comments on the poor systems, the old and tired management systems in place at the prison. Amongst all of this was what was clearly evident, a breakdown in communication between senior management and frontline workers.

The union is saying it has not changed and is impacting on low staff morale. Is that the case? The Director of Prisons, Mr Brian Edwards, said during our last briefing that things were quite good within the prison.

Morale can change quickly and is subject to events occurring in the workplace at a specific time. Low morale brings with it other problems, including sickness, work injury, poor judgement, bickering and other internal disruption. It is a fact that it must be repaired forthwith. We cannot leave any organisation with low morale and/or a perception of low morale. If it is perceived to be the case, we need to try to change that with some positive reinforcement and positive changes.
Another area raised was 'spinning the numbers'. That was the phrase used - spinning the numbers. The union raised a point about whether current recruitment practices are keeping up with resignations and retirements.

The 2015-16 annual report reveals an increase of 11 staff over the 2014-15 year. They compared that to the 2014-15 year. In 2015-16, staff increased by 11. What will the annual report for 2016-17, not released yet, reveal? Were the 11 referred to in frontline services in 2015-16 Correctional Officers? Is the recruiting such as advertisements in the papers keeping up with current resignations, retirements and all those other issues that cause people not to be at work?

The Launceston Reception Centre was referred to. The issue raised with staff relates to a claim that only two officers are rostered on night shift where there is a requirement for three. It is suggested this is creating and causing dangerous situations because when those two officers are taken up on a matter or involved in an incident, they are not able to attend to other prisoners' needs and requirements. They raised this as a concern that needs addressing.

Overcrowding is an important one, and has been raised not only by the union, but also by the opposition, Labor and the Greens.

As at 3 September the prison was running at 93 per cent capacity. Not full, but not far from it. In 2014-15, prison numbers were about 470 per day. In 2015-16, they were about 550 per day, an increase of about 80 and reaching as many as 590 per day. That is a huge increase over a relatively short period of time in prisoner numbers.

This is a comment made by the union -

The Hodgman government has adopted an unapologetic law and order agenda. They are keen to see more criminals in prison and there for longer. They are dismantling the suspended sentencing regime, removing remission, reducing access to bail and making it harder to get parole. All of these things are the prerogative of the government of the day, assuming they gain the support of both Houses of Parliament, but if you are implementing a law and order agenda that will see more criminals behind bars you have an obligation to ensure you have capacity within your prison system to humanely and securely house them.

They have forgotten to talk about other options open to the courts to keep offenders out of jail. That is if this place supports the legislation. There is electronic monitoring, to identify one of those new systems the Government wants to introduce, and there are other options available to magistrates and judges. The
union does not direct attention to that at all in the document and neither did they discuss this with us. It is proper to do that.

Electronic monitoring is a strategy I harassed this and the previous government about for a long time, but did not get anywhere. I had been given some promises that it would be looked at and considered, and maybe it has now. I hope my prompting has helped the Government with the introduction of the legislation we should see shortly. I hope it will keep many people out of jail.

A judge or a magistrate will often say to those given their first taste of jail, 'We will give you a short taste of what it is like in there to bring it home to you that it is not a holiday camp.' I suggest that when first-time prisoners are being sentenced - unless it is an extremely violent crime such as murder - that electronic monitoring should be a first consideration. I have always said that there is no reason those convicted of corporate, computer crime or driving offences should be incarcerated. It does not do them any good and only does harm.

A figure of about 20 per cent or thereabouts could be kept out of the jail on home detention, controlled with electronic devices and other controls.

Mr Finch - There is a huge cost to having those prisoners in prison.

Mr DEAN - Absolutely. With that and the overcrowding, it needs to be done now and not put off. Other states and countries are operating this system and reports from those places show it is working effectively. There are issues - and there are always going to be - with anything new implemented. There will be problems, people will breach, cut off their things, but we will address that at the time.

Ms Forrest - You are alluding to problems in prison also, as you were saying.

Mr DEAN - There are problems in the prison in any event to manage and handle. This makes common sense.

According to the Government, jail numbers have increased because of changes to reporting of domestic violence and other crimes. These were answers to my questions. They said the increase was as a result of increased police numbers. I challenge that because I am not sure that has led to an increase: police statistics do not necessarily support this belief.

Mr Valentine - So they are not catching more?

Mr DEAN - If you look at the numbers, there has been a slight increase. The percentage of crime cleared up in the last financial year, 2015-16, saw a slight increase. Do not hold me to this because I am going from memory. There might
have been an increase or drop-off in some areas. The statistics do not necessarily gel with what the Government is saying in relation to extra police numbers creating and causing more prisoners than we have now.

**Mr Valentine** - Mandatory sentencing.

**Mr DEAN** - I am not sure that it led to an increase because police stats said that. Further, if you look at police numbers - take a close look at this - in 2011 when Labor slashed and burned the police -

**Ms Forrest** - The police themselves or the numbers?

**Mr DEAN** - They slashed and burned the police numbers.

**Ms Forrest** - You said the police.

**Mr DEAN** - They slashed and burned police numbers. Now look at those numbers just before that happened and look at the figures for 2017. The numbers are somewhat similar. There is a bit of an increase. I have taken those facts and figures from a senior police officer who I should not identify.

**Ms Forrest** - Are you saying they have not been rebuilt? Is that what you are saying?

**Mr DEAN** - That is what I am saying. They simply replaced all those who were taken and moved and made redundant and so on.

**Ms Forrest** - How does that reconcile with the claims of the Government that it has significantly invested in police?

**Mr DEAN** - They have because they have replaced those who were taken shortly after the 2011 period by the previous government. They have replaced them so they have invested in police to replace those numbers. That is true; that is fact. From my research, we find, if we look across the country, that Tasmanian police numbers are the slowest growing in the country.

The union, the Opposition and the Greens keep referring to the Government's 'tough on crime' strategies and mandatory sentencing legislation as reasons for the overcrowding. I am not sure whether these people are telling fibs, being mischievous or just plain negligent, and/or having a lend of the public by misleading them. On 19 September 2017, I asked some questions around these points. I was accused of putting a Dorothy Dixer forward, of helping the Government. Do members recall that? I did it without any prompting from the
Government or anybody else because I was getting sick of hearing what I know is crap. It was not right.

Ms Forrest - An unparliamentary term.

Mr DEAN - I am sorry. I withdraw that and use 'rubbish'. The answers that came back from the Government were -

(1) The only legislation passed by the current Liberal Government for which mandatory minimum sentences is provided is section 16A of the Sentencing Act 1997, which commenced on 17 December 2014. This section mandates a term of imprisonment of at least six months for causing serious bodily harm to a police officer while they are on duty. No prisoners have been incarcerated as a result of this provision, indicating that the laws have a strong deterrent effect.

So it is clear. We are told that changes to the mandatory sentencing legislation has not in any way increased the numbers at Risdon Prison. As far as I know no people are in jail because of a harder line taken on crime. It is not the government that decides whether an alleged offender is bailed, detained or convicted and incarcerated. It is the presiding magistrates and/or judges. They are the ones who determine that, not the government.

Ms Forrest - As it should be. That is right.

Mr DEAN - Yes, it should be.

To say the Government is doing and causing that is anomalous in my view. I agree; I have not heard these statements in recent times - certainly since those questions were asked I have not heard it mentioned. Maybe now there is a pull away from that. I hope there is. If it is, I hope it is factual.

One of my problems in this place is my difficulty in wrestling with the exaggerations and the untruths that are clearly told. I wrestle with the fact that the full facts are not told, that the public is not aware of the full facts of situations. To some extent, I do not disagree with what Jacqui Lambie says.

Ms Forrest - On every occasion or just on one?

Mr DEAN - No, I do not necessarily support Jacqui Lambie's methods and ways of work, but she makes this statement -
Members interjecting.

Mr DEAN - She makes this statement: 'It's my role to keep the bastards honest and I take that role seriously.'

Ms Forrest - What was she referring to when she said that?

Mr DEAN - She was talking about the Turnbull Government. I will quote the beginning of that -

I'm sick of politicians only telling half the story. People want the truth, not a workshopped statement heavy on the spin ... 

Then she said, 'It's my role to keep the bastards honest'.

Ms Forrest - Was that in a media release she put out?

Mr DEAN - That is in a media release she put out, where she is also calling for -

Ms Forrest - Or an article in a newspaper?

Mr DEAN - A newspaper article, it was in the Mercury.

Ms Forrest - It might not have been a media release; it could have been the reporter talking to her.

Mr DEAN - Yes, it could have been, but it was reported in the Mercury.

Ms Forrest - We need to be accurate about where it has come from.

Mr DEAN - I can get the date for the honourable member. What she says there is fact. Equally, one of our roles is to keep the other place honest, as I see it very clearly. That is an issue I have wrestled with. It is a problem I have had in this place.

In conclusion, it should be understood that prisons will never be easy to manage and run. None of those in prison - the inmates - want to be there, or very few. There are some who have committed crime for the specific purpose of being there.

I told the story in this place of the young fellow who, in front of a number of police officers, smashed the windscreen out of a car. Of course he was then locked up as a result of that. When I took the course of speaking to him because I wanted to know what was behind it, he simply said, 'I have a better life inside than I have
outside.' It was his choice to do that; he wanted to be there. He was quite a nice young chap.

Ms Forrest - Prison is the wrong place for someone like that, isn't it? They need to be supported in the community.

Mr DEAN - They do. It is just cruel. He is the type of kid who, if you had taken him under your wing, you probably could have done a lot with him, I would have thought. It is cruel that this happens.

None of the prison inmates want to be there. Many have a chip on their shoulder and many have other medical issues or self-inflicted health issues. Some believe they are innocent and should not be there. Some are just out to create trouble. While I have never run a prison as such, I did run Ashley Youth Detention Centre for a period. That was hard enough, but would pale into insignificance compared to Her Majesty's jail at Risdon Vale. It would be a very difficult task to run a prison, I accept that. I think everybody should understand that.

While it is easy to be critical of what is happening within the prison, I am mindful of the difficulties managers are confronted with and the difficulties frontline workers are confronted with daily. They would have a tough job. Having said that, our prison has confronted many problems over a long time. Going back to the 1980s, a parliamentary inquiry was undertaken along very similar lines to the one we undertook in 2012-13. I commented then that we could have simply changed the names on the 1980s report, put our names on it and submitted it. It was all about management, administration, lack of communication and overtime. It was all about exactly those same issues. The issues were disappointingly similar and some of those issues are still with us.

While I am not saying the issues raised by the union are accurate - and I mean no disrespect to the union in saying this - I have not had the opportunity to test the points raised by going to Corrective Services or to the Government or the minister. Many of the issues raised in the 2012-13 inquiry mirror the problems raised in the 1980s inquiry.

My opinion is that there is room within the prison service for innovativeness, for change and revision of work practices. Whether this means more money, more staff and improvements or modernisation of infrastructure, I do not know, but it may be a combination of all those things.

Apart from the points I have just referred to, in addressing point (3) of the motion - which is what is or could be the answer to all of this - I believe strongly that a second prison, preferably in the north of the state, is essential if we are to satisfactorily address the continuing management problems and other problems that keep arising. I am not going to go into that because the member for McIntyre
- known to me as the member for Western Tiers - will address that issue in his contribution to the next motion, which will be moved shortly. I will step away from that, but I am of the view that this is the direction we need to be taking into the future.

I commend the motion to the members.

[12.55 p.m.]

Mr DEAN (Windermere) - Mr President, I thank members for their contributions.

Very clearly, this is an area that we are all thinking about and considering. I think we all want to all see the Tasmanian Prison Service run in the best way possible. We would like to see it - or I would - as a model for other states and territories and places to follow. We are far from that at the present. This motion is not about - although some people here might think so - bashing the Prison Service. It is about trying to get it right and on the right path. I am not saying we are not there, but we still have quite a way to go. That is what it is about. I do not normally take the tack of bashing people for the sake of bashing people.

I will consider the responses provided. I appreciate the position of the member for Rumney, where you come from, and the positions you have put forward, as I do the member for Apsley and the Government.

I just pause at this stage - because I have not done so previously - to congratulate the Leader on the position she now occupies as our Leader of the Government. I congratulate you.

Mrs Hiscutt - Thank you. We are in the thick of it now.

Mr DEAN - You have it now. I do not think that it is going to change your ways; I think you will continue in the way you have been. You are doing a good job.

A lot of the issues the Leader raised are matters I will now need to consider closely, as I guess other members will as well. We will follow them to see where they go and whether there are any positive results in relation to the changes you are putting forward. In other words, the compensation area is a significant one; there is no doubt about that. If you look at Tasmania Police, you know they have a lot more employees than Corrective Services or the prison. They were dogged with compensation issues a number of years ago. It was not until they started putting welfare officers in place to specifically work on this very point of assisting people on workers compensation - talking to them and their families, making it easy for
them, addressing their issues and getting them back into the workplace in other roles, not back into frontline services.

I am not saying for one minute that these correctional officers - the greatest number of them - are pulling the wool over anybody's eyes at all. They would be genuine cases, but I think there would be some who might be in the other area as well, but the majority would be very genuine cases. It is important to get them to work, and we heard this in the inquiry. One or two said that they wanted to come back to work. They wanted a position back in the Prison Service, but they could not get one. There was not anything there for them, or senior people were not interested in having them back. That is really what they were saying.

Ms Rattray - It might have been a little to do with what they could actually undertake if they were back at work, given their rehabilitation, but surely there is something they could be doing.

Mr DEAN - Yes, absolutely, because these people have husbands, they have wives, they have partners, they have family. They too suffer if their loved one is not at work. If they cannot see that something positive is happening for them, they too suffer. It has this multiplying factor with it. That is why it is critical they are attended to at the very first opportunity. We also know that the longer you leave somebody out of work, the greater and more difficult it becomes to get them back to work.

I heard a comment yesterday about the Holden position, where all these people are out of employment in Victoria, on this very same problem. A lot of people who are now being made redundant are going to use their money to travel around the world and around the country and so on. As one commentator says, 'Once they do that, the chances of them getting back into work is very remote'. You lose that opportunity. People on sick leave and workers compensation have to get back to work at the very first opportunity or they will lose it.

Ms Forrest - That is why it is called workers compensation and rehabilitation.

Mr DEAN - Absolutely right. I agree, spot on. You have organisations, as I said, such police and health, concentrating on looking at that very closely.