

VERIFIED TRANSCRIPT

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into budget estimates 2007–08

Melbourne — 11 May 2007

Members

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Witnesses

Mr B. Cameron, Minister for Corrections;

Ms P. Armytage, secretary;

Dr R. Kelleher, executive director, police, emergency services and corrections; and

Mr K. Anderson, commissioner, Corrections Victoria, Department of Justice.

The CHAIR — I now welcome Mr Kelvin Anderson, Commissioner, Corrections Victoria. I call the minister to give a brief presentation — and I mean brief — on the more complex financial and performance information in relation to the 2007-08 budget estimates for the portfolio of corrections.

Mr CAMERON — Thank you very much. Kelvin Anderson, the corrections commissioner, has joined us for this segment. I understand you want to keep this down to 5 minutes, Mr Chairman.

The CHAIR — That is right.

Mr CAMERON — So I will proceed to go through it. We have allowed for that by having less slides as well.

Overheads shown.

Mr CAMERON — Let us just touch briefly on the corrections system. We have here the number of offenders who are in the system at the moment. In addition, there are 1381 on parole and there are 7500 community corrections offenders, which includes parolees. There are 13 prisons in Victoria — that is 11 public and also 2 private prisons — which have to answer to Corrections Victoria. In relation to community corrections, there are 50 locations and there is one transition centre, the Judy Lazarus Transition Centre, which has opened only very recently. The staff, including prisons, community corrections and head office, is 2385.

If you look at the monthly average of prisoners, you will see that it is steady, but that during the course of last year, the latter half of the year, there was a large increase. That essentially came about with restricting the use of suspended sentences for serious offences, sexual assault reforms, major crime and police corruption, domestic violence policing, drug trends, longer sentences being given, a tougher breach of policy in relation to community corrections — so if someone breaches a community-based order, less tolerance towards that — and also a reduction of prisoners in police cells.

I go to my next slide. We see the number of major offenders in prison. I am conscious of the time, but what you will see is an increase in relation to the number of major offenders in prison. Also, some of those are people on remand; they have not been found guilty, but also some people are on remand as a consequence of being alleged terrorists.

In relation to new initiatives, there is \$25 million over five years to expand prison capacity for 300 additional beds. There are programs to help rehabilitate. There is \$6.6 million to continue home detention, and there is \$4.5 million over three years for graffiti prevention and removal. Community corrections plays a key part in relation to that.

Here we have the imprisonment rates, and, as you would know over many years, Victoria has tended to imprison the worst offenders. What you see there are the imprisonment rates with Victoria and all of the other states across Australia as a proportion of 100 000 people in the population.

If we go to the next slide you will see the recidivism rates, and obviously what this is is people who come back into the system within two years. What we have seen in recent years is a downward trend. This is below the national average. That is obviously something we are pleased to see. But that work in terms of bringing down the recidivism rate is obviously important — important in relation to people returning to prison, but also obviously important from a community perspective in relation to crimes that are being committed. If we go to the persons returning to prison within two years of release, — this is a reflection across the nation — you will see that we are second best to Queensland. What we have seen over the past five years is that downward trend.

If we go on to the next slide, and this is the final slide, we do have modern prison infrastructure in Victoria. If you have a look at the changes that have occurred over the years, you have the Bendigo prison closed a year or so ago. That was the last of the old Victorian-era-type prisons that we had in Victoria. Really what that has meant, as a result of the work over the last 25 years essentially, is the modernisation of the prisons, and in relation to a couple of the older prisons — Langi Kal Kal, Dhurringile and Ararat — from the 50s and 60s, they have also been modernised. So what we end up with is very good infrastructure.

Obviously offender management framework and balancing security with reducing reoffending is a key role of community corrections, as well as a sustained downward trend in recidivism. Community Corrections Victoria is the leader in correctional practices, and we have many delegations looking at what we do. As I said, there is

additional funding for additional beds, and Corrections Victoria does ongoing master planning in relation to future development. Thank you.

Mr SCOTT — Minister, in your presentation you touched upon the new Judy Lazarus transition centre. I would like to ask you how community safety, service delivery output and the integrity of the prison system is improved by this program?

Mr CAMERON — The Judy Lazarus Transition Centre is a new transition centre down in West Melbourne.

The CHAIR — By the way, who is Judy Lazarus?

Mr CAMERON — Judy Lazarus was a former CEO of VACRO. She has now retired. She actually lives up in Beechworth, but it was named in her honour given the work that she has done over many, many years in relation to transitioning people from prison into the community. Obviously to the extent that you can transition, that is also important in trying to break reoffending behaviour. If you go back to the old days when people were thrown out of prison with a paper bag, or a plastic bag, full of their stuff, you can obviously understand why people would fall back into a pattern immediately. She has been a great devotee of transition over the years.

This is a 25-bed unit and it aims to take low-risk offenders, putting them there so that they are able to go out on release, but during the night there are strict curfews in place. That was done in collaboration with the community, as well as Crime Victims Support Association. Noel McNamara and a whole group of people were involved in it. The quest is to try and help further bring about a successful transition so that we do not see people reoffending back into the community. For those that are there, community safety, of course, is paramount, and what will happen if there is any breach of any of the rules is that they will end up back in mainstream prisons. So clearly there is an incentive to make sure that their transition works and works very well.

Mr BARBER — I have got some questions about the corrections inspectorate, being an internal unit of the Department of Justice. We are a little unclear on what its deliverables are or have been, unlike in WA where it is a separate inspectorate — particularly it does not publish its findings, reviews or reports in any way that I can find out where they are. What I have got is a detailed question on notice about its budget, staffing and activities, which I will pass over. Could you let me know the sorts of reports and audits it has been doing on prisons, and also investigations regarding individuals in the past and what you think they will be doing this year?

Mr CAMERON — Yes. Penny, do you want to answer? Obviously we cannot go into some of those privacy issues.

Ms ARMYTAGE — Obviously the corrections inspectorate adopts a forward work plan for any particular given year. In addition they do planned reviews that they have mapped out, but they also will do reviews of incidents that occur within the prison system and also in community corrections. They can be asked to undertake a review by the minister or myself as secretary, and we do do that on a regular basis in terms of their work program. They have conducted 21 inquiries in 2006–07 and did 18 reviews. As I said, they have also commenced doing reviews of people subject to community-based orders as well. For the first time they are now starting to do that.

They have examined things like prisoner transport services. There were some issues in terms of prisoners being transported. We became aware of that and they did a review of the conditions, et cetera, that occurred. They looked at prison performance, and they do a regular report about how all the public and private prisons are performing according to the service delivery outcomes that are set, in the case of the public prisons, and that are articulated for private prisons in their contractual obligations. They have reviewed visit bans and how they are imposed in terms of prisons, looked at how our technology is working, reviewed fire incidents and serious assaults and also examined some deaths in custody that have also been the subject of review by the coroner. They provide the report on each of the reviews that they have done, and we provide details in terms of the broad range of activities of the inspectorate in the Department of Justice annual report.

Mr BARBER — If that is in order, Chair, then can you pass that question on notice over?

The CHAIR — Yes. I mean I will put it in my letter to the minister. I just should note that some of the stuff probably should be handled as the usual sort of questions on notice that you ask in the Parliament.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — The inspectorate, are they prison employees?

Mr CAMERON — No, they are department employees.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — And they are seconded from police and other agencies and from wherever?

Ms ARMYTAGE — They are recruited from a wide range of circumstances, so they might be people with previous experience, say, in the ombudsman's-type functions in other jurisdictions, but they are public servants employed under the rules, and we have deliberately structured it separately in terms of their reporting arrangements, because they are reviewing the activities of the corrections program under the auspices — —

The CHAIR — So they are a bit like an internal audit; they just do not report to the line manager. They report directly presumably to the secretary; is that correct?

Ms ARMYTAGE — Yes, they do.

Ms GRALEY — I notice as of last week there were 253 female prisoners in our corrections system, and I refer you to the women's diversion strategy. I would like to ask you, minister: what has been the progress in implementing Better Pathways — An Integrated Response to Women Offending and Re-offending program, which I note in the budget papers continues to receive funding until 2008-09?

Mr CAMERON — Obviously the reducing reoffending strategy — the Better Pathway strategy — is something that the government has been committed to as well as Corrections Victoria. Obviously getting people into the community, if it is done successfully, helps bring about a reduction in recidivism and for the community helps bring about a reduction in reoffending. So the Better Pathways policy, the integrated response to women's offending and reoffending, was launched in November 2005, and that includes 28 discrete projects that are delivered over four years from the 05-06 financial year through to the 08-09 financial year.

The government invested \$25.5 million to strengthen prevention and early intervention diversion, rehabilitation and transitional support as part of that initiative. There was 18.3 million for support programs and \$7.2 million for infrastructure. That also includes capital works, which commenced in early 2006 and which are scheduled for completion in June 2008. Some of those works include work at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre, the women's prison, and those works are now under way and due to be completed by the middle of next year. I might ask the corrections commissioner to elaborate more on some of the successes or where he sees successes that have worked as a consequence of the program.

Mr ANDERSON — The need for the Better Pathways program came about because of the rapid increase in the number of women prisoners — something like an 85 per cent increase in the number of women prisoners over a five-year period. Clearly our job is to do something about reducing that reoffending rate. We have seen a tapering off in the number of women prisoners just at the moment, so it has capped out and has not continued to grow. The real intent of this program is to look at early intervention, diversion, rehabilitation and transitional support programs. There is no doubt that the capital works that are being done now at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre were required, so we are working on something like six different building sites within the prison as we speak, but probably the two most important parts, or perhaps three important parts, of that building program are the extension to the health centre and, in particular, a program facility dedicated to the delivery of rehabilitation and support programs.

One issue that does face women prisoners is there is a very high level of mental health need, so there is being constructed a 20-bed intensive support program which we will call Marmak. That will be delivered in the middle of this year, and in the interim we are delivering the support services in other parts of the facility. We are not just waiting for the building, and indeed we will get that 20-bed relief because this has been a significant issue for us, and that is how we cater for the number of mentally ill women prisoners. The particular beauty of this program is that there is also attached to it a women's integrated support program which brings together a consortia of community agencies which provide both pre and post-release support, particularly with regard to accommodation and employment. It is those transitional arrangements which we believe will play an important part in reducing reoffending. In summary, it is about diversion and reducing reoffending.

Ms GRALEY — Just a follow-up question, Chair. What sort of mental illnesses are they?

Mr ANDERSON — Women prisoners by the time they get to our system, not surprisingly, have been involved in significant episodes of abuse. There are examples of domestic abuse, sexual abuse and indeed their own abuse of alcohol and drugs. We see the full range of mental health issues that present at the prison. There is depression, schizophrenia — those kinds of things. Women who are actively psychotic will be transferred to the Thomas Embling Hospital, but clearly no forensic health facility would take the full range of mental health issues, so prisons are left with some of that to deal with, and that is what Marmmak will cater for.

Mr WELLS — Minister, I refer you to budget paper 3, major budget output, prisoner supervision and support, page 167. I also refer the minister to a report in the *Herald Sun* yesterday which highlights the rampant overuse of prescription drugs in Victoria's prisons, costing the taxpayers about \$2.5 million a year. I also note that there is an estimated 1200 prescriptions for the highly addictive benzodiazepam, the drug closely related to ice. Do you agree there is a rampant overuse of prescription drugs in the prison system and, if you do, what will you do to curb their use?

Mr CAMERON — These are prescription drugs and medications and they have been prescribed by medical practitioners, and what has to happen is because they are prisoners the state meets the cost, where normally in the community when a doctor prescribes a drug the commonwealth picks up a substantial portion of that with the pharmaceutical benefits scheme. But I might ask the corrections commissioner if he wants to make some further comments about the matter.

Mr ANDERSON — I think there are a couple of points to make about that and I guess that it also relates to the comments I made earlier about women prisoners. Generally the research into prisoners' health shows — and it is consistent both nationally and internationally — that prisoners' health status is very low. There are high rates of physical and mental health issues and disorders that are detected, and on top of that you get the social and economic disadvantage. Together with those is the issue of substance abuse. This allegation about medication being used in prisons, and medication being used as a management tool in prisons, we reject. Prisoners are treated in a medical sense as patients, and doctors will prescribe only on the basis of the presenting condition that they see. Indeed that means that the whole range of medication pharmaceuticals are required to be provided in prison, as they are with any other group within the community. Is there overuse of these kinds of drugs? The way we ensure that that does not occur is the Department of Human Services has a prisoner health care unit which looks at and monitors the arrangements for health.

The CHAIR — Minister, this morning I was at my local traders' monthly meeting, and the issue of graffiti came up. I notice in one of your overheads is a new initiative regarding it called a graffiti initiative — \$4.5 million over three years for a graffiti prevention and removal. I assume this means we are going to get some of the people doing community orders or whatever being involved in this, and I am sure my local traders would welcome this, provided they are properly supervised. Can you tell us a bit more about this please?

Mr CAMERON — Yes. What we want to do is continue to ramp this up. What we see with a lot of people that are in the community corrections system is that they are required to do community work, and one of the things that is targeted and will be more so in the future is relating to clean-up — clean-up of graffiti, clean-up of the community. It is only fair that those people that are required to do community work have to go out and do it. So what Corrections Victoria has done is that they have had 8000 offenders to date do 775 000 hours of unpaid community work, and one of those things that they do is graffiti clean-up. To date 72 000 square metres of unsightly vandalism by these graffitiists, who are after all criminals, have been removed under the program. In addition they have removed rubbish and a whole range of other things around community clean-up. But I might ask the corrections commissioner if he wants to elaborate further on how he intends to direct community corrections to go about this business in relation to the program.

Mr ANDERSON — Graffiti clean-up — most people would have seen the handiwork of our community work gangs, but might not be aware that it was done by offenders on community-based orders. Partnerships have been established with a range of departments and municipalities. That includes the Department of Infrastructure, VicRoads, Yarra Trams, Connex, the Royal Children's Hospital, Scouts Vic, municipalities such as Geelong, Ballarat, Darebin, Yarra, Greater Dandenong, Moreland, Maribyrnong, Boroondara, Maroondah, Knox, Hume, Frankston, Greater Bendigo and the City of Melbourne. Each week we have teams out and targeting those hot spots for graffiti.

We are very mindful that the removal of graffiti does not impact on the use of water and the like, and so we have moved from water-based products — that is, to spray the graffiti off — to now moving increasingly to painting it out so that we are not putting a drain on the state's water resources.

The CHAIR — I know there were a number of initiatives announced in the last year or two, including tag databases and even a suggestion that we strengthen the criminal code against graffiti. I do not call them 'artists' — I agree with you that they are criminals.

Ms MUNT — Vandals.

The CHAIR — They are certainly vandals. It is criminal damage.

Ms GRALEY — It is vandalism.

Mr CAMERON — We have had an exposure draft, and we will be responding to that in the middle of the year or so.

The CHAIR — That will be good. I know that will probably be of interest, certainly in my community, in that regard.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Minister, I would like to ask you about the relative cost of housing prisoners in the public and private prisons. You may have seen a table that your predecessor provided to the committee last year, which appeared in the budget estimates report and showed the cost of the daily recurrent cost of housing prisoners by each of the public prisons and then the average daily recurrent cost per prisoner for all the public prisons and all the private prisons, and you may like to provide similar information on notice to the committee. But my question is: can you provide us now with details of what the current estimate is for the annual daily cost of the prison providing for the prisoners by the public and the private prisons respectively and over the estimates period — the four years?

Mr CAMERON — Overall, looking at it globally, from the 2004–05 year to the 2005–06 year the increase in cost for a bed day was 1.6 per cent.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — That is for both public and private?

Mr CAMERON — That is the global cost. What you want to know in particular is how that breaks down into the public and private — that 1.6 — which ones are above and below I gather?

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Yes.

Mr CAMERON — We are not able to do that. We will have to get you those more detailed figures. But that is the overall figure.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Probably on notice, do you also have estimates for the four-year estimates period of the same figure, for the public and private? Is that something you can provide us?

Mr CAMERON — Yes, we can put something together.

The CHAIR — Have a look at that. It may not be all that easy to predict of course.

Mr CAMERON — It may be a bit rough, but I think we will be able to do something or other.

Ms MUNT — Minister, I was interested in the presentation on the imprisonment rates for Australian states and territories and the difference in the comparisons here. ACT is 86.4 and Victoria is 99.7. I would have thought that the nearest state in comparison might be New South Wales — they are at 185.6. So I thought that was very interesting. The Northern Territory seems to have particular problems of its own. What are the factors that are factoring into, you know, pretty good results for Victoria compared to the other states? Would you be able to elaborate on that?

Mr CAMERON — Victoria traditionally has tended to jail the worst offenders, so that figure of 99.7 — and that is as a proportion of 100 000 people — has actually gone up a couple of percentages in the last few years. It has gone up slightly. But what you see at work there is really a long-term pattern, notwithstanding that small

increase. Obviously across the whole sentencing system, those who come out we have to manage. That includes not only those who are in prison, but also those who are on other orders. Those orders, for example, are intensive correction orders, community-based orders and there are also suspended sentences. But you will remember last year there was a change in relation to suspended sentences for serious offenders, which was already made, and the Sentencing Advisory Council flagged future changes down the track as well. Part of that is reflected in that jump that we saw in the latter part of last year in terms of prison numbers. But I might ask the corrections commissioner if he would like to make some other comments.

Ms MUNT — But regardless of those factors, Minister, it is still a pretty good figure.

Mr CAMERON — Yes.

Ms MUNT — So I was wondering what the influences are on that.

Mr CAMERON — Key drivers.

Mr ANDERSON — In Victoria I think there has always been a tremendous level of confidence in community-based corrections, and so there is a range of options for the courts to choose from, and Victoria has always used imprisonment as a last resort. So the Minister's comments about those people that come into jail being the harder end of the market are absolutely true, and they are reflected not only here in the imprisonment rates, but later if you compare those imprisonment rates to recidivism rates you will see in some jurisdictions that we would think imprisonment a bit too easily, the recidivism rate is also low because they have simply been warehousing lower-level offenders that perhaps could have been dealt with in another way. So it is always a good result for Victoria and we maintain to that level. Indeed it has gone up slightly over time. It has bounced around between sort of 91 per 100 000, 95 and now down to 93.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — Minister, there was a period when I was shadowing your predecessor, two predecessors ago, Mr Haermeyer, and in particular one of the issues that was of particular note for us, and indeed the community, was a thing called the prison design capacity. I know that was an issue and I have had that discussion with the commissioner in relation to that. That essentially means that if a prison has been built with, say, 100-bed capacity and then you put 120 prisoners in there, the desired capacity effectively is 120 per cent because you are 20 above.

Now I understand that there were — and having seen them — relocatables placed around the state and in particular the national measures always have a prison design capacity, unless I am advised otherwise, that measure has since been dumped by your predecessor two ministers ago, and I note on budget paper 3, page 167, the government changed from what they called the prison design capacity, which they used to get whacked on quite regularly, to now a daily prison utilisation rate. And surprise, surprise, that obviously is below or on target to what is expected by the government. Minister, are you able to provide to the committee the prison design capacity as measured nationally? Are you able to provide a list of the relocatables of the portable prisons that are currently still in place? I know some have been decommissioned or placed elsewhere — from memory, Ararat, or one of them that I went to had been decommissioned.

Mr ANDERSON — Decommissioned. We have decommissioned a couple.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — Yes, you have decommissioned a couple. I was just wondering if you can give some indication of what the desired capacity is against the real prison numbers which we have to give some fair representation to, or do you have a view either way on my statements?

Mr CAMERON — This committee actually suggested that the design capacity be done away with.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — Luckily I was not on that committee at that stage.

Mr CAMERON — So the department went off and did that and put in place the utilisation rate as a total of the prison capacity. So let us start there. What does that mean — the prison utilisation rate of a total prison capacity? So that is in any particular one year how many beds we are funding, and this is actually the percentage of prisoners who were taking that up.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — It is like when I went to the prison at Won Wron, for example, when that was decommissioned. I think that is now getting re-commissioned as a Koori-rebuild. The prison design capacity I think

was 127 from memory, yet when I went there you could not believe how many bunk beds and sort of how many beds were crammed into the prison.

Now the utilisation rate would be that it was not crowded, but those who are there would say yes, it was well above its design capacity. I guess it is a bit of a whinge of mine in the sense that you have dumped the measure — the committee previously has dumped the measure, I am advised. The other statement I made: is there a national measure; is that still the national measure? Maybe the commissioner might be able to indicate if it is. Maybe we as a committee should reconsider bringing back — —

Mr CAMERON — We will take it back and we will look at the design. I think part of the complication is prisons are designed to have so many beds, but they generally do not have that many beds in them. So if you go to a lot of cells, they are designed to have a multiple number of offenders, but actually less offenders get in there.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — And that is fine. For me that is fair because you have designed for that number and then there is less prisoners; for me that is a true measure.

Mr CAMERON — And that is what gives you your capacity in the future.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — Yes.

Mr CAMERON — We will go back and have a look at that for you.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — In particular — I just want it on the record — is the national measure prison design capacity?

Mr ANDERSON — That was discussed by the administrators as recently as two weeks ago. Victoria has expressed its view that that is not an appropriate measure. Other jurisdictions will choose for their own purposes to use design capacity as a measure, so it will be patchy around the country.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — So every state uses it? Are you able to provide, again on notice, if other states and what states do still — —

Mr CAMERON — Yes.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — I think it is important given that we have removed it to just review it as part of the assessment.

Mr CAMERON — Okay, we will come back and find that out.

The CHAIR — Get some comparisons.

Mr PAKULA — There was an earlier question, I think, from Mr Scott about the Judy Lazarus Transition Centre. I suppose just to expand on that about the issue of what transitional programs are in place to help prisoners reintegrate into society and not reoffend — just a bit more of an expansion on that.

Mr CAMERON — Not just in relation to women, but more broadly to the male population?

Mr PAKULA — No, more generally.

Mr CAMERON — Okay. I will get the corrections commissioner to take you through some of the key initiatives. Obviously managing people on parole is important. The work that the parole board does in making sure that people have some sort of plan in place before they get given parole, and having pressure on them to do that is important, as well as the funding that we give to a number of organisations.

Mr ANDERSON — Really this is not rocket science. It is clear that if people are transitioned out of an institution back into the community well and settled well, then there is a reduced likelihood of re-offence. We have had a couple of pilot programs that we have evaluated, and we have shown in those small-scale evaluations that there is a reduction in recidivism for people who have settled well into the community. The key elements appear to be around accommodation and employment, and the other element appears to be about the first nine months being a sort of critical period. There should be no surprise in that, it is fairly logical. In fact in the budget papers you will

see there is comment there about prisoners at least suffering disadvantage in a number of areas on reception, but two areas being housing, homelessness, and lack of employment.

To address those issues in the women's system, if we can start with that, we have integrated our system together, and we have pulled a number of programs together under what we have called the women's integrated support program. It is both a pre and post-release support service. It is a case-managed service and, again, provides for issues such as support for drug and alcohol abuse upon release and also accommodation and, in particular, employment. There is another employment program called women for work, and, again, that is to look for job search opportunities for women prisoners and women on community-based orders.

The lessons we have learnt from that program are now being transferred to our men's system, where we did have a fragmented approach to the service delivery, and, as of July, we will bring all those kinds of services together under what we are calling the men's intensive bridging support program. That is currently in the process of being contracted out. At each prison there is a transitional assistance program, where prisoners prior to release will go through a series of information sessions and checklists about what they need to be doing to find their way back safely into the community.

As part of that, the minister mentioned the old ways of doing things, of just releasing them, perhaps on a Friday night, with a plastic bag of belongings and half a dole cheque. We have worked very closely with Centrelink to provide a protocol which allows that first payment to be done in a way whereby people can access their money on release. We have also provided a number of publications like a *Getting Out* booklet, which is also part of our Koori information booklet process. On top of that we also have a series of grants we give under the Pip Wisdom community grants program, where we fund about 13 different initiatives in the community. The one that I would point to for next year which we are particularly keen about is we are also developing an indigenous transitional support program, which we will roll out through 07–08.

The CHAIR — I am sure Minister Jennings will be very interested in cooperating very fully with you, Minister, on that particular program.

Mr SCOTT — The question I would like to ask is about the application of technology in security arrangements. What new technological developments are being implemented in our prisons to strengthen the level of safety in particular?

Mr CAMERON — Security is obviously central to our prisons. One of the things about the modernisation that we have seen in our prisons over the last 25 years is security being much more effective. If you have a look at the medium and maximum-security prisons, it has actually been quite a while since someone was able to breach that. How many years would that be?

Mr ANDERSON — The last escape from a secure facility was in about 2000–01.

Mr CAMERON — It has been a while. That is obviously the envy of other states. But part of security relates not only to getting out but also to things getting in and in particular drugs — measures are put in place around that — as well as any weapons or explosives. To that end there has been a substantial increase in the number of dogs, for example. I might get the corrections commissioner to take you over the key initiatives that we are seeing.

Mr ANDERSON — We have had an injection of something like \$23 million in the past two years to upgrade prison security. That includes not only technology but extra staff resources. The minister talks about winning the battle against drugs and drug abuse. Clearly with the level of people that abuse drugs — the number widely quoted is something about 70 per cent of prison receptions are claiming that drugs played a part in the commission of the offence — it is not surprising that they will try to introduce contraband into prisons. A test of the success of our drug strategy is that we are currently running at about a 2.75 per cent result on our positive random urine analysis program, which is quite remarkable. I can report that all prisons are meeting their service delivery outcome — their benchmark — in that regard or bettering it.

To give you an idea of the level of this kind of activity, between July and December 2006 we in fact intercepted something like 212 items that people were trying to smuggle into our prisons. That included illicit drugs, weapons and the like. We have doubled the use of vehicle searches — that is, if people come to our facilities, we will, and they should expect that we will, search their vehicles. We have conducted more than 1000 searches with our

specially trained passive-alert dogs looking for things like drugs and explosives. On top of that, at the Melbourne Assessment Prison, at Barwon Prison and the remand prison, people entering these facilities go into a high-tech scanning booth which effectively is a drug-sniffing device. It is a bit of a shock for people the first time they do it, I am afraid, but that is obviously looking for drugs, narcotics and explosives. Having exited there they then go into a metal-detecting booth before they then have to front up to the iris scanner before getting access to the prison. All in all, there has been a tremendous increase in the use of technology in all our facilities.

The CHAIR — That is clearly very comprehensive. Thank you, Minister. Just a couple of other items I want you to take on notice. I would like you to provide what resources, both in terms of staffing and costing, the department will be anticipating spending on servicing the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee in 2007–08, based on the experience over the last few years. I thank you also for your response to our questionnaire which we sent out. We focused very much on the estimates this time. But in regard to staffing matters, question 3.1, I notice you did not provide the figures for the CFA, the MFB and — I know it is not your area — the VLA and also the judicial officers. I know it may not necessarily appear on the department's accounts, but the costs for these services do actually appear in the budget, even if only partially, so I wonder if it could be provided in terms of the staffing. We would all like to know how many judges we have got and also how many people are in the metropolitan fire and emergency services.

Mr CAMERON — We cannot with LSB, but we can with our statutory authorities.

The CHAIR — Thank you. I am sure the secretary will take on the other ones in other parts of the justice portfolio. That concludes consideration of budget estimates for the portfolios of police, emergency services and corrections. I thank the minister, the commissioner and departmental officers for their attendance today. It has been very comprehensive. Where questions have been taken on notice the committee will follow up with you in writing at a later date. The committee requests that written responses to these matters be provided within 30 days, and they will be considered to form part of a further report of this committee to Parliament. Thank you very much.

Mr CAMERON — Thank you, Chair, and thank you to your committee for your courtesy.

Committee adjourned.