

VERIFIED TRANSCRIPT

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into budget estimates 2008–09

Melbourne — 15 May 2008

Members

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Witnesses

Mr B. Cameron, Minister for Corrections,
Dr R. Kelleher, Acting Secretary,
Mr K. Anderson, Acting Executive Director, and
Mr R. Wise, Acting Commissioner, Corrections Victoria.

Mr CAMERON — With me is Dr Kelleher, the acting secretary of the department; Kelvin Anderson, who is the corrections commissioner — he is acting deputy secretary at the moment, but his normal daytime job is the corrections commissioner; and Rod Wise, who is the acting commissioner, but is usually the deputy commissioner.

The CHAIR — You have a presentation for this portfolio which will take about 5 minutes; is that right?

Overheads shown.

Mr CAMERON — As is the way, we have a presentation about the corrections system, and we will fire that off.

First of all, on the corrections system — this is at last week anyway — how many prisoners were in the system? You can see the numbers are there: 3940 male and 245 female. In addition, the corrections system has to look after people on parole — that is, 1458 of those. That is interstate and commonwealth. People are dealt with under the commonwealth system, but the states do it behalf of the commonwealth. There is also 7800 involved in community corrections, over 2500 staff, 11 public prisons, 2 private prisons, 60 community corrections locations and 1 transition centre, the Judy Lazarus centre, which was opened about a year ago.

The next slide shows you the average prison population. You can see the growth that has occurred. It dropped there for a couple of years, and again there was very large growth during 2006; more growth during 2007 but not as large as 2006. Obviously there have been some policy drivers around that: restricting the use of suspended sentences on serious offences has been a contribution; sexual assault reform; obviously issues around major crime have impacted there on sentences; domestic violence policing — we are seeing that more rigorously dealt with; longer sentences; drug trends; a tougher breach policy by community corrections where people are on order, and community corrections being tougher about breaches; and also a reduction in the number of prisoners in police cells.

Here is a just a little bit of a graph about imprisonment rates and where Victoria sits vis-a-vis the other states. Just around community work — there is a lot of work happening around graffiti, and certainly corrections encourages partnerships with councils, and that has been quite active. The Better Pathways program we continue to see in the women's prisons, involving infrastructure works and program initiatives achieved, and obviously the management of high-security prisoners has been a challenge also. What we have seen is a new facility being opened there in recent times down at Barwon Prison.

The recidivism rates — we have continued to see in recent years the recidivism rates decrease. We see a little graph there to that effect. When you compare that to other states, you will see where Victoria sits. This is a very hard thing to compare like with like.

Mr WELLS — You are using a sample?

Mr CAMERON — No, it is very hard to compare like with like here, because we have a different prison mix, for example, to Queensland or other states. We tend to have more high-end prisoners, who are obviously the harder set.

The next thing is the challenges. Obviously the challenges are around prison growth and work within prisons to detect contraband and drugs, sex offenders in the community — and the management of high-security prisons remains a challenge.

In terms of the budget this year, new facilities, new beds, 594 new beds will come online over time: at Ararat in 11–12, 350 beds; 52 beds at Port Phillip; in late 09, 52 beds at Dhurringile; 40 beds at Beechworth; and 100 beds across the system. This will ultimately lead to additional staff, and over 100 of those will be at Ararat when that is operational.

In terms of the conclusion and looking forward, environmental management in Victoria's prisons, that essentially occurs around the use of water and working on that, also around land care with minimum security prisoners at Ararat, Loddon, Langi Kal Kal, Dhurringile and Beechworth. Corrections is always master planning and planning for the future, because corrections is one of those businesses where people turn up at your door, and they always take them in.

They are not like a hotel. They cannot turn anyone away. Master planning and contingency planning is always important. Very soon we will be seeing the opening of the new centre for indigenous offenders near Yarram. That is going to be the learning place. That is for indigenous offenders on a community-based order. They do not have to go there, but that residential unit will be an option. We believe there will be good take-up. That is it, in a nutshell. Obviously you will have some questions to ask about that and other matters.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Minister, for that presentation.

Mr SCOTT — In the handout you have just given us, you list under ‘challenges’ the projected growth in prison numbers. What is the government doing to address the growing number of prisoners in Victoria?

Mr CAMERON — In relation to prison numbers we might just go back to the graph. You will see the prison numbers listed there. Obviously there are factors at both ends here. One of the factors is some of the policy drivers, which I outlined, but at the other end it is also about trying to work on some rehabilitation measures and trying to continue to bring down the rate of recidivism. I will ask the corrections commissioner to go over those things.

Mr ANDERSON — As you can see from the graph, there was a levelling off of the prison population between 04 and 06. Essentially that reflects the investment there was in a strategy called the corrections long-term management strategy, which provided for new infrastructure but also provided for a number of diversionary programs and rehabilitation programs. We are seeing the effects of those through that period, and then, as the minister said, there have been a number of policy decisions which have meant the increase to the current prison population.

Although we are always reviewing the demand for prison places, we are at the same time developing a demand management strategy. That demand management strategy will essentially look at those groups of offenders that we can invest in to either hold them safely in the community or to provide different types of rehabilitation programs, which again will put, if you like, a brake on this growth in the prison numbers.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — In relation to the slide you had up there about new facilities — —

Mr CAMERON — Hang on, we will get the slide up, if you like.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — You ran through the increase in the new beds. I was trying to write it down quickly. Can you just run through it again? I know it is on the record.

Mr CAMERON — Of those, there are 350 at the new prison at Ararat, which will be next to the old prison — so a doubling of its activity. That will be 350 beds. There will be 52 beds at Port Phillip; 52 beds at Dhurringile; 40 beds at Beechworth; and there will also be 100 beds across the system.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — Relating it to the budget paper, this anticipation of growth, Mr Anderson made mention before about the increase because of policy decisions. I was trying to get clarity on what were some of the policy decisions and you say have impacted on the increase in bed numbers being required?

Mr CAMERON — If we just go back over some of the policy changes, you had the change in relation to suspended sentencing for various serious offences, which you will remember. That would have made an impact. Sexual assault reform and the way sexual assault matters are dealt with and the rates of conviction — that has obviously made an impact. We have seen the issues around major crime of recent years. Obviously that makes an impact and also makes an impact around high security prisoners as well.

Domestic violence policing and the fact that that is being more rigorously attended to also has an impact. The longer sentences — we are seeing longer sentences imposed by the courts. Also a toughening of the policy of community corrections, particularly in the last couple of years. People, for example, might be on an intensive correction order or a community-based order. The tolerance level there is substantially different to what it was. So we are seeing people breached more and taken back to court. That could result in any number of outcomes.

One of the outcomes of that clearly impacts on the number of people that are in prisons. We have also seen a reduction in the use of police cells. Now there is a lot less people in police cells than there were a couple of years ago. That also has an impact on the prison system. Collectively, in terms of cells and prisons, it does not change what the number might be, but you have more in one and less in the other.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — In respect of the increase, and it was one of my pet hates when I was there a while back — not in jail; I will clarify that — when I had shadow corrections I noticed the amount of relocatable prisons. Those increases that you have suggested — the 350 et cetera — are they a component of relocatables? Obviously Ararat is not, but are the others part of relocatables? If they are, is there a funding outcomes or requirements from the budget for those? Have they been moved from other prisons?

Mr ANDERSON — No, the 350 beds at Ararat will be stand-alone new facility. We will be co-joined with the existing prison. That will allow us to re-profile the existing prison also. We are calling the 52 beds at Port Phillip and at Dhurringile quick-build beds.

We will go to the providers and look for a solution to how quickly we can get those beds produced so that they will be online by late 2009. The 40 beds at Beechworth are the same type of construction as that facility which we opened only about two years ago, and the other 100 beds across the system will be a combination of better use of some of our facilities. At open prisons we have been able to use some existing buildings and convert those to accommodation, but there will also be an element of doubling up; for example, at the remand centre there will be a small number of double bunks put into a protection unit.

The strategy we have had for some time has been to use these flexible beds and to move into those flexible beds when our musters become high. Then, as permanent accommodation comes on, we are able not to decommission them but effectively mothball them and then go back into them as we need. You will see over the last two years we have opened the new remand centre with 600 beds at Laverton and the 300-bed facility at Lara. That allowed us to come out of some of our flexible beds and simply not use them. As the numbers have increased, as you saw on the graph previously, then we have been able to move back into that surge capacity. That is the same strategy we will use with the Ararat and Beechworth facilities. We will build new; that will allow us to come out of that flexible accommodation, and then if we do require surge capacity, then we move back into that flexible capacity.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — The quick-build beds — are they just a renaming of relocatables? Is that what you are calling them?

Mr ANDERSON — We are changing the name because we do not want to assume that it will just be a relocatable; it might be another way of building. For example, with the 52 beds at Dhurringile, because that is a minimum security facility, you would not need to build maximum security-type relocatable cellular accommodation. That might be a series of cottage-style accommodation where people can self-cater.

Dr SYKES — Are you increasing the Dhurringile ones because you are expecting to put a few quasi plug-the-pipeline terrorists away in the near future?

The CHAIR — I think that is probably off the subject.

Mr NOONAN — Just a quick point of clarification: these figures do not include youth detention facilities?

Mr CAMERON — No. The youth training centres are in DHS.

Mr NOONAN — Okay. My question goes to your second dot point in terms of challenges: detecting drugs and other contraband. As part of this budget what new measures have been or will be put in place to increase security and detect drugs and other contraband in the adult prison system in Victoria?

Mr CAMERON — Drugs and contraband have always been an issue in the prison system, but Victorian prisons are doing a good job on that front. We do not want to see them introduced into prisons, and obviously rigorous barrier control and systems are needed, and they have now been put in place. As part of the Victorian prisons drugs strategy, walk-through ion scanners continue to operate at Barwon, Melbourne Assessment Prison and the Metropolitan Remand Centre, and since they have been put in they have been very effective. They can also be used to detect explosives.

The Metropolitan Assessment Prison, Barwon, the Metropolitan Remand Centre and Marngoneet Correctional Centre all continue to use biometric identification systems — that is, iris scanning — to identify all persons entering and leaving the prison. You have to sort of register so they know that you are you. There are also security booths — you have to walk into the security booth — and that is in addition to hand-held scanners and X-ray

machines. I will ask the corrections commissioner to elaborate on that further and on how that regime continues to be effective.

Mr ANDERSON — Essentially what we are relying on is our intelligence collection system in order to target our effort at barrier controls. As the minister says, prisoners have a habit of trying to introduce contraband into our facilities, and it is not necessarily just the things that you would naturally think they would be interested in, like alcohol or drugs. For example, mobile phones would be a hot commodity, you can imagine, in prisons, and our challenge is that as those things become miniaturised with more and more plastic in them, detecting them through the normal means of metal scanning might not be that successful.

In our maximum security facilities we have moved to very sophisticated drug detection booths, which, as you have heard, can also be used to detect explosives. We then also rely very heavily on the use of our intelligence section and our passive alert detection dogs, which are trained to sniff around our visitors on a targeted basis looking for, in particular, drugs.

For an example of how successful we have been, from July 2007 to March 2008 we have conducted a total of 12 698 visitor PAD searches — that is, the passive alert dogs I was speaking about — and a total of 3231 vehicle searches. The vehicle searches are particularly important, because members of the public do not realise that as soon as they enter the car park of a prison they are in a prison — they are in a gazetted prison — and so that allows us to search those vehicles.

As a consequence of those searches the sorts of things we are detecting are cannabis, prescription drugs, alcohol, varieties of white powder, smoking implements and syringes, and we have even found weapons like knives, batons and tools being seized in those barrier controls. It is an important part of our work. To give you an example of the scale of this, at a recent search of a vehicle at the remand centre we detected 100 syringes in the car. Naturally when that occurs we involve the police, and then the police will take care of any criminal charges that follow.

Mr BARBER — This big upgrade to prison capacity seems to have taken a lot of people by surprise. What sort of exercise has the government been undertaking to project these numbers? If that has been done on the quiet, then what consultation do you do with stakeholders and with other groups before you move from predict to provide? What are the key findings of that research, and will we get to read about it publicly? For example, have you modelled the number of women or indigenous people who will be in this expanded system?

Mr CAMERON — I might get Kelvin to talk about that briefly, but as things change corrections has to forward project and forward plan. Obviously that is critical in the whole corrections system. As I said, people turn up at the doorstep and corrections take them in. To that end whenever corrections see a change in patterns they have to be able to adapt for the future. That is why we have put beds into existing prisons as part of the budget. On the existing Ararat site, effectively there has been a doubling of that. That is something which is supported by the Ararat community. But in terms of how corrections does its predicting and its modelling, the corrections commissioner will give you a run down.

Mr ANDERSON — Essentially we use two methods, but they both rely on a demographic model. We look at the growth in the population, the age and then work out what the offending cohort would be. On top of that we overlay some expert advice, and we certainly consult stakeholders at this point. Broadly though, stakeholders are in the legal or the criminal justice profession, and so what we say to them is, 'What will be the trends in the next five years? Will we see an increase in this type of offending?'. On judges, 'Do you think longer sentences will be given?'. That then goes into the mix. We are following very much on the projections that we have just presented in terms of the actual prison population, so we have been within — sort of — 5 per cent of those projections, and we are regularly re-doing them; we do them once every year.

Really the consultation with the broader stakeholders comes when we know that we have money to expand. In the Ararat facility, for example, we certainly went to the local shire and spoke to people locally about whether we would be welcome there. We were pleased to have their support, and then we knew we could expand that facility knowing there would be local support for it.

Mr PAKULA — Minister, I am interested in the new graffiti laws. Apart from knowing what the government is planning to do about graffiti, in terms of the forward estimates I would also like to know in terms of the corrections system what is the likely effect of those laws?

Mr CAMERON — Thank you very much. As you know there are new laws about penalties and on-the-spot fines which have been generally well received across the community; not by all sectors, but certainly by those who do not like graffiti. As part of that a continuing emphasis has been around community work involving graffiti. Corrections Victoria has ramped that up, and what Corrections Victoria likes to do is to work with the local community so that people who are on a community based order, for example, can do some graffiti clean up. Corrections Victoria had 8 graffiti vans. That has been increased by 6 in the last year so that there are now 14. They are in discussions with other councils — new councils — around the work that they can do. But they have been doing this program to a lesser extent for quite a while now.

Since 2005 the graffiti removal program has involved 7500 offenders who have completed over 84 000 hours of community work. They have removed an area equivalent to 13 MCG playing fields. Obviously we will be seeing more vans and an increasing ramp up of that, but we see this as an important way that community corrections can contribute to its local community, particularly where a council encourages it and wants to take part. But the corrections commissioner will elaborate further.

Mr ANDERSON — Yes, indeed. We are currently involved through 14 community corrections locations across the state, and we are in partnership with 26 local governments or community partners. There is a nice sideline to this. We have been able to produce the graffiti removal trailers at Ararat prison, so we have been able to build them in prison to our specifications, and then they are used by offenders in the community to go around and clean up the graffiti.

Essentially the graffiti removal is done in two ways. It is either done with the use of recycled water through high-pressure sprays or, increasingly, given the issues with water, we are painting out graffiti. The effect of this, apart from the aesthetics in the community, has been that recently I was able to view some of these programs. After they have been involved the offenders actually take some ownership of the site and are able to say, 'I cleaned that up. I would prefer it did not get done over again'. We have found that where graffiti is removed it stays removed for a considerable amount of time.

Dr SYKES — Is there a network there so the message gets out, 'Don't do it!'.

Mr ANDERSON — I think that might be pretty accurate.

Mr WELLS — Minister, I am just interested in home detention. Which section is home detention under in the budget papers? I am looking at page 176 of budget paper 3 — —

Mr CAMERON — Hang on. Budget paper 3 — —

Mr WELLS — Yes, page 176. There is a heading 'Prisoner supervision and support'. The other category is 'Community based offender supervision'. Which category does home detention fall under out of those two?

Mr CAMERON — Sorry. Which were the two you referred to?

Mr WELLS — Just on that page, Minister, page 176. There is 'Prisoner supervision and support' and 'Community based offender supervision'. Where does home detention fit in?

Mr ANDERSON — We fund and we have attached the home detention program through our prisons directorate and not our community-based corrections directorate. That is because it is both a front-end and a back-end system, meaning it can be given as a court option but also as an option that the parole board considers.

Mr WELLS — Why is that not in the budget papers? Or have I missed it somewhere? The program for home detention and the funding for it.

Mr ANDERSON — It is just not mentioned.

Dr KELLEHER — It is part of the bottom line.

The CHAIR — The 504.9 is part of the total. Presumably therefore the number of people on home detention is included in the daily average number of prisoners, is that correct?

Mr ANDERSON — No, it is counted separately.

Mr WELLS — Hang on, we need to clarify this. We have the chair saying one thing and you are saying another thing. Where do we find the number of prisoners who are out on home detention? Is it in the top section, or where is it?

Mr ANDERSON — It is just not counted.

Mr WELLS — They are not counted?

Dr KELLEHER — There is no specific output measure in relation to home detention, but the costs of home detention are included in the total output cost for prisoner supervision and support.

The CHAIR — Can you advise, either now or on notice, just how many are on home detention and expect to be on home detention?

Mr CAMERON — Yes, I think we know — —

Mr ANDERSON — We know how many people.

Mr WELLS — Has that always been the case, that you have not included it?

Mr ANDERSON — Yes.

Mr WELLS — Can I ask some questions then in relation to home detention? Obviously, how many do you have on home detention? How many breaches have there been for those who are on home detention? What have been the results of punishment in regard to the breaches by those who have been on home detention? I mean, how many have been returned to jail, for example?

Mr ANDERSON — Since the program started and until 6 May this year the referrals for the home detention program have totalled 705, but in total only 299 orders have been made — the rest having been found unsuitable. As of 6 May there were 28 orders that were current. That is not an uncommon figure. It hovers around that mark, maybe a little more, maybe a little bit less, but about 28. Of that, 249 orders have been completed; 17 were revoked due to breach, and those breaches have been dealt with by the parole board and resulted in imprisonment; and there have been 5 revocations on top of that 17 due to accommodation issues. Typically that might be where a co-resident has withdrawn permission for the person to remain. Out of that, 17 due to breach and then 5 due to accommodation issues.

Mr WELLS — I guess I was wondering about concerns about the partner not being satisfied, but that is fine. Kelvin, you said 17 were revoked, but how many breaches have there been?

Mr ANDERSON — That is due to breach. We treat all breaches seriously. The majority of those breaches related to the detection of drug and alcohol usage.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — All breaches result in revocation?

Mr ANDERSON — If we detect drugs and alcohol, we will put that to the parole board as a breach and it will consider what to do with it. If you are talking about a breach being outside of curfew hour, then I do not have that figure with me, but we could get it.

Mr WELLS — Can we ask for that on notice, please?

The CHAIR — Yes.

Mr WELLS — The total number of breaches.

The CHAIR — I know we have some fascination with figures and trends and statistics, but could I ask you what is the cost of prisoners per head of population, and how does this compare to other jurisdictions?

Mr CAMERON — Thank you very much, Chair. We do have some figures. Victoria had the third highest recurrent cost per prisoner day in Australia during 06–07. The recurrent cost per day is \$212. That is above the average around Australia of \$187. But it is a bit like I mentioned before in relation to the recidivism rates; it is very hard to compare the whole system with the whole system. That is because in Victoria we have a different

weighting of prisoners. We have far more medium and maximum security and a smaller number of minimum. Obviously maximum security costs more than minimum; there is obviously a hierarchy. The consequence of that is our system does cost more. That is really because of the lower prisoner rate. At the start I showed you that graph about what the prisoner rate was per head of population and Victoria was relatively low; I think it was only the ACT that was lower. That is because obviously we have the harder end of the market. I might ask the corrections commissioner if he wants to add anything further around those matters.

Mr ANDERSON — The per day cost also is influenced by the significant investment there has been in the rehabilitation-type programs, such as Better Pathways for women offenders. But also our expenditure per head of general population is extremely low. Victoria's expenditure is \$75 per head of general population, compared to the national average of 105. I guess that is all I would like really to add. Our costs in terms of prisons, the public prisons are currently averaging \$288.20 a day, compared to our private prison average of \$254.30. But these comparisons are very difficult because each of our facilities is different — different size, different profile, so there is quite a variation within those figures.

The CHAIR — There was some commentary on that in our outcomes report just recently, but we may well follow that up in the future as outcomes rather than necessarily estimates.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Minister, I would like to ask you about the expansion of facilities you mentioned earlier, just in relation to the timing of the commissioning of those and the capital funding for them, in particular Ararat, Port Phillip and Beechworth. Can you give us an indicative time when they will be commissioned and what the capital funding is?

Mr CAMERON — Yes. I went over that at the outset, around the time line. I will just go back to my presentation notes. At Ararat that will be in the 2011–12 year. It is late 2009 at Port Phillip Prison, late 2009 at Dhurringile, 40 beds at Beechworth by 2010, and then the 100 beds across the system will be earlier.

Mr ANDERSON — By the end of this year.

Mr CAMERON — By the end of 2008. In relation to the total cost, in the budget papers you will see — you will just have to excuse me for a moment.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — It was \$12 million last year. Is that the funding for these?

Mr CAMERON — No. We will just get the figure out for you. Just give me one moment.

The CHAIR — In terms of what you are spending for assets for prisons?

Mr CAMERON — Yes.

The CHAIR — Yes, in appendix A on page 339 of budget paper 3; I assume it is 'Building confidence in corrections'?

Dr KELLEHER — That is it.

The CHAIR — That is \$78.2 million, and \$316 over the four years.

Mr CAMERON — Obviously when it comes to Ararat we would not want to be putting a figure on that because that might be a little bit indicative to the market, so we do not intend to do that.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — But the Ararat funding, though, is built into that aggregate?

Mr CAMERON — Yes.

Ms MUNT — In your presentation you list 245 female prisoners that are currently accommodated within the system. I am no expert, but I would assume that female prisoners have issues that are specific to them. I was wondering if you could let me know if anything has been done in particular to address mental health issues of female prisoners and also to reduce the rates of imprisonment for female offenders.

Mr CAMERON — Having gender-specific initiatives is something that we support in Victoria. Victoria is a leader of this in Australia, and other states come to see what we do. There are different needs for women; they

are different from those of a lot of men. The 2008–09 budget provides an additional \$7.7 million on the ongoing delivery of programs under the Better Pathways strategy at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre, which is one of the women's prisons. We have two: one at Dame Phyllis Frost, and the other one at Tarrengower, a smaller prison which is up near Maldon, in my electorate actually.

You ask me specifically in relation to a new mental health facility. That opened a little while ago; it is called Marmak at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre. We believe the establishment of that unit is very much a positive step forward, and to date all the feedback has been that that has been a very good advance. In addition there are other facilities which have just come online at Dame Phyllis Frost in the last 12 months, and I will get the corrections commissioner to take you over that, but also the reason why he so keenly supports gender-specific initiatives in the corrections system.

Mr ANDERSON — We were very fortunate to get \$25½ million for the Better Pathways strategy, and, as the minister says, \$7.2 million of that has been delivered on infrastructure; and in total it will go to about \$18.3 million for programs to strengthen early intervention, diversion, rehabilitation and transitional support for women. You are correct: women offenders, by the time they come to prison, have been through the system. They have very complex needs. They have high-risk behaviours, and it is true that they have a history of abuse, both self-abuse — it might be drug and alcohol taking — and certainly there has been a high level of other abuse, physical and mental abuse of them.

There is also a high level of psychiatric need, so the Marmak unit now provides 24-hour nursing coverage for 20 women offenders — prisoners, I should say. Why that is a benefit for us is that prior to having that facility the only options we could exercise for women who were displaying adverse behaviour, particularly at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre, were management options. We are now able to use a supported mental health facility for them within the grounds of the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre.

The transitional programs have also been particularly successful. We have invested in a women-for-work program. To date 80 women have been placed in employment on release, with 46 of those women being placed in employment for a minimum period of 16 weeks.

We have also created an integrated program called the Women's Integrated Support Program for Transition, and currently that has supplied support to 190 women exiting prison, including some supported accommodation; and that also includes two transitional bail support facilities that we have, one in Mildura and one in Shepparton, to place indigenous women offenders released by courts to bail.

Also money is available to support women to complete their community-based orders. That was something that we found in our Better Pathways research: that there was a high number of women who were not able to meet their commitments to their community-based orders, particularly the program commitment. Why is this all so important?

We believe that if we do intervene heavily with these programs, we will be able to do something about reducing the reoffending rate of what is a relatively small number of prisoners in our system — any day about 250 to about 280 — so we think the investment is well worth it. There has been a reduction in the number of women in prison from a high a couple of years ago, so there are some early indications that these programs are working.

Dr SYKES — I want to take the opportunity to make a positive comment to you, Minister and Kelvin, in relation to the role of the inmates, I think from Dhurringile and Beechworth, in the post-fire recovery activities. Their assistance in fencing and other recovery activities was really appreciated by the local community. It gave them a real lift, and I would like to think it gave the prisoners a sense of satisfaction. So if you could pass that on to those involved, I would much appreciate that.

Mr ANDERSON — We would be delighted to.

Mr CAMERON — Last year some of them were umpires. Are they still umpires?

Mr ANDERSON — Yes, they are still involved.

Mr CAMERON — There was a shortage of umpires in the area. It was a very innovative community engagement despite apprehension at work.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — From football to forward estimates: just a brief question and one you may wish to take on notice; the issue that you have raised during this presentation has been one of the matter of drugs in the prisons, and obviously drugs in the community and the impact that that has in terms of prison population and the like. I have gone through the budget but I cannot see any sort of indication as to how specifically drugs are being addressed in the prison population. I reference it back to your table in respect of recidivism. Whilst I accept that the percentage is lower comparatively, it is still a high figure and obviously drugs are a component of prison. You relate it to the home detention as well and I am just trying to work out given that — I think it was Bendigo, Rod?

Mr WISE — Yes.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — Bendigo closed. That was a dedicated drugs prison. I have not used the right word but —

Mr ANDERSON — It had a large program.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — It had a large part of the rehab population. What has happened to the prisoners from there and what programs do you have in place in the funding context to deal with those types of offenders who obviously have a high level of recidivism — I do not know but I gather they do?

Mr CAMERON — Yes. As you would appreciate from your past, if you took away alcohol and you took away drugs, there would be a large collapse in the corrections business, but of course we all face the realities of life. There was the program at Bendigo but as you know, there was a large rebuilding program and reconfiguration and there are now programs at Marngoneet. Kelvin, you might like to expand on that.

Mr ANDERSON — What we have at Marngoneet is a 300-bed program prison at Lara, co-located with Barwon, and that has three areas for therapy: one is sex offender therapy, the other being anti-violence therapy, and the third being our drug and alcohol program. While we do have drug and alcohol programs throughout the system, that ranges from drug and alcohol programs that talk about the harm that you do to yourself using drugs and alcohol, the intensive program is located at that facility. That is where we have focused all our clinical effort. Currently we have introduced a screening tool which streams people by their need for therapy, and they will be headed towards Marngoneet to get their drug and alcohol treatment.

In terms of proving the point, we have a random drug test program and during 07–08 it was 1.98 per cent of those tests that came back positive. Between the barrier controls and therapy we are seeing a reduction in the number of people returning positive results while they are in jail. This is one of our constant challenges, of course — to keep drugs out and to stop people from using drugs.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much. That concludes consideration of budget estimates in the portfolios: Police and Emergency Services earlier; and Corrections now. I thank the minister and departmental officers for their attendance today. There are a couple of issues that have been put on notice there. We will follow up in writing on those and we would like replies within 30 days. Thank you very much, Minister, for your attendance.

Witnesses withdrew.