

Community Coalition on Corrections

30 April 2007

Mr Simon Corbell
Attorney General
ACT Legislative Assembly
GPO Box 1020,
Canberra, ACT 2601

Dear Simon,

Thank you for your letter of 16 March 2007 in response to the Community Coalition on Corrections' letter of 22 December 2006.

The Community Coalition on Corrections' letter outlined some serious concerns that were emerging from operational documents for the Alexander Maconochie Centre and in particular the Drug, Alcohol and Tobacco Strategy. At the time of writing the letter the Coalition had examined all the relevant documents available, including two of those that you referred to in your reply.

Your letter has done little to allay our concerns. It did not address their substance and bade us be reassured by a critical documents that is not yet available.

We note however that further work is proceeding on the operating procedures for through-care.

The issue of that critical document, the ACT Health Corrections Health Services Plan, is long overdue. The Drug, Alcohol and Tobacco Strategy was not released for public comment before finalisation and we fear that when the closely related health document finally becomes available, there will be insufficient time for meaningful community consultation. Our concerns that Plan may be seriously flawed are heightened by the apparent subservience of health considerations to security ones in the *Corrections Management Bill* and the fact that the Bill, wrongly in our view, makes health the responsibility of the corrections authorities rather than the Department of Health.

The Chief Minister in his speech to the Assembly in August 2004 laid down clear objectives for the Alexander Maconochie Centre which was referred to in the Coalition's letter of 22 December. The following are quotations from the Chief Minister's speech:

- The centre would provide "more secure, humane and safer accommodation". ACT detainees would not be "accommodated with a significantly larger population where violence, assault and power are features of the dominant culture".
- "The prospects for the rehabilitation of ACT sentenced prisoners will be improved"
- "Possibilities for reducing rates of recidivism will be improved" and there would be "reductions in offending behaviour"
- "The health and well being of the ACT prisoner population will be improved"
- Programs would target "reducing drug and alcohol addictions"
- Programs would aim at "making improvements in mental health"
- There would be "minimising [of] self-harm"

- “Improvements in prisoner educational attainments will be targeted” and there would be “improved training and work skills that are appropriate and transferable to the workforce in the Canberra region”
- There would be “smooth reintegration of prisoners back into the ACT community on release”
- “Prisoners will have greater accessibility to, and interaction with, family and other supports to assist in their rehabilitation and to maintain family unity.”
- The “risk factors confronting families with children coming into contact with the criminal justice system will be reduced.”

The Coalition’s letter made the point that performance measurements for rehabilitation should be in place to give effect to these objectives. On the advice of your Department you wrote that “the Performance Indicators proposed for the AMC, as detailed in the ACTS AOD Strategy, sufficiently address this concern.” They patently do not as the attached table shows. An evaluation strategy needs to be established which is based on adequate performance indicators and which clearly and transparently measure the performance of the AMC against the objectives that have been established. The Coalition has concerns that the proposed performance indicators will not be adequate to the task. Of the 25 so-called performance indicators in the AOD Strategy only 6 will measure outcomes, the rest are simply measures of “busyness”. The Coalition therefore asks that a great deal more attention be paid to the identification of performance indicators in the AOD Strategy and other documents.

The Coalition is of the view that all the correct building blocks should be in place early to give effect to the principles that were inherent in Alexander Machonchie’s approach to corrections and as outlined in the Chief Minister’s media release of 9 January 2004 in which he said: *“The prison would be a safe and secure environment and aim to maximise rehabilitative and re-integrative opportunities for ACT prisoners – links with community agencies will also be encouraged to facilitate a ‘throughcare’ model of case management.”*

These are ideals that the Coalition supports and is keen should be realised. However the trends that appear to be developing in respect of the policies and strategies, as outlined in the Coalition’s letter of 22 December 2006, indicate that these ideals will not be achieved. Your comment about needing to have “a realistic understanding of what the community can expect” simply exacerbates that concern. The Chief Minister has articulated what the community is entitled to expect.

Thank you for your offer to raise any further matters with the AMC Project Director, John Paget. The Coalition has had the benefit of a meeting with Mr Paget and he has agreed to meet with us again in the near future.

Yours Sincerely,

B McConnell
Chair

PERFORMANCE MEASURES FOR THE ALEXANDER MACONOCHIE CENTRE

Outcomes to which the Chief Minister has committed the Government	Performance measures under <i>Drug, Alcohol and Tobacco Strategy</i>	Proposed performance measures	Comments
Humane and safe detention “More secure, humane and safer accommodation” - Not “accommodated with a significantly larger population where violence, assault and power are features of the dominant culture”.	-----	Assaults and other victimisation of prisoners including bullying Extent of self harm Changes in mental health status during detention	
Rehabilitation “The prospects for the rehabilitation of ACT sentenced prisoners will be improved”	-----	Changes before and in six months after detention in: Welfare dependency Employment status Accommodation status Debt Family integration Social contacts e.g. with others in the drug scene	Several of these measures are mentioned in the context of “Internal Reporting” in <i>Vocational Educational and Training and Rehabilitative Programs in The Alexander Maconochie Centre</i> pp. 56-57. Would require post release follow up survey which would need to be voluntary, confidential and independent of JACS.
Recidivism “possibilities for reducing rates of recidivism will be improved” and “Reductions in offending behaviour“	-----	Changes over time in the percentage of released prisoners who re-offend.	Consistent criteria for measuring recidivism should be laid down and consistently followed to show trends Base line measures of recidivism should be established before the AMC is opened.
Physical Health “The health and well being of the ACT prisoner population will be improved”	-----	Change in physical health on admission and release; including whether suffering from hepatitis C or B or HIV and other blood borne diseases	Confidential voluntary surveys independent of JACS may be necessary to determine status regarding blood borne viruses that may not be apparent on release.
Addictions “reducing drug and alcohol	“Decreased demand for drugs in the AMC, PDC	Extent of drug and alcohol use in six months before detention, on release and six months after	DAT Strategy focuses on trends of drug use in prison &c. Focus should be on change

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addictions”	and community corrections” (p. 29)	release	in individual behaviours. Post release survey vital because addiction status that really matters is before and after detention. Surveys, particularly post release follow up ones, would need to be voluntary, confidential and independent of JACS.
Mental Health “making improvements in mental health”	-----	Change in mental health on admission and release	
Self harm “minimising self-harm”	“Deaths and self-harm in custody” (p. 30)	Deaths and self-harm in the six months following release as well as during custody	Reintegration into community can be very stressful. Released prisoners are particularly vulnerable to overdose deaths. Post release surveys need to be voluntary, confidential and independent of JACS.
Education and skills “Improvements in prisoner educational attainments will be targeted” “improved training and work skills that are appropriate and transferable to the workforce in the Canberra region”	-----	Skills and educational qualifications attained in detention Usefulness of those skills in the Canberra workforce Employment status before and after detention	Some performance measures are listed in <i>Vocational Educational and Training and Rehabilitative Programs in The Alexander Maconochie Centre</i> pp. 56-57
Reintegration “smooth reintegration of prisoners back into the ACT community on release”	-----	See under <i>Rehabilitation</i> above	
Family interaction	-----	Performance measures need to be developed	Formulation of performance measures

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“Prisoners will have greater accessibility to, and interaction with, family and other supports to assist in their rehabilitation and to maintain family unity.”		<p>directed at:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Changes in positive family and other relationships during detention; Changes in family unity associated with detention; Extent of contact between detainees and family; changes in the capacity of those in the family support network of prisoners to provide support 	<p>needs to reflect outcome of measures recommended particularly by Standing Committee on Community Services and Social Equity, <i>The forgotten victims of crime: families of offenders and their silent sentence</i>, report no. 7 (Legislative Assembly, Canberra, June 2004) and the ACT Alcohol & other Drug Strategy, 2004-2008</p> <p>Base line measurements need to be established for existing system with NSW</p>
<p>Children of detainees “risk factors confronting families with children coming into contact with the criminal justice system will be reduced.”</p>	-----	<p>Performance measures need to be developed directed at:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> maintenance of healthy relationship of prisoners with their children (§5.14) whether relationship of prisoners with their children has fractured (§5.17) extent to which children of prisoners get into difficulties such as school drop out, developmental health problems, self harm, become drug dependent or offend (§2.33) 	<p>Para references are to the <i>The forgotten victims of crime: families of offenders and their silent sentence</i> report.</p>