

Submission 4

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BY:

NSW JUSTICE ADVOCACY CENTRE INC.

COMMITTEE SECRETARY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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Overview

The Australian approach to dealing with crime has been to place the emphasis on effective policing and harsher punishment as an ongoing deterrent in the hope of reducing crime.

The real facts show that both policies although popular with the media and provide governments with good election rhetoric are total absolute failures. The hard facts are that 58.4% of prisoners Australia wide are actually in prison because they have been imprisoned before.

The real cost is to the general public and will be in the order of 22 billion Dollars in the current financial year, and this doesn't take into account the ongoing cost of running the criminal justice system (police courts gaols and other services)

As a volunteer member of justice action for the past twenty years and now the CEO of the NSW justice advocacy centre I find with out exemption that all sections of politics police courts and prisons just don't see the true facts or alternatively ignore them because of the vested interest in their own survival. The opportunity now exists to make subtle changes to the way we think about the current institutional approach to crime and the media driven public perception of crime and punishment.

Australians largest state NSW provides us with a clear overview of the current trends in law enforcement.

The 2000 figures for the bureau of crime statistics clearly show areas where immediate changes can be made.

2,1225 people attended court by way of summons another 58,170 by way of court attendance notice here we see 63.9% The amount of time and money spent on these matters must clearly alarm any thinking person.

The simple facts are this group could be better dealt with by way of on the spot fine there by freeing up a huge number of police for street duty and unclogging



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The courts for more serious matters. Fine provides increased revenue court costs are dramatically reduced and between 25 and 50% more police time is now available to be reallocated for real crime prevention.

It is now important to note that no loss of civil liberties accrue (as with all on the spot fines) there is a section on the infringement notice to elect to have the matter heard by a court, if the person feels they are not guilty.

Proper management of criminal justice resources must look closely at the remaining figure for the 2000 period.

44,824 were dealt with by way of charge over 10,000 of these accused persons spent between 4 days and 4 months in prison on remand.

The frightening figure here is that only 85.2% were actually convicted and of this 85.2% only 51,3 actually received a prison sentence.

Once again it is clearly demonstrated how huge and unnecessary millions of dollars of public money is poured in to the black hole of law and order auctions And the perception of being tough on crime.

We have more than enough police; we have sufficient courts and far more correction or prison bed than necessary.

The simple fact are if we take out the mentally ill and the homeless; we have some 20,000 less cases for police courts and prisons.

We are now able to divert over one billion dollar in to mental health homelessness and diversionary programmes.

Justice action and the advocacy centre have run these programmes over many years with great success achieving results as high as 90%.

With this type of history and clear facts showing we need to begin to find new directions I believe it is now time for governments and committees to hear and acknowledge the old system is now out dated and needs to be up graded from 18th century thinking to 21st century affirmative action.

Eric McCormack CJA CEO.