John Elferink
Minister for Correctional Services

Creating a better detention system to rehabilitate offending youths

18 February 2015

Minister for Correctional Services John Elferink will today release the Review of the Northern Territory Youth Detention System Report and announce that all 16 recommendations will be implemented in full.

Mr Elferink said work is already underway to implement a number of the Review’s recommendations, highlighting the Country Liberals Government’s commitment to create a better youth justice system to rehabilitate offending youths.

“The Review was commissioned in October last year following several concerning incidents in the youth detention system,” Mr Elferink said.

“The Review outlines that in recent years, both under Labor and Country Liberals Governments, there have been deficiencies in the management of youths in detention.

“The Country Liberals Government is committed to changing the Territory’s youth detention system, from enhanced training for staff and greater personal protection equipment, to a better case management approach and a formal and fair detainee incentive scheme.”

The Reviewer, Michael Vita, also backs the Northern Territory Government’s decision to move juvenile detainees to the Don Dale Youth Detention Centre (former site of the Berrimah Correctional Centre), stating that the Centre “will afford more opportunity to safely, securely and humanely accommodate both male and female detainees”.

“With almost $1 million of upgrades now complete, the Top End’s juvenile corrections facility will play an integral role in rehabilitating those young people who come into contact with the prison system,” Mr Elferink said.

“It is pleasing that among the recommendations, the Reviewer has commended the Seek Education or Employment not Detention (SEED) program.

“The SEED program was introduced last year for youth detainees to provide them with access to education programs and employment opportunities that they otherwise may not have access to, thereby supporting their reintegration back into the community.
“The SEED program and other initiatives to change the offending behaviour of youths in our corrections system is key to driving down crime in our community.”

The Reviewer also noted that the use of tear gas to contain a violent incident at the former Don Dale Juvenile Correctional Centre in August last year was “justifiable”.

“It must be remembered that a number of youths we currently have in our corrections system are some of the most violent we have ever seen,” Mr Elferink said.

“It is for this reason that better processes must be adopted and I have instructed the Commissioner for Correctional Services to begin work on this immediately.

“The Country Liberals Government has always had a tough approach to law and order and this will continue into the future. The offending youths must be held accountable, but they must also be presented with the opportunities to change their offending behaviour.

“I thank Mr Vita for his efforts on this Review and those individuals and organisations that made themselves available for contributions.”

Mr Vita is a youth justice expert with more than 15 years’ experience managing youth detention centres in Australia and is currently General Manager of Reiby Juvenile Justice Centre in New South Wales.

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