Canberra Must Cough up on Fishermen

Northern Territory and Western Australia have today called on the Howard Government to honour its responsibility towards the cost of imprisoning the burgeoning number of illegal fishermen.

The Federal Government recently passed legislation providing custodial sentences for foreign fishermen found fishing in Australian waters.

At the annual Corrective Services Ministers’ conference in Adelaide today, the Territory Justice Minister and the WA Corrective Services Minister said the expense of housing the prisoners captured under Federal legislation was an increasing impost on their budgets.

The NT Justice Minister Peter Toyne said Territory jails were already close to capacity.

“We support the Federal Government in defending our fishing stocks, but we’ve got to make sure we’ve got the infrastructure and the capacity behind the initiative,” he said.

The WA Corrective Services Minister Margaret Quirk said the Commonwealth isn’t paying sufficient attention to the flow-on effects to state and territory prison systems.

“In Western Australia, we estimate the cost of detaining current prisoner numbers to be well in excess of $3.8million.

“This doesn’t take into account the special requirements and additional costs in detaining foreign prisoners, such as health screening and providing interpreter services.

“With all the extra prisoners coming in under the new Federal regime, this cost will swell significantly and yet Canberra isn’t giving us one red cent extra.”

Dr Toyne said he has already written to the Federal Justice Minister Chris Ellison about the issue.

He also hopes to have talks with Senator Ellison while in Adelaide.

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