



Please explain: Christian Porter

## Crisis in jails

Some months ago Attorney-General Christian Porter gave an impressive address to a community group emphasising his view of the importance of the rehabilitative role of prisons, not just as custodial institutions. His opinion was exemplary. However, it is not assisted by his Government's policy on law and order which has resulted in an exponential rise in prison numbers of 150 per cent.

The situation is at crisis point. There are now two prisoners per small cell, locked in with their toilet facilities for about 12 hours straight, or longer when there is a "lock-down" as tensions rise within the prison. The therapeutic role of prison officers is non-existent as they struggle to control numbers and, most importantly, prisoners have reduced access to rehabilitative programs required before their release. The problem is compounded by the restrictive practices of the Prisoners' Review Board which is retaining more prisoners than usual.

Coupled with the mandatory sentencing laws passed last year, which reduced the discretionary powers of judges, and the proposed stop-and-search laws, the problem will be exacerbated.

Apart from the social impact of imprisonment on the family unit, especially when women are imprisoned, one can only ask: how cost-effective is it to imprison someone at \$100,000 a year if there are less-expensive preventive and rehabilitative measures?

For a party which prides itself on its fiscal policies, its approach to law-and-order issues is incongruous and dangerous; locking people in overcrowded prisons does not make a safer community.

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