

WOOROLOO PRISON FARM FOOTBALL TEAM —  
WEST AUSTRALIAN AMATEUR FOOTBALL LEAGUE

**690. Mr F.A. ALBAN to the Minister for Corrective Services:**

I note the announcement that the Wooroloo Prison Farm football team will be joining the West Australian Amateur Football League through the sponsorship of Swan Districts Football Club. How does this achievement fit within the context of the state's offender employment, education and recreation program?

**Mr C.C. PORTER replied:**

I thank the member for his question. It has been a very interesting two years dealing with the Wooroloo Bombers football team. I will provide a bit of context and background to the decision that has been reached and the outcome. This government has done a lot of work to try to increase the delivery of offender-based programs to prisoners. I described previously that we had a 68 per cent increase in the last year, and a 146 per cent increase in the two years since we have come to government.

One of the very important features in being able to achieve that was last year setting up an Aboriginal program facilitation unit, the sole responsibility of which is to deliver offender-based programs to Indigenous prisoners, particularly, with a focus on addictions-based offending programs and family violence-based offending programs. In the last year we have had a 45 per cent increase in the delivery of offender-based programs to Indigenous prisoners and 131 per cent since taking office—that is, over two years. One thing that we have done is linked the taking and completing of programs to other benefits inside the prison system, such as recreation, which I will come to with respect to the football side in a moment. One of the things that I might point out, though, is about the family violence offending programs, which we are running in the community and inside the prisons.

It seems to me that there has been a lot of debate and a lot of statements made about the percentage rate of Indigenous incarceration. I attended a very interesting conference with judicial leaders, judges and support staff last week. One of the focuses of that conference was to look at something that seems to be spoken about not nearly enough—that is, how it is the case that Indigenous persons are not merely jailed at disproportionate rates, but are also the victims of crime at highly disproportionate rates, particularly women. Some of the figures that were focused on at this conference relate to the fact that an Aboriginal woman is three or four times more likely to be a victim of a sexual assault, four or five times more likely to be a victim of an assault and, absolutely remarkably, 40 to 45 times more likely to be the victim of a serious assault requiring hospitalisation. That is an absolutely tragic and remarkable figure. Fifty to 60 per cent —

**Mr E.S. Ripper:** It is a terrible figure, isn't it?

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** Indeed it is. Fifty to 60 per cent of Aboriginal domestic violence involves weapons. We talk about the figure of Aboriginal incarcerations, and one of the points, which I wholeheartedly agree with, that was made at this conference is that if we really want to tackle that 39 per cent figure, yes, mental health is an issue, yes, fines are an issue and, yes, there are other issues to do with licensing, but the big-ticket item is trying to ensure that domestic violence in Aboriginal communities is reduced over time. If we can achieve that, we will make inroads into that incarceration figure. Indeed, that is something that I will be concentrating on over the next two years.

Another thing we discussed at that conference was the fact that we in Western Australia now have the highest rate, when we adjust all of the states' data according to eligibility requirements, for prisoner education participation. The highest rate is in WA, of all states across Australia, which is a significant improvement. Growth in vocational training was up 35 per cent in the last year, so we have made significant inroads there. One thing that has been very important is to link participation in these offender-based programs and education, vocational employment and training programs to recreation. The most popular feature of recreation in the prison system is football. It is just undoubted.

In June 2009, I had the experience as minister of receiving an enormous amount, a great spate, of very negative media attached to the Wooroloo Prison Farm football team. The team was playing in the Mercantile Football Association and there were allegations of thuggery, if we like—broken bones, admissions to hospitals—from certain people who were unnamed sources in articles. Obviously, that was a matter of concern to me as minister. It was one of those classic situations that when we actually peeled away all the layers to the claims that were made, there was really very little there. It seemed to me that the biggest problem with the Wooroloo Bombers prison side, in which Andrew Krakouer was playing, playing in the mercantile league was that the team was too good. In fact, it was very, very good.

I had a long meeting with the commissioner after this very heavy spate of negative media on talkback, and particularly in local newspapers. We reached the joint decision that we must do everything that we can as a government to continue a league for that team. We held off for a year and had an internal competition with that side. We have now managed to broker an agreement between the West Australian Amateur Football League, Swan Districts Football Club and the Department of Corrective Services. That team will now play in the West Australian Amateur Football League. I think that league is a much better fit for the team because it is about the standard of side it should be playing. It is something that, I think, will provide a range of benefits to all the prisoners involved. It is obviously recreational and it is linked to the improvements that we have managed to occasion in other areas—discipline, professionalism, teamwork are all the factors that will come to play.

I congratulate the Swan Districts Football Club, the West Australian Amateur Football League, and the Commissioner of Corrective Services for doing something that sounds minor, and in a sense it is, but has larger ramifications. Also, it was not at all easy to achieve, so congratulations to them all.