

BORONIA PRE-RELEASE CENTRE FOR WOMEN, ANNIVERSARY

Statement by Minister for Justice

MR J.B. D'ORAZIO (Ballajura - Minister for Justice) [12.06 pm]: I wish to advise the house that the Boronia Pre-release Centre for Women has now been open for a year and has achieved what the government envisaged. I would like to acknowledge the efforts of Attorney General and former Minister for Justice Hon Jim McGinty in articulating a clear vision and direction for a new women's prison. I am pleased to be able to report to Parliament today that Boronia has had an extremely successful first year of operation. A total of 127 women have been discharged from Boronia into the community.

Although it is early days, initial information from the Department of Justice indicates that the reoffending rate amongst women released from the Boronia Pre-release Centre is currently less than half the statewide rate of 45 per cent. Boronia has not experienced any escapes, serious incidents, assaults on staff or attempted suicides by prisoners. In addition, none of the 44 random drug tests that have been conducted has returned positive results. Drug management is a focus of the prison, and drug treatments are provided, including pharmacological and therapeutic treatment programs. These measures are supplemented by frequent drug testing and the employment of a passive alert dog at visits as required.

Women at Boronia make reparation to the community through community work programs, which include partnerships with the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Good Samaritan Industries and Landcare, and the preparation of breakfasts for at-risk children. The value of this community work over the past 12 months totals \$52 347 of reparative work that has so far been provided to the community by prisoners at Boronia. The women on site are all employed, and employment and training are linked to real jobs in the community. The catering industry on site is one such example. The money made by this industry helps to offset the cost of imprisonment and in the past three months alone the revenue from this industry has amounted to \$30 000. A number of prisoners who have been released from Boronia have since gone on to obtain positions in this industry within the community.

All women on site are encouraged to enrol in education and the current level of participation is over 80 per cent in a variety of courses, including basic literacy and numeracy, computing skills, small business management, Aboriginal studies and driver training, as well as traineeships in hospitality and horticulture. Although imprisonment continues to serve as a punishment for crimes committed, it should also be an opportunity to maximise the potential of these women to reintegrate positively with the community upon release. As envisaged, the centre sets new standards for women's corrections and represents a new approach to the management of women prisoners, which is now being picked up in other jurisdictions interstate. My congratulations to all concerned.