

## **Inquests into the deaths of Christopher Steven Bell, Robert Gary Mitchell and Adam Cartledge**

In 2011 and 2012 the then State Coroner Michael Barnes convened three separate inquests into the deaths of Christopher Bell, Robert Mitchell and Adam Cartledge who intentionally took their life by hanging at the Arthur Gorrie Correctional Centre.

The Queensland Government responds to recommendations directed to government agencies at inquests by informing the community if a recommendation will be implemented or the reason why a recommendation is not supported. Further information relating the implementation of recommendations can be obtained from the responsible agency named in the response.

### **Coroner's comments relating to hanging points in Queensland prisons**

At the conclusion of each inquest, the State Coroner commented on unsafe cells in Queensland prisons. In the findings of inquest into the death of Mr Cartledge, the State Coroner said:

... there are still 380 cells in use at the Arthur Gorrie Correctional Centre with exposed hanging points. This is contrary to the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, made 20 years ago and to numerous recommendations made by coroners.

The prison operators and Queensland Corrective Services say this is unavoidable: that all safer cells that have been built more recently are full and that the system could not function adequately without the unsafe cells being utilised. Queensland Corrective Services also says that many millions of dollars have been spent and will continue to be spent incrementally addressing the issue.

I acknowledge that progress has been made and that the proportion of unsafe cells has decreased. Of course, I readily accept that there is ongoing competition for public funds and that it is the role of governments to balance those competing needs. Conversely, it is the role of coroners to point out the consequences of these decisions when they result in reportable deaths. Accordingly, I observe that preventable fatalities will continue to occur in Queensland correctional centres while prisoners continue to be housed in cells with readily accessible hanging points.

There is no recommendation to reduce this risk that I could make that has not been already made.

Response and action: implementation is in progress.

Responsible agency: Department of Justice and Attorney-General.

On 8 October 2015 date the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services and Minister for Corrective Services responded:

Since 1996, the Queensland Government has invested more than \$1 billion in construction of new design safer cells and modification of older style cells. Infrastructure projects at Lotus Glen, Southern Queensland, Brisbane, Townsville and Arthur Gorrie Correctional Centres have contributed to the reduction of hanging points. Additionally, specific funding was provided to convert as built cells to safer cell design at the Arthur Gorrie Correctional Centre. Currently, 85% of secure cells have safer cell measures in place with 650 cells throughout the state yet to be modified; 138 cells at Townsville, 268 cells at Arthur Gorrie and 244 cells at Borallon Training and Correctional Centres.

In the 2014 / 2015 financial year, funding was allocated for works to be undertaken at Borallon Training and Correctional Centre to allow the recommissioning of this facility. Following the announcement of the recommissioning of the Borallon Training and Correctional Centre the government committed to undertaking an audit of potential hanging points prior to any prisoners being placed at the centre to ensure prisoners are transferred to a safe and secure environment.

Queensland Corrective Services (QCS) has a duty of care to provide a safe environment for prisoners managed within QCS facilities and is committed to minimising self-harm and suicide. The department has developed and implemented a range of management strategies in relation to best practice principles to reduce self-harm and suicide in correctional centres. These strategies are largely incorporated in the Risk Management Practice Directive and related documents and are implemented at various points throughout a prisoner's contact with QCS.

QCS has and continues to increase the number of safer cells in Queensland correctional facilities using a three phased approach.

First, QCS ensured that a limited number of 'safer' prisoner cells were established within each correctional centre. These were then available to house those prisoners individually identified as being at-risk of suicide/self-harm. Second, as capital funds become available, cells are modified either as a separate project or as part of a site-wide redevelopment project to safer cell specifications. Finally, all new cells constructed since 1996 are designed to minimise self-harm and safer cell designs have been refined since that time. Safer cells are available in secure cell accommodation at every correctional centre within the state. However there are a number of secure cells which remain in operation that do not have safer cells specifications in place.