

# Submission to the INQUIRY INTO IMPRISONMENT AND RECIDIVISM by the QUEENSLAND PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION

from

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and

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Dear Commissioners,

I write to contribute to your important deliberations and so offer brief observations about three areas that I hope will assist:

- the relevance and importance of social housing in Queensland
- the relevance and importance of the practice of Crime Prevention Through Design
- the adoption of an integrated urban planning mind-set for Justice Infrastructure.

I acknowledge that my experience and continuing practice as a senior member of both the planning and architecture professions in Queensland have not involved contact with most of the Imprisonment and Recidivism issues being considered by you.

However your Issues paper does make reference to matters such as:

- interventions to reduce the incidence of criminal activity, and
- the relative levels of criminal activity in areas of low socio-economic status.

and those matters encourage me to offer my first two points.

I make no attempt here to expand at length upon my point-form comments but would be happy to expand at some later date. Nevertheless my brief comments are based upon four decades of active and continuing involvement with social and affordable housing matters and the design of safer urban environments (as might be noted in the attached CV).

I note however that my working context is substantially an urban one that has engaged very little with the challenges confronting remote communities.

## **(A) SOCIAL HOUSING**

(1)

Access to appropriate and secure housing is a major and growing issue in the community and its absence a major source of stress for many individuals and households, with arguably understandable potential ramifications for anti-social or criminal behaviour.

(2)

Systematic and extensive efforts by Government responsibly to ensure access to appropriately designed and located housing almost certainly have widespread positive cost-benefits beyond the focus of the housing sector ... into areas such as education, welfare, health, employment ... and the justice system.

(3)

Public housing by State Governments has in the second half of C20 played a critically important role in the community by initially delivering principally worker housing and facilitating access to home ownership. In recent times, that emphasis has moved almost totally in a different direction towards trying to deliver almost solely a community safety net for those with the least financial ability to access appropriate private rental housing (with home ownership absolutely unachievable).

(4)

Much of the funding for such programs has in the past come from the Australian Government by agreements with State Governments ... as arguably it should given the relative revenues and the recognition that such a safety net should be understood as part of an integrated welfare system in a good community.

(5)

In the last decade or so, the funding appears to have been substantially reduced or abandoned and the amount of housing in that "Social Housing" safety net, whether under the ownership and management of

- the Queensland Government or
- various not-for-profit organisations, often publicly subsidised or funded

has, it would appear, substantially fallen ... and continues further to fall ... *way below* the levels needed by

- the growing Queensland population, and worsened by
- the changing nature of the community,
- the changing distribution of wealth,
- the changing economy, and
- the continued growth of urban areas.

(6)

Any *increasing inadequacy* in a socially responsible safety net is arguably one of the factors contributing to the incidence of enhanced community stress ... and arguably the potential for increased anti-social or criminal behaviour.

(7)

To accept that a diminishing safety net is appropriate and without real social and financial impact upon society and upon other areas of Government is, it seems to me, to adopt a curious understanding of our community or a lack of commitment to a just society.

(8)

A further issue arises from how well the housing that is in that safety net is designed and located. I am confident that most of the public housing developed since the early 1990s (and maybe the community housing by others in the last decade) has been acceptably well designed. ....what there is of it.

(10)

The issue however is where that housing is. *Arguably* the more that low-income housing is successfully and unobtrusively integrated within mixed-income communities, the better might the relationships and behaviours within the community and the better access to social infrastructure help to ameliorate stress and create a more positive and less negative mind-set. This might be seen as a naïve position...but I would suggest that, arguably, there ought not *in principle* be any "low-socio-economic areas" in SEQ.

(11)

If such an objective of social mix were to underpin thinking about what is a good community (including one that should impose fewer externality burdens upon other areas of public administration), then the Queensland Government could take pride in projects such as

- its award-winning public housing program in inner Brisbane neighbourhoods in the 1990s, or
- its creation and support for the Brisbane Housing Company initiative in the late 1990s, or
- its award-winning Kelvin Grove Urban Village initiative starting in the late 1990s.

(12)

But it should however be greatly concerned by such outcomes as

- increasing market-place gentrification of inner suburbs and of other areas well-served by social or economic infrastructure, .... coupled with
- the failure to keep inserting further new low-income housing in those areas on equitable and social efficiency grounds alone ... plus
- faced with difficult access into the marketplace, the apparent failure to have new social housing included in and subsidised or funded by projects led by other agencies of government, such as adjacent to transport nodes or in educational or health precincts ..... and
- the *apparent* failure to have *any* social rental housing ... and probably also affordable key worker rental housing ... in any of the large new privately-delivered master-planned communities that dominate the urban expansion of SEQ.

These trends alone, if true, actively work against the development of desirably mixed communities ... and hence reinforce the potential for housing stress ... and perhaps against the promotion of tolerance of difference within community.

(13)

In theory some would suggest that well located social housing not only has a significant role to play in helping to prevent unacceptable behaviours up front .... but might also in providing pre-trial remand options and post imprisonment housing. That raises of course issues of

- the extent of social housing available and competing priorities,
- potential special design/planning requirements, and
- the residential or mixed-use neighbourhood or urban centre contexts that might be both appropriate and acceptable.

(14)

It is some years since I have been “on the inside” of the social housing system and so the Inquiry may well wish to establish whether my observations are grounded in data ... or not. Equally, others will be better able to confirm or challenge the suspected linkages between housing stress and anti-social or criminal behaviours.

(15)

The bottom line, I suggest, is that the significant and urgent enlargement and on-going delivery of an appropriately extensive and socially adequate community safety net of social housing would seem to be an important part of a properly integrated response towards lessening the incidence of anti-social or criminal behaviour ... not to mention an appropriate part of a decent society.

## **(B) CRIME PREVENTION BY DESIGN**

(1)

Your Issues report refers briefly to the National Crime Prevention Framework and in passing to its mention of a strategy to *Design and/or modify the physical environment to reduce crime opportunities – such as through urban renewal projects.*

(2)

I strongly suggest that such a strategy be an integral part of your considerations.

(3)

The principles and practices of CPTED: Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design have been well-established and refined over decades ... and found to be effective. Their origins as a focused approach can be seen evolving in the 1960s and 1970s and have been accepted, tested and implemented by various state agencies in Australia since at least the 1980s ... and increasingly by others.

(4)

Indeed, the principal expression of those desired safe-city making practices in Queensland is the Government’s own 2007 award-winning *Crime Prevention through Environmental Design: Guidelines for Queensland: Part A: Essential features of safer places* (a document I am most familiar with.....)

(5)

This influential document was created by an inter-departmental and industry initiative, led by the Queensland Police Service and with central involvement of the Government’s major town planning agency.

(6)

These CPTED Principles have been increasingly adopted by authorities and other development industry stakeholders and are to be found enshrined in statutory planning instruments such as many City Plans (including those of Brisbane and the Gold Coast) and in the SEQ Regional Plan co-owned by the Queensland Government with the SEQ Council of Mayors. Its application is important to transport, health, housing and other activities of government.

(7)

Queensland is not alone in its acceptance for most, if not all, administrations throughout Australia and New Zealand have adopted these strategies in varying degrees. While throughout Queensland they usually remain at the level of Guidelines, in NSW, for example, the Police manage formal training programs and state planning legislation demands a formal Crime Risk Assessment report for a range of development projects.

(8)

Given its effectiveness and its potential co-ownership by various parts of government and the community, it is important that some in industry or the community not infer that the QPS no longer seems to place as much importance as they once did on the ideas and practices in this award-winning and highly communication-oriented document created with its leadership a decade ago ... and still relevant and needed.

(9)

Part A can be found on the QPS website but at a second layer below the major *Crime Prevention* page ... under *Safety in Public Places* .... or directly at [www.police.qld.gov.au/programs.cscp/safetyPublic/default.htm](http://www.police.qld.gov.au/programs.cscp/safetyPublic/default.htm)

(10)

There is widespread acceptance that CPTED practices are helpful in reducing the incidence and the fear of crime in the public realm in all its extent and complexity and so most understandably infer that the QPS "owns" it and champions with adequate resources its spread and understanding and practical adoption ... since it would seem a natural part of their mandate ... and one that potentially offers them greater efficiency in the allocation of resources.

(11)

It is possible however to note various Government developments in recent times whose design is inconsistent with CPTED Principles, in addition to various projects approved by councils.

(12)

In the pursuit therefore of decreasing the incidence of crime in the urban environment (an outcome that must have a positive effect across the silo boundaries of public administration), it would therefore seem important for:

- Government to redefine and re-assert CPTED as an issue and strategy owned and championed across government;
- a new program to reinvigorate the community's understanding and adoption of the effective crime-prevention principles in this body of urban planning and design and management practice .... (I suggest a specialised program for a year or so could provide a significant dividend to Government and the justice system), and
- someone...arguably the QPS with its status and natural mandate ....to undertake the role of principal adviser to Government on Safe City or CPTED matters, especially in relation to major projects including the Government's own.

(13)

In part these suggestions for clarity and energy are important because, in various administrations and professions, in spite of the idea of CPTED being publicly accepted, its consistent practical application is too often weak or absent ... with potential external impact upon others ... including the justice system.

(14)

The bottom line, I suggest, is that the established principles and practices of CPTED should be seen as an important strategy by the Commission's Inquiry and in need of its recommendation. If indeed CPTED is a proven way of making safer places, then it should be seen as part of an integrated approach by Government.

## **(C) A PLANNING ISSUE**

(1)

Given the Inquiry's examination of the costs to Government of the Justice system, I suggest that an important issue is the physical location and design of significant parts of the physical infrastructure.

(2)

Where the courts, remand centres, prisons and the like are located must have an impact upon such matters as

- access by staff
- access by professional visitors
- access by the families of prisoners
- access by staff to supportive facilities, as part of their working environment
- the efficiency of public transport systems....and therefore
- the direct and indirect costs to Government and the community.

(3)

The direct and indirect costs to the Justice system, to other parts of Government and to the community are

- financial
- environmental and
- social.

(4)

It is natural for agencies to be focused upon their central mandate and not upon the costs or benefits to the other silos in the public administration. Equally it may usually be difficult to convince Treasury of long term benefits in the face of higher up-front costs.

(5)

Nevertheless, while acknowledging that I have not been "inside" the Justice mind-set and so the practicality may well be poor from a Justice point of view, I nevertheless invite you to consider one possible scenario.

(6)

More than a decade ago, a new Remand centre was established at Wacol near existing correctional facilities and therefore relatively distant from the centre of the SEQ urban area. What if, instead of that, the new remand centre had been built on top of part of the Roma Street railway precinct? In that location it would be:

- a multi-storey urban built form (just as I understand those in Adelaide and Melbourne are, rather than low-density low-rise buildings in a semi-rural setting) and appropriately designed for inward-looking amenity and operation;
- close to the major courts and to Police HQ ... facilitating convenient short-distance accessibility;
- close to the heart of the metropolitan transport system ... facilitating convenient and cost-effective access by staff, families and visiting legal professionals;
- close to an array of supportive urban facilities and amenities in the city centre as a desirable working environment; and
- a catalyst for the renewal of the precinct and support for other development over the rail yards, consistent with Government planning objectives.

(7)

In theory, the direct and indirect savings in travel time and running costs alone each day for all concerned (unless you presume they all live in the western corridor) would over some years more than pay for the undoubtedly extra development costs.

(8)

A Roma Street remand centre might not be considered practical in the eyes of the Justice system (even for those unlikely to attempt absconding...?) but I offer it as an example of the need to consider the relationship of the justice system infrastructure to other infrastructure, especially in creating more sustainable multi-use urban precincts for the future.

(9)

The bottom line, I suggest, and speaking as an urban planner and designer, is that there is clear benefit to the community and to Government in thinking beyond the edges of the Justice system and seeking an integrated urban outcome. While those responsible for the effective internal workings of the Justice

system are focused inwards, there are many outside who would argue the benefits of an integrated response that perhaps re-defines the relationship with other parts of public administration and the community at large.

## **IN CONCLUSION**

I offer these three areas of comment to the Inquiry.

Each may well seem beyond the obvious territory of the Commission's focus.

Nevertheless they represent, I hope, useful contributions grounded in the contemporary best practice and thinking of the urban planning and design professions and others involved in sustainable city-making and the continuing understandings of the social housing sector.

I am happy to discuss these ideas.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Byrne', with a large, sweeping initial 'J'.

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