

## NLAFF Prisoners Forum Report to NLAFF - May 2015

The NLAFF Prisoners Forum met on 7 May 2015. At that meeting, items on the agenda included:

- **Prisoner Numbers**

As at 19 April 2015 prisoner numbers are at an all-time high of 11,558, with approximately 3000 on remand.

Prisoner numbers, particularly early remand inmates, are likely to remain high while access to prisoners through AVL facilities proves problematic. Lawyers continue to report difficulties in contacting clients before court dates due to ongoing problems with AVL facilities.

- **Post-Release Transport Assistance in Regional and Remote New South Wales**

The Prisoners Forum has convened a sub-group to address the issue of the lack of transport options for defendants/inmates released on bail by the court or released from prison. The lack of transport options is often accentuated in regional and remote NSW, where Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander people are disproportionately affected by difficulties returning home after release. Accessible transport is a small but essential part of assisting Indigenous defendants and offenders to attain bail and comply with court orders.

The first meeting of the sub-group will be held on 4 June 2015.

- **Report of Prisoners Legal Information Team**

The Legal Information Portal is now installed on the new Offender Computer Platform being rolled out to all centres. The portal was recently updated to include links to:

- The Law Handbook (13th Ed)
- “Woman and Family Law” (pdf)
- Work and Development Orders
- “Just a Piece of Paper? Making Your AVO Work for You”
- Mandatory Alcohol Interlock Program

In addition the following publications will be added to the portal:

- “Defend Yourself: Facing a Charge in Court by Tim Anderson, 3rd Ed
- “ALS talking facts sheets” (if technically possible)
- Sentencing tables

The Forum has become aware that the portal is not available in the GEO run gaols, Parklea and Taree. The Forum has resolved to write to Peter Severin (Commissioner, Corrective Services) and request that Parklea and Taree gaols provide inmates access to the portal.

- **Calls from Prisoners to Legal Services**

Legal Aid NSW reported that calls to Legal Aid NSW are trending down 15%, although the volume of calls remains high at approximately 5,000 calls per month. Legal Aid NSW will continue to investigate the reasons for the high number of calls.

LawAccess reported call volumes are down 40% in April 2015 from the corresponding period in April 2014.

ALS also reported they received a significant volume of calls each month and will share their call statistics with the group at the next meeting

- **Upcoming Conferences**

Legal Aid Criminal Law Conference, Darling Harbour, 1-3 July 2015

Aboriginal Kinship and Communication Day – 30 June 2015.

The next meeting of the Prisoners Forum is 13 August 2015.

**Richard Funston**

