

NLAF Prisoners Forum Report to NLAF - August 2015

The NLAF Prisoners Forum met on 13 August 2015. At that meeting, items on the agenda included:

- **Prisoner Numbers**

As at the week ending 2 August 2015, the number of prison inmates was 11,896, reaching a high of 11,939 during the week.

- **Audio-Visual Links**

The AVL system is being re-designed by Corrective Services. Members raised several concerns including the privacy of the suites, air-conditioning, and availability of desks and computers in the suites. The Forum will address these issues with the NSW Ombudsman.

- **Women's Advisory Council**

Corrective Services has commenced 'Project Miranda' to reduce the number of Aboriginal women in custody. The project is run in conjunction with Waminda Health and Welfare Centre in Nowra to link women with support services to reduce high incarceration rates.

- **Aboriginal Court Diversion Program**

Corrective Services have commenced a trial program in Campbelltown to link Aboriginal clients before the courts with support services in Campbelltown. Without access to support services during court proceedings Aboriginal people are more likely to receive custodial sentences. The project has employed a local Aboriginal person with strong links to the community. The program may be expanded to rural area subject to the successful evaluation of the trial.

- **Report of Prisoners Legal Information Team**

The Legal Information Portal team is discussing with ALS to add specific information for Aboriginal prisoners, including adding the ALS' talking fact sheets

The Forum wrote to Peter Severin (Commissioner, Corrective Services) to request Parklea and Taree gaols provide inmates access to the portal.

- **Calls from Prisoners to Legal Services**

Legal Aid NSW reported that prisoner calls to Legal Aid during the period July 2014-June 2015 were down 19% over the corresponding period from last year and down 26% since the commencement of the new protocol in November 2014.

LawAccess reported a 40% decrease in call volumes during the period July 2014-June 2015 over the corresponding period last year. During the period 1 January - 31 July 2015, 22% of all calls to LawAccess were from prisoners, representing an 8% decrease over the previous year.

- **Visa Cancellations**

Cancellation of visas are currently running at 40-50 per month. Legal Aid continues to promote its visa cancellation services to inmates.

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

Richard Funston

Chair NLAF Prisoners Forum, 27 August 2015