

Question on Notice
No. 133
Asked on Thursday 14 February 2008

MRS SCOTT asked the Minister for Police, Corrective Services and Sport (MS SPENCE)-

QUESTION:

Will she outline how our Queensland prisoners have been helping flood affected communities around the State?

ANSWER:

Over the past two months, many Queensland communities have been affected by floods.

The intense weather conditions have left a trail of damage and debris around many of these towns - and the clean up job has been too great for many small communities to manage.

In times like these, it is essential that we all do everything we can to lend a helping hand to those in need.

Queensland Corrective Services has stepped up to the challenge - with prisoner work camps being deployed to a range of areas, to provide emergency assistance.

We've had prisoner teams on the ground in Mackay, Beaudesert, St George, Charleville, Springsure, Clermont, and Palen Creek.

The prisoners deployed to help in these areas have been performing a range of jobs. For example, in Mackay, Emerald and Charleville-

- * working in the botanical gardens in Mackay clearing silt from ponds within the grounds, cleaning a road reserve area outside the township of Calen, and cleaning up the Council Free Camping area at St Helens Beach;
- * Assisting to fill thousands of sand bags for use by businesses and home owners in Charleville; and
- * Assisting in the rebuilding of the Emerald Botanic Gardens.

Other work conducted around the flood affected areas generally includes:

- * Cleaning up yards - removing tree branches, rubbish, mud and debris from residences and suburban streets;
- * Removing furniture and putting floor covering materials in place,
- * Building temporary levies; and
- * Re-erecting and rebuilding fences.

In total, over 3000 hours of labour has been performed by work camp prisoners assisting with the clean up efforts.

It is hard work that has to be done by hand - and as many of the people affected are elderly, they would not be able to complete the work without the help of the Work Camp prisoners.

Queensland Corrective Services has received letters from grateful flood victims, thanking the working groups for their efforts.

Samantha Cornelius from the Charleville Neighbourhood Centre (who is a representative on the Charleville Work Camp Advisory Committee) said the work camp prisoners have been helping local residents and businesses get back on their feet.

She wrote: "On behalf of the Work Camp Committee I would like to express our most sincere thanks and gratitude that we are fortunate enough to have this sort of program running in our community."

Telemon Crossing resident Ray Drynan also wrote to the Assistant General Manager of Palen Creek Correctional Centre, thanking him for the work performed by prisoners on his flood affected property.

He wrote: "Your team... did a tremendous job. I was able to work with these fellows with my truck and take away the debris, thus resulting in a clean tidy job."

The work of these prisoners has clearly made a real difference in the lives of those people affected by floods.

The low-risk prisoners involved in the program, have also benefited from this important opportunity to give something back to community and develop skills and a work ethic.

Prisoner work camps have been operating in this state for 17 years.

The Queensland prisoner work camp program was in fact borne out of the need for community assistance during the 1990 Charleville floods, when prisoner labour was first used to help a community recover from a natural disaster.

Since then, the program has developed into a network of men's and women's camps across Queensland, contributing around \$1 million each year in labour costs to rural and regional towns.

In times of natural disaster, these camps have proven a great asset to Queensland communities, requiring urgent labour assistance.

The work camp at Mackay was established only on a temporary basis to provide urgent assistance to the local community. Permanent work camps have only been established where they have been invited and supported by the local community.

This government is committed to supporting our communities in times of need, and this is a great example of how we are finding ways to help flood victims, while also giving prisoners a chance to participate in a positive community-oriented initiative.