From Jails to Jobs- A Queensland Prisoner Recovery Program

Mervyn Lea – Director, Indigenous Initiatives.. DEEDI
Ron Cox, Director, AEVET QCS
Section 1

Background to *From Jails To Jobs Program*

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander overrepresentation in the criminal justice system within Queensland

- Indigenous people account for 4% of the Queensland population but make up 22% of offenders.
- Indigenous young people made up 60% of young people in detention in Queensland.
- Indigenous adults made up 29.5% of those in prison in Queensland.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offending patterns are a key cause of over representation in the criminal justice system.
A Queensland Response

Queensland has established the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Justice Strategy 2011-2014* which is a three-year program to reduce Indigenous offending and re-offending in Queensland.

This strategic response will operate within the broader context of the national *Closing the Gap* agenda to reduce the gap in life outcomes and opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

One of the **primary strategic actions** that is directed to DEEDI, from an employment perspective, is the *From Jail to Jobs Program* which is aimed to build upon and strengthen the current Advance to Work Program, which is a **partnership** between DEEDI and QCS.
Section 2
Building Upon Advance to Work

Overview of the Advance2Work Program

Joint initiative DEEDI and QCS (CBRC submission)

• Commenced July 2000;
• QCS lead Agency – Administer the Program;
• CBRC decision – on-going program;
• Available all correctional centre locations;
• Six months prior to release;
• Three Stages -
  Stage 1 – Pre-release,
  Stage 2 – Employment gained,
  Stage 3 – Retained in employment 13+ weeks;
• Three external contracted service providers.
Section 2
Building Upon Advance to Work

Overview of the Advance2Work Program (Cont.)

2010-11 Outcomes

- Number supported (Total) – 2307
- Indigenous prisoners - 922
- Number gaining employment post-release (Total) – 561
- Indigenous employed – 182
- Number retained employment beyond 13+ weeks (Total) – 449
- Indigenous – 133
- Recidivism rates (2006 evaluation) – 6.9% reduction
- Retention beyond (still employed) 13+ weeks
  Non Indigenous – 83%
  Indigenous – 73%
Section 3
Utilising Industry Engagement

The Queensland Government believes that local people, particularly those who are disadvantaged jobseekers, should be an important part of the solution to labour and skills shortages, which can be achieved through helping employers and industry to source local labour. Under **SkillingQueenslanders for Work**, our regional employment officers work with industry and employers to gauge labour market trends and emerging needs at the local level.

- Industry and employers partner with the government, contributing funds and personnel, to ensure that employment and training assistance is relevant and appropriate to their needs.
The *Skilling Queenslanders for Work* Initiative

Examples:

- **The Gladstone Workforce Skilling Strategy** which is assisting 210 local jobseekers (including 25% Indigenous people) over two years to take up jobs in the Liquefied Natural Gas industry.

- **Thiess Indigenous Apprenticeship Program.** DEEDI working with Thiess and Construction Training Centre, the State Government’s Skilling Queenslanders for Work initiative funded 14 participants’ wages for 20 week paid work placements.

- **Myuma’s Civil Construction and Mining Skills Prevocational Training Program** which aims to increase Indigenous employment in North West Queensland within the resources and civil construction industries, working in partnership with Mining and Civil Construction companies to ensure the skills and training delivered produce work-ready employees to meet the skills shortages across these areas. This project will assist 60 Indigenous participants this year through a paid SQW work placement program.

- **The QRC MOU** with State and Federal Governments is focused on education and training, employment, enterprise and business development in the resources sector for Indigenous people.
The Suite of Initiatives under *Skilling Queenslanders for Work*

- **Youth Training Incentive Programs**
- **Indigenous Employment and Training Support Officers Program**
- **Community Employment Infrastructure Program**
- **Get Set for Work**
- **Participate in Prosperity**
- **First Start Traineeship Program**

Integral to the delivery of Skilling Queenslanders for Work initiatives is the network of over 110 regional employment staff ensuring state-wide coverage from the Gold Coast to Cape York and the Peninsula regions.

The role of regional officers includes:
- working with local organisations and industry to develop local employment and skilling solutions to meet the needs of jobseekers and employers;
- funding organisations through a suit of initiatives such as the Skilling Queenslanders for Work initiative and the Indigenous business development grants;
- linking newly retrenched workers across Queensland to employment and other support services;
- supporting Indigenous businesses; and
- providing culturally appropriate mentoring and support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander apprentices and trainees.
The Outcome for *From Jail to Jobs* Program

- create **opportunities for 200 Indigenous people leaving jail** each year 2011/12 to 2013/14 (approx one quarter of the number of Indigenous prisoners exiting prison) immediately commence apprenticeships, traineeships or employment through initiatives such as Advance2Work, Skilling Queenslanders for Work, Remote and Rural Housing Program, or other programs.

- other activities that support the *From Jail to Jobs* program listed:
  1. **Increased mentoring exceeding 13 weeks after completion of Advance2Work** in order to support and sustain employment to reduce recidivism.
  2. **Continue funding Advance2Work** to prepare prisoners transition to employment;
  3. **Participate in DEEDI employment initiatives** program;
  4. **Industry engagement** that identifies opportunity for employment with selected priority industries to meet Industry skills and labour shortages;
  5. **Target communities to maximise employment and economic development** opportunities through the roll-out of social housing and other government infrastructure projects as part of prisoner transition to employment upon their release from prison back into communities.
Section 4
Conclusion

Key activities to be undertaken to meet the scope of the project

• Leveraging resources/funding/opportunities from other government agencies and industry to progress initiatives to meet 200 target;
• identifying and working with three industries/large employers to create linkages for employment opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people leaving jail. This will include a Skills Audits and training needs analysis that match Industry skill shortage demand with the prisoner’s skill sets to provide a contribution towards the skills and labour pool required by Industry;
• regular monitoring, reporting and evaluating of the initiative;
• appointment of two dedicated From Jails to Jobs co-ordinators who will identify Indigenous Employment and Training Support Officers (IETSOs) to mentor Indigenous prisoners entering employment, in particular from Lotus Glen Correctional Centre;
• working with larger Skilling Queenslanders for Work providers to direct a proportion of their SQW effort towards Indigenous ex-prisoners;
• upskilling of regional staff.
Conclusion

*From Jails to Jobs* initiative is an important intervention initiative to assist offenders move towards a healthy, non-offending and productive lifestyle through gaining meaningful employment. This in turn, will provide former prisoners with a sense of purpose and legitimate source of income, rather than illegal earnings and status achieved from criminal pursuits.