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NSW prison numbers reach record highs

Updated: 4:06 pm, Monday, 2 November 2015



The NSW prison system is 'beyond breaking point and exposing officers at overflowing jails to unnecessary risk'.

This is what the Public Service Association says after it was revealed the state's prison population has surged by 14 per cent in the past year, reaching a new record high of 11,801

adult inmates.

The Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR) said on Monday the jump has largely been driven by a rapid and unexpected rise in the number of prisoners on remand.

More than 900 extra remand inmates entered NSW prisons between October 2014 and September 2015, almost double the swell in sentenced adult prisoners.

Public Service Association general secretary Anne Gardiner said the increase in remand inmates carried serious safety risks.

"You never know quite what you're dealing with in terms of the use and abuse of drugs such as ice among this cohort," she said.

NSW Corrections Minister David Elliott said the government was pursuing a raft of measures to boost the number of prison beds, including constructing a new jail in Grafton and expanding Sydney's Parklea jail.

Grafton should be built by 2019 and Parklea expanded by 2018, housing an extra 1000 inmates.

"I've asked Corrective Services NSW to look at all necessary measures to create increased prison capacity in the short-term," Mr Elliott said.

BOCSAR says it expects the state's prison population to climb even higher on the back of the usual annual increase in prisoners on remand over the Christmas and new year period.

NSW opposition corrections spokesman Guy Zangari questioned how prisons could cope with any further climbs.

"The truth is there are more prisoners in NSW than ever before and nowhere to put them," he said.

"Bail courts were closed over the weekend as remand numbers reached record highs; this simply is not good enough."

AAP.

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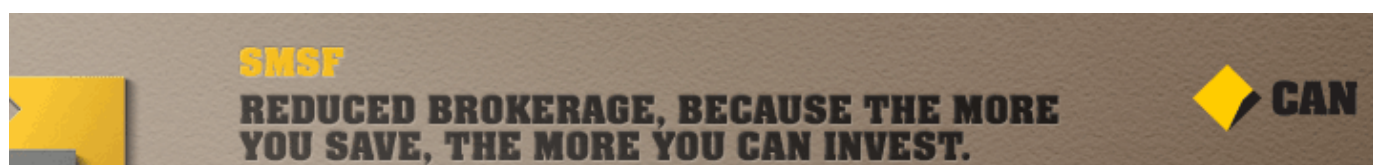
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