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DETENTION CENTRE CONTRACTS:
DIMIA SHUTS ITS EYES AND HOPES FOR THE BEST

A new report on the management of detention centre contracts reveals the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) has no idea what is going on inside detention centres, and simply hopes for the best from its contractor.

The Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) report on *The Management of Detention Centre Contracts - Part B* comes a day after it was revealed the Palmer inquiry has found Baxter's "detention services contract is inappropriate and inadequate" and fails to deliver the outcomes expected by the Commonwealth.

The ANAO goes further, saying that under the contract between DIMIA and the operator of the detention centres (Global Solutions Limited), "it is not possible for DIMIA's staff to assess the ongoing performance of the Services Provider objectively." This is because the "department assumes that detention services are being delivered satisfactorily...unless the reporting of an incident highlights a problem."

But the last thing we should do is assume anything about these centres, given the culture of complacency, the failure to report incidents and the lack of proper review or performance appraisal. The ANAO report makes it clear that there is simply no way of knowing whether the Commonwealth is receiving value for money or, more importantly, whether the needs of detainees are being met. DIMIA simply shuts its eyes and hopes for the best.

The report finds that less than half of the agreements between DIMIA and State agencies for the delivery of services have been finalised - seven years after the outsourced arrangements came into place. It also reveals that DIMIA has absolutely no idea if (or to what extent) it is insured for incidents at detention centres, why the cost of detention is rising even while the number of detainees is falling, or even what assets and equipment it owns in each of the detention centres.

The Public Accounts Committee is charged with ensuring Commonwealth agencies are delivering services in a cost-effective way for the benefit of the nation. The number and serious nature of incidents in detention centres, and the deficiencies now exposed in the contract, show a real need for DIMIA to account to the Australian people through the Committee in a public inquiry for the services delivered under these contracts.

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