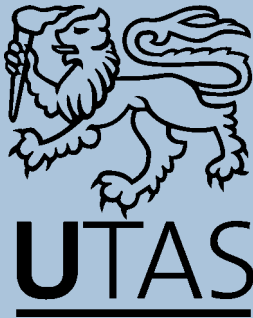


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Food Matters

Issues Surrounding Food in Prison

by

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Preface

The issue of prison food has made headlines several times over the last few years in Tasmania. It is a problem not unique to this State. As demonstrated in this report, the quality, quantity and social context of food preparation and consumption really does matter for prisoners – whether they reside at Risdon prison, a mainland institution or overseas. What you eat and how you eat is enormously important to all of us. In situations of enforced confinement and loss of ordinary freedoms, food becomes even more significant and the issues more pronounced.

This report has been undertaken as part of the Field Project component of the Criminology & Corrections post graduate course work program offered by the University of Tasmania. Di and Dannielle drew upon a range of sources of information about prison food, including relevant literature and interviews with former prisoners. They also had discussions with select prison staff.

As a field project report, the study has its limitations, due to time, resource and access constraints. Nevertheless, the report provides a good example of independent research that can constructively bring to public attention an informed overview of key issues. Indeed, part of the intention in publishing this study as an occasional paper is to provide a 'benchmark' document for future reference – something that provides criteria and baseline information that may be useful in any evaluation of prison food issues later down the track.

The aim of the Criminology Research Unit is to foster criminology in Tasmania as a field of study, research, evaluation and policy development. The CRU undertakes commissioned work on behalf of government departments and non-government agencies, as well as publishing briefing papers and occasional papers on topics of general public interest.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report sets out the findings of semi-structured interviews with six ex-inmates about the place of food in their prison experience. The research shows that despite varying backgrounds, the men shared certain common experiences, opinions and perceptions of prison food. Comparisons were drawn with jurisdictions in New South Wales and Victoria, as well as exploring best practice policies and procedures in Northern Ireland and New Zealand.

Four key issues emerged :

1. The cook-chill method
2. The eating environment
3. Staff/inmate relations, and
4. Communication

Those issues in relation to food and eating that made the mens' lives particularly difficult include:

- The practice of eating in cells
- The closure of mess rooms
- Eating in dirty overcrowded yards
- Food cooked and chilled 48 to 72 hours in advance
- A perceived deterioration in the quantity, quality, variety, temperature and presentation of food since introduction of the cook-chill method
- Not enough food
- Change from metal to plastic cutlery and from plates to foil containers
- Replacement of week-day hot lunches with sandwiches
- Inadequate and ever-changing canteen list
- 15-16 hour gap between dinner and breakfast
- Absence of an effective impartial grievance process
- Anxiety about hygiene, food poisoning and the validity of unannounced kitchen inspections
- Obstructive practices by custodial officers
- Special diets poorly catered for
- No opportunity to prepare and cook food for themselves
- Increased time in cells and yards

Key Findings

The essential findings of this study are that :

- The expectation that inmates will sleep, eat and go to the toilet in the same space is offensive. Cells are not designed for food consumption, given their proximity to toilets, and those who share a cell are particularly disadvantaged
- The closure of mess rooms and the move to eating in cells has had a significant impact on inmates, limiting social interaction and increasing time spent in cells

and yards. Yards are overcrowded, unhygienic, open to the weather, have inadequate seating and are regularly soiled by birds

- Since introduction of the cook-chill method and the new food service, inmates maintain there has been a marked deterioration in the quantity, quality, variety and appearance of food. Dinner portions are smaller, fruit and vegetables lack variety, raw vegetables are scarce, meat is often poor quality and portions are stingy. Meals are frequently floating in water and regularly tepid or cold. The lack of a choice-menu for dinner is out of step with best practice in most modern prisons
- The practice of cooking food 48 to 72 hours in advance and re-therming it on the day of consumption is particularly disliked. Inmates believe it is unacceptable to be continuously eating food which is at least two to three days old, and sometimes up to a week old
- Breakfast meals are inadequate, given the 15-16 hour break between dinner at 4.00 pm and breakfast at 8.00 am. Portion sizes take no account of varying levels of physical activity, there is no choice of cereal, and toast is soggy on delivery
- The move from plates to aluminium containers and from metal to plastic utensils is disliked. Concerns exist about the long-term risk of eating out of aluminium, as well as fears about contamination of food. The fact that containers have no divisions to separate food types is also an issue. Plastic utensils are considered impractical and often snap during use
- Standard beverages are limited to hot sweet tea, with milk and sugar, leaving those who prefer black unsweetened tea, or coffee, without a choice.
- The replacement of week-day hot lunches with sandwiches is unpopular and has contributed to the belief that inmates are getting less food than under the old system. Bread is often stale with no option for multigrain or wholemeal varieties and sandwich fillings need further review
- The celebration of festive occasions such as Christmas, Easter and birthdays has diminished over the years. In prison, the significance of such occasions is heightened, given the degree of isolation inmates feel at these times, and the fact that such events are often associated with particular religious customs, favourite foods and/or family gatherings.
- The canteen list offers few healthy food choices and is forever changing, making it an unreliable source for supplementing diets
- Concerns about kitchen cleanliness and the personal hygiene of kitchen staff are underpinned by suspicions that unannounced kitchen inspections are a farce, which in turn exacerbates fears about food poisoning

- There is a perception that since the introduction of the new food service, the focus on cost-cutting has intensified, to the detriment of inmate needs
- Ideally inmates would prefer to prepare and cook their own food or at least have opportunities to do so periodically
- No simple straightforward complaints process exists to deal with grievances and the impartiality of the Ombudsman's office is problematic in the eyes of inmates
- The provision of special diets is at best uncertain and at worst non-existent, and the existing process for requesting a special diet is seen as overly bureaucratic and burdensome. Obstructive practices by individual custodial officers delay food and interfere with requests for both medical attention and special diets.
- Food is an issue, not simply a way of gaining attention or publicity, and food-related concerns evoke strong emotions, taking their toll on inmate self-esteem as well as prison morale
- The process of change to the new food service has not been managed in a way that engages inmates or gives them an ongoing say in decisions about food and eating.

In summary, this study found that food matters. 'What matters is the quality of food on the prisoners' plates' and 'what is required is wholesome food, properly prepared and well presented. It is an essential aspect of having decent conditions in prison' (Irish Prison Service 2002 : 9). What also matters is diluting a penal culture that appears to 'rub salt in the wound' by poor communication and indifference.

INTRODUCTION

The idea for this research was triggered by a siege at Risdon Prison in May 2005. The siege ended when a group of inmates were finally appeased by the delivery of fifteen pizzas, a fact many Australians found amusing at the time. However, the centrality of prison food to these events made us curious about the impact of food on the lives of inmates. Well after the siege ended, issues surrounding prison food continued to appear in the media and as recently as October 2005 prison food remains an issue that refuses to go away.

Prisoners' Perspectives

In preparing this report, we felt it was important to think about prisoners' perspectives, and for their voices to be heard in circumstances other than at a time of crisis. The six men we interviewed had spent at least twelve months in a Tasmanian prison. All had served time in Risdon Prison and some had served a portion of their sentence at Hayes Prison Farm. The youngest participant was in the 20-25 age group and the oldest in the 50-55 age group. Their release dates were on a continuum from several weeks to just over 18 months. Each participant was asked a series of open-ended questions about their expectations, impressions, opinions, memories, and disappointments surrounding prison food.

Two questions were central to this study.

What is prison food like? ... and ... how does it make you feel?

Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed according to the principles of thematic analysis, drawing out key themes and exploring differences. Emerging themes were broadly grouped into the following categories – the eating environment; food quantity, quality and variety; the cook-chill method; expectations and realities of prison food; containers and utensils; kitchen hygiene and contamination; hunger and loss; complaints and communication; punishment and coercion; canteen and supplements; festive occasions and special diets. After five interviews we reached saturation point and no new themes emerged. A qualitative approach was selected because the conversational style of informal semi-structured interviews was more conducive to information sharing.

The quotations in *italics* throughout this report are the views of the men we interviewed. Although we allocated pseudonyms to each individual, we decided against using them, in keeping with our commitment to guarantee their anonymity.

Information collected during these interviews provides the primary data source for this report. Two particular texts informed our thinking about food. The first was Deborah Lupton's book *Food, the Body and the Self* (1996) which explored ideas about food and emotion, nostalgia, rebellion and special occasions, as well as the notion that 'food and eating are central to our subjectivity or sense of self,

and our experience of embodiment, or the ways that we live in and through our body' (Lupton 1996 : 1). The second was a paper by Catrin Smith (2002), entitled Punishment and pleasure : women, food and the imprisoned body, which, despite its gender bias, was important to our understanding of the place of food in the prison environment.

Secondary data sources included two Tasmanian Ombudsman's Reports (Office of the Ombudsman Tasmania (OOT) 2001 & Walter 2004), a report by the Victorian Auditor-General's Office (VAGO 1999), a New South Wales Inmate Health Survey (Butler & Milner 2001), reports by Prison Action Reform Inc Tasmania (PAR 2005) and Justice Action in New South Wales (JA 1999). Additional data included Inmates' letters to the Ombudsman, Food Safety Standards, Clarence City Council Inspection Reports, Press Clippings, Books, Academic Journals, Emails, Risdon Prison Menu Control Plans, Canteen Lists and 'best practice' examples from prisons in New Zealand and Northern Ireland.

A broader study might take into account, the opinions and competing demands and priorities of other stakeholders, including female inmates, juveniles, prison management, custodial officers, catering staff, and inmates' families.

Recollections & Expectations of Prison Food

The mens' experiences of prison food are informed by their food and eating practices before prison, by ideas about what constitutes a healthy diet and by the changes some have witnessed in the prison system over time.

Recollections

Several of the men remembered an era when there was a sense of anticipation about meals, when fresh food was prepared and eaten the same day and portions were more generous.

As I said, years ago, I use to look forward to our food, you know what I mean, it was, it wasn't something spectacular, but there was plenty of it.

Back then, you could always get extras and that, like they use to bring down whatever was left from the kitchen they would bring down on plates - like, just say you had steak for tea, whatever steak was left in the kitchen they would just bring it - divide it around the yards - that was back then.

Others recalled a time when selected inmates took an active role in food preparation and how working in the kitchen constituted an opportunity for reward and rehabilitation.

The kitchen would be a flurry - you know you'd have everybody racing round cooking and preparing - ready to serve it up fresh to the guys.

There was a definite hierarchy to it, it was like an achievement. You actually got rewarded as you went through. If you can get to say a number one cook position or a position of responsibility - um - there's no incentive in the prison at all to achieve for yourself, um - which means the rehabilitation aspect's gone and the kitchen used to be the main thing.

Those were the days when custodial officers ate and enjoyed the same food.

I remember when an officer would lower - would lower a little bucket down from the top and you'd put a slice of cake and a coffee in it for him.

Once we used to have to cook just as much for the officers as what we cooked for the inmates, but they won't even touch the stuff now - that's how bad it is.

Others spoke appreciatively of the more relaxed approach to food and eating at Hayes Prison Farm.

And you're given breakfast and you're given morning tea and you're given lunch and you're given afternoon tea and you're given tea - and you can go back to the mess room and you can eat all the way to nine o'clock till you go to bed. It's not frowned on - it's encouraged to do that.

One man's reflection on prison routine illustrates the undeniable impact of institutional life.

There's one thing I could never keep up out here and that was that everything was run on them specific times. Like I'm so busy out here I will be an hour late for a meal and it will put me off for my next meal, and all that sort of stuff.

The mens' experiences of food and eating before prison were no different to the accounts you might expect from a range of people in the community.

Yep, very normal, as anyone else would eat - with family. I prepared some of me meals, ate with family, and alone.

I used to prepare my own. A lot of the time I used to eat at the local tavern because they had meals for \$5.

Expectations

All the men had commonsense expectations of what prison food might be like.

Pretty basic, you know. I expected just normal, how can I put it, just normal nutritious meals. Do you understand what I am saying - just normal like out here - you know - meat and vegetables for tea.

Very normal - as anyone else would eat. I guess. It's taken for granted that you are going to be supplied nutritious food – it's not something you give any thought to.

Yeah, just as you would expect to be fed on the outside, you know wherever you go, whether it be a pub, or um, I'm not talking a flash restaurant or something like that, just, you know, a normal meal, a home cooked meal

Ideas about a 'healthy diet', ranged from high protein/low carbohydrate principles and low-fat diets, to those who simply said they enjoyed a range of food including 'meat and three veg', 'roasts', 'salads' and 'seafood.'

Um, no deep-fried take-away foods, stuff like that. Meat, vegetables, yeah, fruit.

Um, just to have- yeah - just quality food you know, lean meats and stuff for lunch and tea, and dinner, and um, yeah just the way it's cooked you know.

There was strong opposition to any assertion that food in prison was better than they would get at home.

That's crazy, you know, it's nowhere near as good - and we have never lived - my family - have never lived a big flash life.

This idea about the superiority of prison food is a commonly held belief, according to long-term political prisoner Nelson Mandela.

Food was the source of many of our protests, but in those early days, the warders would say, 'Ag, you kaffirs are eating better in prison than you ever ate at home!' (Mandela, 2003 : 89).

And a different perspective ...

When you first go into a prison, the meals are absolutely atrocious, because you're used to what you've had outside. Over a period of months it changes in your mind - you're thankful that it's there. Then when you get released you realise how bad it was.

Interestingly, only one man mentioned take-away food and it was not in the context we had expected.

Um, – I guess when I, when I got my first section 42, which is a leave from prison – um, – what I wanted was – was a home cooked meal – I didn't want McDonalds, which is, you hear people say – uh Kentucky fried chicken or McDonalds – It wasn't for me – and it's not for most who got leave – it was definitely a, you know, – roast, or something like that.

The above recollections and expectations demonstrate realistic expectations about prison food; a perceived deterioration in the quantity and quality of food over time; changes in officer/inmate interaction and an apparent shift away from a philosophy of rehabilitation. Having said that, it is recognised that 'prisoners' perspectives are not the only perspectives ... and their accounts are 'not necessarily fully-informed or unprejudiced'. However, 'an understanding of the way that prison is experienced is an essential ingredient of effective program and service delivery and of genuine reform efforts' (Jonas 2000).

Standards

It is important that any expectations about prison food are placed squarely within a standards framework. In this regard, the benchmarks cited in the 1999 Victorian Auditor-General's Report into Victoria's prison system, set a sensible precedent:

- Three meals each day, at times acceptable by normal community standards
- Menus that comply with recommended dietary intakes and meals which take account of:
 - o prisoners preferences
 - o the need for a variety of food flavours
 - o the need for an interesting and varied diet
 - o the seasonal availability of fresh produce, and
 - o medical or special dietary needs

Food service specialists engaged for the audit also 'developed a ... criteria which provided the basis for arriving at objective conclusions as to the quality of food services at each of the selected prisons' (VAGO 1999 : 8.146), taking into account :

- food quality
- facilities and hygiene
- supervision of prisoners working in kitchens
- food storage and stock control
- training for prisoners; and
- compliance with legislative food handling requirements

(VAGO 1999 : 8.146).

Many of these standards were challenged by the men we interviewed. What follows is their account of the realities of prison food.

REALITIES OF PRISON FOOD

'Good' food is characterized by the emotions of pride, comfort and love and with feelings of warmth, contentment and security' (Lupton 1996 : 154).

In society, the quantity, quality and variety of our food is determined by budgetary constraints, by personal preference and by particular lifestyle choices. Most people exercise control over their own body, by deciding what to eat, when to eat, where to eat, and how much they will eat. In prison, 'eating choices and preferences are restricted and the bodily experience of eating becomes mediated and controlled [by others]' (Smith 2002 : 202). In these circumstances, there is 'a special duty of care owed to a group of people who are deprived of many personal liberties by virtue of incarceration and who have special physical, mental, emotional and social needs, which frequently differ from those of society as a whole' (OOT 2001 : 3).

Cook-Chill & the New Food Service

At the heart of the mens' dissatisfaction was the introduction of the new food service and the cook-chill method. Under this process, 'food is prepared 48 to 72 hours in advance, ladled into individual containers, and cooked to a 'just done' state, then immediately chilled (but not frozen) for storage and reheating at a later time' (Butler & Milner 2001 : 83). On the day of consumption, meals are rapidly 're-thermed', in a foil container, to 60°C. The quality of meals is dependent on strict adherence to these requirements.

'The cook-chill process ... was formally approved and endorsed by the Tasmanian Prison Service's Senior Management Team on January 6, 2004 and the Justice Department Executive shortly thereafter' (Hines 2004 : 2). The impetus for the new food service was a desire to rationalise, centralise, customise and economise, in keeping with the objectives of Tasmanian Corrective Services at the time, for a 'total food services solution, whereby all inmates in all institutions receive the same meals and for a more cost effective food service program' (Walter 2004 : 2). Based upon the New South Wales Corrective Services "Pro Serve" model, the philosophy of the new food service was described as "simplicity", 'translating into the practice of meals being 'dispatched as quickly and efficiently as possible with minimum officer contact and employing as many inmates as possible' (Hines, 2004 : 2). At Risdon, 'the "Pro Serve" model was chosen, most notably for the quality and accountability of a centralised production facility for the state, as well as the ability to securely cater for the new infrastructure' (Hines 2005 : 1).

The major differences between the old and new food service are:

- Food prepared between 48 and 72 hours in advance, rather than being prepared and cooked the same day

- Dinner meals now served in foil containers with plastic cutlery
- Week day hot lunches replaced by sandwiches and fruit

In the mens' eyes the cook-chill method simply means they are forced to eat food that they believe is up to five days old.

Well, they use to cook the meals - freeze them - and reheat them. Um, yeah and sometimes someone would come up and say "we cooked steaks tonight, but you're not getting them until Wednesday", and this would be like on the week before - and that would be right, we would get steaks on that Wednesday - and they were cooked like four or five days before.

An inmate with experience in the kitchen, explained his understanding of the preparation and re-therming process.

Your container - once you put the vegetables in it - take up the best part of it and... then you'd have probably an inch on top of the container that would have a little bit of meat along the top. So when you got the container after it was cooked up again ... you would have half a container full, because the rest of it would be water.

There was a consensus that the cook-chill system had resulted in a decrease in the overall size of the evening meal, particularly meat portions, and a corresponding deterioration in the quality and presentation of food.

My first ever trip to prison, the food was excellent and I - before I went to prison the last time, I ah - had no idea the food could change so much - I'd only been released from prison for about xxx - I didn't realise it could end up the way it did.

The move to foil containers was especially disliked.

I am starting to think there is just no way we crims can get out of eating from these bloody things (Inmate letter 29/3/05).

Foil containers were seen as a source of contamination and on occasions the inside of lids "melted and bubbled", coming into contact with food items.

I can just remember peeling the lid off and half the food is stuck onto the paper, and you'd be pulling it off - and you would have cardboard stuck on your food.

Complaints to Prison Action Reform (PAR) record inmate concerns about the long-term effects of eating out of aluminium and the fact that at times food contained aluminium shavings (PAR 2005).

The men expressed a clear preference for aluminium containers to be partitioned, making it easier to separate different foods.

Now they are in these little foil containers, so you've got your main meal - like everything all squashed into one, so they can put four peas on there and it looks like - you know what I mean? You can't even find your vegetables now - you'd probably get three or four peas, maybe there was a pile in the water or whatever - it was just hard to separate the foods while they are in there.

Plastic knives and forks were a source of irritation, mainly because they often snapped during use.

Budgetary constraints were seen to have intensified since introduction of the new food service and there was a perception that cost-cutting took precedence over inmate needs and that meal quotas failed to allow for replacement of meals that were spoiled for any reason.

The budget is that tight for whatever reason, they get in just enough food to supply the inmates that are there.

The level of frustration was greater for those who had witnessed a more flexible approach to budgeting in the past.

There was stages there you could get milk and orange juice. Um again that would come under - say a person would come into the prison, who had a bit of forethought - worked out his budget and allowed for it.

The men maintained that if a meal was inedible there was often no replacement. According to the Food Services Manager the procedure in such situations is that 'the inmate has always access to the yard officer, the complaint is referred to the officer's supervisor, and if the complaint is valid, the kitchen officer will replace the meal' (Hines 2004 : 2). It is unclear what constitutes a 'valid complaint' and given the number of people involved in the decision-making process, it is fair to presume that most people would find it easier to simply leave the meal.

In response to a question about the importance of budgetary constraints in the scheme of things, Risdon's Food Services Manager saw it this way

'... the more you spend the better commodity you can purchase and incentives like choices can be included. Whether these were required is a matter for debate' (Hines 2005 : 3).

Complaints about the cook-chill process fell broadly into the areas of quality, quantity, preparation, variety and choice. The situation was made worse by the move from plates to foil containers, the introduction of plastic cutlery and the increased emphasis on cost-cutting.

Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

In prison, mealtimes divide up the day, offer a break from a relentless routine and

provide an opportunity to socialize. Meals are served over an 8 hour period with breakfast at 8.00 am, lunch at 12 noon and dinner at 4.00 pm.

Breakfast

Breakfast is delivered to individual cells the night before, along with the evening meal. It consists of two, 7g butter portions, 60 grams of cereal served in a sealed plastic bag, two portion controlled (PC) spread and two PC sugar (Hines 2004). Four slices of toast, a daily allowance of 300 ml of milk, and a cup of hot sweet tea are served to each inmate the following morning.

You get your cereal for breakfast of a night - because you actually eat breakfast in your cell the next morning - and there's a couple of jams or something like that you can put on bread - 'cause you get toast.

The more than 14 hour wait for breakfast is a sore point, given the fact that breakfast is deemed to be insufficient, because portions fail to take account of varying levels of physical activity.

I guess a morning meal would be probably the most hated, even though it's the one you're looking forward to the most, you've probably gone 14 hours without food when you're given a box of weetbix - and toast.

Then you had to go all them hours without a meal. Breakfast you'd get a cereal - a little box cereal - I know we're in prison because we've done something wrong, but these things, it doesn't matter where you are, you shouldn't be put in this position.

One way of alleviating the hunger pangs between dinner and breakfast might be to serve a supper snack with the evening meal.

Apart from quantity, the most frequent criticism of breakfast was being unable to request a cereal of choice and the practice of wrapping toast in aluminium foil.

You just get what you're given - like the little packets they use in motels.

Well, basically of a morning when you get your toast, it's just soggy - like it's gonna fall apart - yeah - and it's just in foil.

Current Menu Control Plans show breakfast cereals are served in portion sizes varying between 60g and 100g and rotate through four varieties - Museli, Wheat Flakes, Weetbix and Light and Tasty. While a variety of cereals are served, there is no opportunity for inmates to choose the cereal they prefer.

Lunch

Lunch comprises two pre-packed sandwiches and a piece of fruit. It is served

in the yard and is the only meal of the day not eaten in cells for the majority of Risdon's prisoners. Under the new food system, the change from hot week-day lunches to sandwiches, has not been well-received and may be one reason why inmates believe they are getting less food.

Well, our so-called sandwiches would be healthy food for lunch - it was - two slices of bread with shredded lettuce - white bread - no brown - this was all cooked at the bakehouse at the prison - and, ah, you may get one slice of egg on it and if the lettuce wasn't too limp you might eat it - um - you would get two of those sandwiches - that's it.

Stale bread was a source of both irritation and mild amusement for this group of men.

You can just actually roll it up into a ball and it goes as hard as a golf ball. If you hit somebody in the head with it, you'd probably kill them.

Other inmates, in particular those in Division 7 said 'bread was often mouldy and stale' (PAR 2005 : 6).

Dissatisfaction was expressed repeatedly about the provision of only white bread. In March 2004, a consultant dietician recommended the prison 'provide whole-meal/wholegrain bread/rolls and or fruit loaves daily' (Calvi 2004 : 6). At the time, the prison made a commitment to 50% of sandwich bread being wholemeal or multigrain, but the men we interviewed maintain this is still not happening.

Bread is baked daily at the prison bakery and sandwiches are prepared a day in advance (Hines 2005), which may account for their lack of freshness. The quality of sandwich fillings was also an issue and complaints to both the Ombudsman and Official Prison Visitors led to an investigation into sandwich fillings in 2004. The two most common fillings causing complaint were capsicum onion and peanut butter, and cottage-cheese and pineapple. (Walter 2004). At the time of the Risdon Prison siege in May 2005, inmates said the 'sandwiches need fixing' (The Mercury May 10, 2005). During our interviews, a recently released inmate described his last meal as 'peanut butter and capsicum sandwiches'.

Fruit was criticized for lack of variety and for the way in which it came and went on the menu. It was difficult to determine how regularly fruit was served, with estimates varying from every day to two to three times a week or less.

Normally you get an orange or an apple, maybe a banana - not every day.

Fruit went along the same lines as the dessert. It went from three times a week, twice a week, to when I left we were only getting it rarely, and once a week.

One inmate put it another way.

You'll never see a cutback in chicken loaf, but you'll see a cutback in fruit.
According to Menu Control Plans, a piece of fruit (usually an apple, banana or orange) accompanies lunch every day of the week. Regardless of the actual situation, there is an obvious preference for a wider variety of fruit and more than one piece per day.

Dinner

Dinner attracted the most criticism, mainly because of the lack of fresh food, small portion sizes, and the quality of the meals after they had been cook-chilled and then re-thermed. Dinner consists of a meal weighing a maximum of 700g, served in a foil container, accompanied by three slices of bread and a 7g butter portion.

Well, there is not enough food for a starter, you know, you are working all day, um, and a lot of people are grown men - they're big boys, you know what I mean in there - there's a tiny portion of everything, which has got no flavour.

It's in a little foil container which is supposed to feed grown men and a lot bigger men than I am, and ah - you just can't survive on it - never enough.

Following the Ombudsman's review in 2004, it was recommended and agreed to in principle that 'prison management ... consider weighing all cooked meals as they are served' (Walter 2004 : 9), to address the problem of discrepancies in the weight of evening meals. Whether or not this occurs is unknown.

Meat, according to the men, was limited in variety and often poor quality, either excessively fatty or with a high proportion of bone and gristle. Once cooked, it was frequently tough and dry.

Main meat would be lamb, silverside - ah - probably chicken.

It's just such a let down you know, you would be craving for a piece of steak, and you would get a piece of steak, and it would just be like a rock, or just a little piece of gristle, and you would just be so shattered when you would get it.

A sampling of dinner meals by the Ombudsman and Official Visitors in 2004 found that '...some chicken pieces had very little meat and a lot of bone' (Walter 2004 : 9).

Meat portions were also criticised for their stinginess, both in terms of thickness and serving size.

Oh, we used to slice the meat up after it was cooked with an electric slicer, but it had to be a regulation thickness, like sliced ham - you couldn't cut a nice thick piece of meat.

Just say if we got silverside it would be about as thin as that bit of paper - 'cause they use to cut it on an electric slicer - two slices.

The mens' perception about a reduction in the quantity of meat is consistent with the prison's emphasis on a healthy low fat style menu and reinforced by the fact that under the the new food system, '... the meat ration has been significantly reduced' (Hines 2005 : 4).

Fish was mentioned only once, described as 'like them tuna patties which are actually fish cakes that you buy from a takeaway shop'. An email from PAR to the Attorney-General in September 2005 describes fish and chips Friday evenings as 'soggy potato wedges, soggy fish portions, and burnt and soggy fish cakes' (Douglas 2005).

Raw vegetables were scarce and cooked vegetables lacked variety. Once re-thermed vegetables were said to be waterlogged, or in the case of potatoes, baked dry.

Yeah - the vegetables - they're always drowned in water and soggy.

There wasn't - when I was there – not a great variety in vegetables - just the stock standard carrots, potatoes, broccoli – that would be it.

A joint investigation and review by Corrective Services and the Ombudsman found that the hard outer casing on potatoes was '...the result of using "off-season" potatoes' (Walter 2004 : 9).

The practice of mixing sauces and gravies into meals prior to cooking was detested and there was a strong preference for adding sauces and gravies according to personal taste.

The gravy is already on when you get the meal - when you prepare these meals you get the gravy out of the fridge – it's in a metal jug – already made –you put a blob of that on it – then that once it's in the oven then melts through all the meal. This is just done day in day out.

In a previous review, the large degree of sauce in meals was defended as 'remedial action to increase the dairy intake of inmates as recommended by the consultant dietician' (Walter 2004 : 9). At the time an alternative recommendation by the dietician was to give inmates access to additional portion control sauces/gravies for dry meals (Calvi 5.1.2).

At times, the moisture from the vegetables and sauces blended together in an unappealing mush. At worst, the food was described as 'pig slop', 'disgusting' and 'not fit for human consumption' and at best as:

Bland - it varies little and it's generally pretty tasteless and obviously the quality - must be from the lowest tenderer, so - it's a money saving thing.

The presentation and temperature of dinners varied widely, with meals regularly

being over-cooked, under-cooked or at times inedible, because they were cold in the middle, baked dry, or there was a layer of water on top.

Of a night when you get your tea in the silver containers, sometimes the um - it must be the condensation builds up - and half the container is full of water.

We are constantly trying different approaches to this and the only answer we are getting is [that] these meals have been approved by a dietician. Well they probably have, but I bet that was before they were frozen and reheated three days later (Inmate letter 29/3/05).

Dinner is delivered in insulated boxes which have been tested to hold the meals at a safe temperature for up to four hours above 60oC, although Risdon's Food Services Manager stressed that this time period 'would not be acceptable from a quality standpoint' (Hines 2005 : 2).

The fact that there is no choice-menu for the evening meal is out of step with best practice and was a matter for comparison with interstate prisons.

They supply you with a menu every week - you tick off what meals you want - there's a variety of meals, there's a variety of meals what you want. Like you tick each box what meal you would like, um, and the meals are 100% compared to the stuff we get here.

In Victoria, for instance, 'a typical weekly menu for a male prisoner includes several choices for the evening meal' (VAGO 1999 : 8.147). When asked how difficult it would be to provide a choice-menu for the evening meal, Risdon's Food Services Manager responded positively. He said it would be 'difficult, yes, but certainly achievable, however it would require more resources to be channeled into the Food Service and was a strategic decision for the Prison Executive' (Hines 2005 : 3).

Dessert was likened to fruit in terms of frequency and unpredictability.

Yeah, dessert changed. When I first moved um there was desserts three times a week, that went to twice a week - then it was once a week.

When the new food service was introduced in 2004, inmates were receiving dessert with the dinner meal twice a week but there was an understanding that they would 'eventually receive a dessert every night' (Walter 2004 : 3). An article in The Mercury (10 May, 2005), cites dessert as 'being served every Sunday night'. According to those interviewed, the promise of nightly desserts has yet to be honoured, although 2005/2006 Menu Control Plans show dessert on the menu each night.

The above issues are similar to those raised by New South Wales Inmates in a 1997 survey (see Appendix A). Likewise, a 1998 survey of inmates at Port Phillip Prison in Victoria found that 'the quantities of food allocated per prisoner were insufficient; the cook-chill system destroyed the quality and freshness of food; there was

insufficient variety in the fruits provided; the meal distribution process needed to be supervised by staff; the kitchen focused on profit rather than providing ample, healthy and nutritious food; and prisoners working in the kitchen were inadequately trained in the correct food heating procedures and presentation' (VAGO 1999 :8.168).

The overall quality of dinner meals was called into question during the Risdon Prison siege in May 2005, and appeared on the list of prisoners' demands, with inmates stating that '... main meals need fixing as there is no goodness in food that's been cooked then reheated a few days later' (The Mercury May 10 2005). The prison response was to 'make available the relevant parts of the Independent report of the Ombudsman [Walter 2004], to prove the quality of the food. (The Mercury May 10 2005). In September 2005, an email from Prison Action Reform, notified the Attorney-General that certain meals were being thrown out because prisoners were not eating them and that meals were still being served in foil trays with liquid sitting on the bottom (Douglas 2005).

Tea, Coffee & Beverages

Being well hydrated is an important consideration for good health. In relation to supplied beverages the men said there was rarely an alternative to the hot sweet tea that accompanies every meal.

Um, tea, always tea - they served tea in an urn - like a big tea bucket actually - the sugar, the milk, everything's put in the tea.

Coffee, instead of tea, appeared to be served only now and then, with estimates ranging from "occasionally", to "weekly", to "once a month". On rare occasions during summer, cordial would be served in lieu of tea, but this was unpredictable.

Inmates are able to make a hot drink in their cell, provided they can afford to buy their own kettle through the prison and have sufficient funds to purchase coffee and tea supplies from the canteen.

If you want to buy a jug, you can make yourself a cup of tea. If you've got enough money to buy ya stuff - tea. But you're not allowed to have sugar, 'cause you might make a brew.

The daily allowance of milk was considered inadequate, and most used it all on their breakfast cereal.

You can make a cuppa in your cell - yeah - but you've got no milk basically, so you'd have to drink it black.

Those who did have surplus milk had nowhere to refrigerate it during the summer months. In March 2004, the consultant dietician warned that 'lack of refrigeration posed a hazard with respect to food safety' and recommended inmates receive

portion packs of long life milk for tea/coffee (Calvi 2004 : 5). Fizzy and mix-up cordials are on the canteen list, but fruit juice is not.

It is evident that since the introduction of the new food service and implementation of the cook-chill method, inmates have witnessed what they maintain is a steep decline in the quality, quantity, variety and appearance of their food. It is also apparent that while they are seeking an improvement in these areas, they do not have grandiose expectations, but rather a preference for healthy foods of good quality and sufficient quantity. Clearly there are ongoing concerns in relation to the size of breakfast and dinner portions, the quality of sandwich fillings, the absence of multigrain and brown breads, the quantity, quality and temperature of dinner meals, as well as the reliability and frequency of fruit and dessert. At the time of writing cold food, often floating in water, remains an issue, and some meals are still being thrown out because they are inedible. On the surface, these changes seem minor, but taken together they represent ‘...another step away from non-prison life and enhance the institutional environment of prison’ (Walter, 2004 : 11).

SPECIAL DAYS & SPECIAL DIETS

Commodities such as food act as ‘storehouses’ of meaning, serving as reminders of events in one’s personal past ... (Lupton, 1996 : 49).

Inmates experience a heightened sense of isolation at times such as Christmas, Easter or birthdays, given that such occasions are usually associated with particular customs, favourite foods and/or family gatherings. Similarly, special diets for health, religious or ethnic reasons are important in expressing individual beliefs and values. Given the fact that hunger was an issue for all of the men interviewed, the canteen plays an important role in supplementing diets.

Menu Planning & Special Diets

The development of the new food service was accompanied by the establishment of Menu Control Plans. Menus are developed by the Food Services Manager at Risdon Prison and follow the 1998 Australian Guide to Healthy Eating (Hines 2005). The four-weekly set menu is rotated twelve times before replacement. An accredited practicing dietician reviews and makes recommendations each time a new menu is proposed, which may equate to an annual review. This is less frequent than the six monthly standard proposed by the Victorian Auditor-General’s Office (VAGO 1999).

‘Securing the services of an independent and accredited dietician ...was first recommended by the Department of Health and Human Services in 2001, when it found that menus in all sections of Risdon Prison failed to meet daily nutritional requirements’ (Walter 2004 : 5). The most common food groups identified as not meeting daily requirements were ‘...fruit and dairy products, too much red meat, and little vegetable variety. The review also found there was poor menu planning

and variation, and recipes were inappropriately based on army rations' (Walter : 2004 : 5).

In August 2001, a formally qualified Food Services Manager commenced employment with Corrective Services, which according to the Ombudsman's office, 'resulted in a general improvement in the food' (Walter 2004). In February 2004, a consultant dietician assessed the Menu Control Plan 'to determine whether it met dietary guidelines for Australians' (Calvi 2004 : 3). The dietician made 'a number of recommendations to ensure that the Menu Control Plans would provide maximum nutritional benefits to inmates ... and at least the minimum number of serves of each food group on a daily basis' (Calvi 2004 : 3). At the time 'the dietician warned Corrective Services that unless her recommendations for improvement were implemented, the new food service menu would not provide adequate nutrition in accordance with Australian dietary guidelines' (Walter 2004 : 6). Based on the accounts of the men in this study it remains uncertain whether minimum daily requirements of fruit (2 pieces), vegetables (5 serves) and dairy (2 serves) are consistently being met, although current Menu Control Plans indicate compliance with minimum requirements.

Special Diets

According to several men, special diets for health, religious or ethnic reasons did exist at one time, but have become a thing of the past under the current regime.

Well, ah, they said there were special diets, but - no - they don't really exist. Ah, if you had a health problem and you needed low fat - they'd say they give you a diet to suit that, but they don't.

An Operational Brief prepared for prison management in 2004, states that 'medical diets will be catered for as recommended by the Corrective Health Medical Officer' and that 'vegetarian and religious diets will be catered for after unit manager approval' (Hines, 2004 : 3). Regardless of these guidelines, those interviewed maintain there is little genuine interest in addressing the needs of individual inmates in this respect.

There's not a system in place to look after people with ah - medical needs who say can't eat processed foods, um - who may for religious reasons have different types of food - there's no system in place for it at all.

In a letter to the Ombudsman, a prison worker remarked that ...

A dietician did come into the prison to prepare menus for a variety of special needs diets, but the inmates in the kitchen admitted that they did not really take any notice of it (PAR 2005 : 6).

The same worker suggested that a quota of 30 diet meals exists and that when those are exhausted no more can be allocated, however Risdon's Food Services

Manager said there is no such quota in place (Hines 2005).

A review of current Menu Control Plans shows that variations to dessert and some meats constitutes the diet menu. The main menu is described by the Food Services Manager as 'practically a low fat diet, with the exception of some white bread rations and full cream milk' (Hines 2005 : 3). Evening meals such as 'simple mixed grill and gravy' and 'curried sausages' are replaced by 'roast lamb' or 'corned silver-side' for those on the diet menu and dessert consists of low fat yoghurt, every night of the week. Weekend hot lunches such as beef pie or cheese burgers, are replaced with cold meat salads on both days of the weekend, for those on the diet menu.

Medical diets need to be authorized by the prison doctor and scrutinized by a dietician. Religious and cultural diets are authorized by the Manager of Accommodation (Hines 2005).

To get a special meal provided to you, you had to go – um - get a request to see a Doctor – hard to do. Um - some people will go as far as self-mutilation – it's called a 'hospital pass' – just to get to see a Doctor.

Once approved, reservations were expressed about the consistent delivery of special diet meals.

You would get a special meal provided to you, which, nine out of ten times wouldn't be done.

The food officer would put it in his diary but could never find it on the day.

Apparently this inconsistency is not uncommon, with a New South Wales Inmate Health Survey finding that 50% of inmates had encountered problems receiving special diets, 'because the kitchen forgets or portions were too small' (Butler 1997 cited in JA 1999 : 2). The most common causes of dissatisfaction with special diets were lack of availability and unhappiness with the contents of the diet (Butler & Milner 2001). In September 2005, an email from PAR to the Attorney General drew attention to the fact that 'special diets were still not being met' in Risdon Prison (Douglas 2005). As families are unable to bring food into the prison, there is an extra duty of care to ensure special diets are properly catered for and that culturally appropriate food is provided as an option in routine menus.

Christmas, Easter and Festive Occasions

Christmas, Easter and special occasions such as birthdays were important to the men. Some recalled celebrations in years gone by, with a mixture of pleasure and regret.

Back then, if ah an inmate was celebrating a birthday the kitchen would cook them a cake - hmmm.

Yeah, it [Christmas] was awesome. They'd have a team of inmates up at four in the morning to get it all ready for that day. Um - everything from um - like eggs and hash browns and bacon, um - things like that in the morning - with a selection of drinks and everything to go with it, um - to say - a hot meal at um, lunch - all turkeys, chickens, hams - everything there - cranberry sauces - everything - say the leftovers from that for tea - so cold meats, puddings, custard - for dessert.

Easter - Easter's gone now - it's just Christmas

Others recalled how fellow inmates experienced their first traditional Christmas in prison.

Ah, as far as Christmas goes it used to be - ah - it was a good time for a lot of young guys who were in there, because they wouldn't know what it was like to have a real Christmas outside. They'd have sports which ran all through Christmas break - ah it was terrific - but even that has virtually disappeared over there.

There were varying accounts from those with more recent experience.

Well, the last time I was there for Christmas - we got um a piece of beef, a piece of turkey and an egg - something like that.

The only memorable feed I had in there was one Christmas, one Christmas dinner. Actually, the year that it was really good, xx xxxxxx had the newspapers come in and it was all over the newspapers - this great meal that we were going to get - and we did - and it was brilliant, it was just a big media thing - to you know - soften the public.

For inmates, Christmas is a time when the absence of family is particularly acute.

Just cause you see your family - you know what I mean. Just - when you're in there you just keep looking back on other Christmas's. Yeah, I hated Christmas.

Yeah, like on those Christmas's when it was really crap - yeah I always use to think, you know, I would love to be out at home with nan and mum, cause it is a huge big family thing.

Some prisons are beginning to recognise the value in acknowledging special occasions. For instance, Shotts Prison in Scotland recently introduced the practice of providing celebration cakes for special occasions such as birthdays or anniversaries, in an effort to lessen the impact on children of the imprisonment of a family member (Scottish Prison Service 2005).

It is evident from the men's accounts that a genuine effort to create a festive environment and serve traditional food, would go some way to relieving the pain of imprisonment. Like most of us, inmates' experiences of food are linked to social relationships, which are as essential to their sense of identity and self-esteem, as they are for anyone else in the community (Goulding 2004).

Canteen, Cash & Supplements

Buying items from the canteen is the only way inmates can supplement their diet. Items are selected by ticking off a list, with deliveries taking place once a week (see Appendix B). The most common purchases from the canteen were chocolate, tobacco, toiletries, tuna, biscuits, noodles and protein bars. The men said canteen items were inadequate, the list was forever changing, and there was a shortage of healthy food items.

Just tuna, that's really the only food - apart from you can buy chocolate and stuff like that - chocolate and chips and cordial - yeah junk food - the only food on there is tuna.

So - I used to purchase noodles - which was a bad thing, because I put on a lot of weight in prison - like bad weight - and probably from the noodles - because - um - that was the only thing that would make you feel full.

This agrees with a finding by the Tasmanian Ombudsman's office in 2004 that '... a lot of the canteen food items are "junk food", that is food or drinks that are high in sugar content and low in nutritional value (Walter 2004 : 17). Inmates would prefer food such as 'yoghurt, eggs, tuna, protein bars, dried fruit and nuts' to be added to the list, rather than having to choose foods such as two-minute noodles, chips, chocolate, sweet and savoury biscuits, all of which are high in fat and low in nutritional content' (PAR 2005 : 7).

Definitely anything nutritious that they can put on there - for sure - like the tuna.

A 1997 New South Wales Inmate Health Survey found that 'about one quarter of male prisoners bought eggs, noodles, meat, and pasta/rice and that these were not considered extravagant food, but basic items prisoners were requiring' (Butler 1997 cited in JA 1999 : 2).

The men's claim that there were fewer food items available on the canteen list than in previous years is consistent with an earlier recommendation that 'the canteen list be expanded to include a wider variety of food items, ... allowing inmates to supplement their diet with non-refrigerated canteen items such as muesli bars...' (Walter 2004 : 17). Canteen provisions were on the list of demands made by inmates during the Risdon Prison siege in May 2005. The prison responded by saying that they did not have the resources to increase the number of items on canteen, however, in consultation, they agreed to review the list as long as the total number of items on the list remained the same. (The Mercury 10 May 2005).

A recent PAR report indicates tuna was subsequently added to the list (PAR 2005 : 7).

Several men said protein powder and vitamin tablets had gradually disappeared off the canteen, and that this was particularly frustrating for those involved in physical fitness and weight training.

When I first went to prison you could get multi-vitamins, um, garlic-oil capsules - you know - just like all healthy and natural stuff. But, ah yeah, that just all went.

One man pointed out that engaging in fitness and weight training "relieved the boredom of prison, and gave inmates something to focus on, diverting them away from things such as drugs and making brews."

The price of canteen items is an important consideration, given the limited income of most inmates.

Just say, I am a smoker right, I buy a small packet of tobacco, it leaves me a dollar left.

Well sometimes, if you had a bit extra in your kitty - well you'd spend all your wage - all your pay.

In their paper 'Beyond Bread and Water', Justice Action in New South Wales argue that consideration should be given to the high level of poverty amongst prisoners and contend that many are unable to afford to buy extra food, nor should they have to (JA 1999).

Comparisons were made with canteen lists from interstate prisons.

Blokes who've come to Risdon and bought canteen forms from other prisons they've been to in Australia - their canteen forms basically have everything you can think of on them. You can buy eggs, you can buy anything - you can get anything you like - and ours is just rubbish.

A worthwhile suggestion made by one man was for the prison to provide a 'survival kit' for new inmates comprising basic items such as a toothbrush, toothpaste and razors, given that most have no money and may wait up to a fortnight for their first canteen.

In summary, inmates remain sceptical about the consistent delivery of special diets. The process for requesting a special diet is viewed as time-consuming and overly bureaucratic and once approved, it remains doubtful whether it is followed through. The perception is that nobody cares about special days or special diets and that, unlike prior years, events such as Christmas, Easter and birthdays, are trivialised by the limited effort put in to mark their significance. While the canteen

provides a resource for inmates to supplement their diet and acquire foods they enjoyed before prison, the lack of consistency and the scarcity of healthy food, represents a source of anguish. Although the Prison Service has gone to the trouble of consulting a dietician regarding the nutritional value of menu plans, no such attention has been given to canteen items. Persistent minimisation of the canteen means inmates cannot rely on it to adequately supplement their diets.

FOOD POISONING & KITCHEN HYGIENE

If one does not know what one is eating, one's subjectivity is called into question (Lupton 1996 : 17).

Because inmates are reliant on others to prepare and cook their food, they are naturally apprehensive about kitchen hygiene and the prospect of food poisoning. These anxieties are exacerbated by the fact that they can no longer see into the kitchen as they once did when mess rooms were in use. Their concerns extend to the cleanliness of the kitchen, the personal hygiene of those preparing food, and the need to know that kitchen inspections are carried out without advance notice to prison personnel. If inmates do experience food poisoning, request forms for medical assistance are allegedly ignored or destroyed by some custodial officers.

Food Poisoning

The fear of food poisoning was a common anxiety and is not without a basis in fact, given that the cook-chill process relies on 'rapid chilling and re-therming to prevent food poisoning and illness' (Walter 2004 : 12). In 2004, the State Food Officer, Public and Environmental Health Service, Tasmania, advocated consuming food within 20 minutes of delivery, 'because food left out of temperature control over time, enables pathogens to multiply to levels of concern' (Johnson 2004 : 1). According to the men, food that smelt foul or tasted off was a regular occurrence.

Oh yeah - my word - there's always someone. Oh - it's a daily thing - yep - and you can attribute it to the food when it's the food because everyone goes down.

Yeah, many times yeah. Food that was off was the cause of the majority of riots and sit-outs when I was in prison.

Four out of the six men interviewed had suffered a food-related illness, although few had reported it.

No, never reported it no - well you know, you would have to see the doctor and - then you know that's another story - you would put a request in but you would never get to see a doctor.

In the period December 2004 to May 2005, PAR received 81 complaints, mostly relating to inmates not getting access to a doctor when unwell, as well as frequent gastrointestinal problems that went unmonitored (PAR 2005). There were specific

complaints relating to 'the failure of custodial officers to notify health staff of requests by inmates suffering physical complaints' (PAR 2005 : 8).

One man explained the dilemma.

What you do is you hope that if you are unwell that you've got the right officer on who will bend over backwards to see the system work for you – he has to fight for it - and if you have the wrong officer on - so you fill out a request form stating you want to see the nurse - and he'll throw it in the bin. So that's the end of it. So you're sitting there waiting - the nurse comes round for the people who that officer decided he wants the nurse to see - the nurse walks straight past you and you go 'ooh - what's goin on?' and the nurse says 'I haven't got your request form, so I'm not allowed into your cell', so it's really run by the officers' moods – so if you've got the right officer there, it works. If you've got the wrong officer there, and the wrong officers are in the majority, well, hmm.

Food contaminated by foreign objects was not a common complaint amongst this group with only one instance cited

We had pies, um, and there was a friggin mouse in the pie - and cooked.

In 2001, allegations about contamination were raised with the Ombudsman, but could not be substantiated, however, it was acknowledged at the time, that 'the practice of deliberately contaminating food, particularly of inmates in protective custody, is well known (OOT 2001 : 55). Correspondence sent to the The Mercury in September 2005 by Risdon Prison inmates, claimed that an inmate found a latex glove in his sandwiches. In October 2005, it is alleged another inmate found cigarette butts in his evening meal (Inmate letter 13/10/05). These incidents suggest that contamination of food by foreign objects remains an issue for some inmates.

Kitchen Hygiene

Ongoing complaints regarding the poor state of the kitchen and concerns about the hygiene of the workers led to changes in legislation, resulting in the prison kitchen being subject to inspection by the Clarence City Council. As a Category C premises, the kitchen is now inspected at least twice a year, in accordance with the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code (2001), although the Senior Environmental Officer at Clarence City Council said he may go in more often than that (Vanderwal 2005).

Inmate concerns about the cleanliness of the kitchen and the personal hygiene of kitchen staff revolve around the belief that unannounced kitchen inspections are a farce.

When we were supposed to get, um, somebody in to show an unbiased opinion - oh things were stacked up so greatly in the kitchen just for that particular time that they were there.

The only time they ever cleaned it up was when someone would put a complaint in and the health inspector was coming.

In previous years, inspections had to be announced, however subsequent discussions between Clarence City Council and the Ombudsman, resulted in unannounced visits. At the time of writing, unannounced visits have been in place for approximately two and a half years. Two recent inspections were conducted, in the company of the prison Doctor (Vanderwal 2005). Despite a genuine commitment by the Clarence City Council to ensure inspections are unannounced, inmates still doubt the validity of this.

The level of training for kitchen staff and their compliance with hygiene standards was also a concern. According to the Food Standards Code (2001) kitchen workers are required to have skills and knowledge in food safety and food hygiene. Clarence City Council's Environmental Health Officer confirmed that senior staff and qualified food handlers had completed a self-paced training program, which took the form of a video and training booklet. The Council also continues to advise the prison on how to apply the Food Safety Plan, as well as providing ongoing training (Vanderwal 2005).

The adequacy of training for kitchen staff was questioned by two of the men.

Ah - well there is an induction course - they say it is - it takes all of about ten minutes. I mean, ah, just a few safety aspects of the kitchen - gloves, hair nets the lot - that's it.

Clarence City Council Food Premises Inspection Reports for April 2005 reveal several areas of concern in relation to kitchen food safety and hygiene. Issues include the hand wash unit not operating in the kitchen toilet area, storage of large quantities of food on trolleys without covers, and bins without lids being moved from the floor area up onto benches, all representing major sources of cross-contamination' (Clarence City Council 2005). While it is recognised that some of these breaches may have been addressed with the refurbishment of the prison kitchen in 2005, the fact that these concerns were identified so recently is disquieting. The Clarence City Council said that policies and practices have been implemented to ensure that these sources of cross-contamination do not occur again.

As custodial officers no longer eat the prison meals and the majority of inmates never see the prison kitchen, the importance of independent and unannounced inspections becomes even more critical in reassuring inmates that personal and kitchen hygiene is enforced and that food is being prepared in accordance with the required standards.

THE EATING ENVIRONMENT

The family meal and the dinner table are potent symbols ... of the family itself... (Lupton 1996 : 39).

In prison, where and when inmates eat is beyond their control and therefore assumes extra importance. The closure of mess rooms brought an end to communal dining, reduced opportunities to socialize, and extended the time spent in cells and yards. Eating lunch in unhygienic yards is an ongoing aggravation, and the timing of the evening meal remains at odds with normal community mealtimes.

Cells, Mess Rooms and Yards

The change to the new food service coincided with a move to deliver food to cells, a proposal first put forward by the Food Services Manager in December 2003 (Hines 2004).

Cells

Eating in cells is the most hated practice and was variously described as “disgusting”, “degrading” and “inhuman.”

Now you've got to eat in your cell - eat breakfast and tea in your cell. You've got a toilet in your cell as well - how would they like to sit in a room with a toilet in it and eat? Rotten, filthy cells they are - all concrete - walls, floor, roof.

One inmate who had studied the literature said he believed it was a *violation of human rights*.

Those forced to share a cell because of overcrowding, were particularly critical of the practice. A shared cell configuration includes two bunks one above the other, a hand basin, a toilet and a small table bolted to the wall. One inmate can sit at the table, but the second must either sit stooped over on the bottom bunk, or on the top of the toilet, provided it has a cover.

Under this new arrangement, cells are treated as ‘domestic’ situations, although it is unclear what this means in practice, other than the stated fact that ‘inmates are required to manage their own hygiene...’ (Hines 2004 : 2). Complaints from inmates suggest this approach does not work because of a ‘lack of access to cleaning materials’ (PAR, 2005 : 8), and they contend that keeping cells clean is particularly difficult during lockdowns.

I mean there were some weeks there where we would be locked down, and we would be fed every meal in our cell - the cells would just be piled up with empty containers and scrap food where you would be locked in your cell and wouldn't be able to clean it.

At the time the new food service was introduced, the State Food Officer with the Public & Environmental Health Service, undertook a risk analysis of inmate health in relation to catering directly to cells. In his opinion, consuming food within the cells raised some potential food safety concerns, given the close proximity of the toilet to the eating area and he suggested that ‘flushing the toilet may create

pathogen-laden aerosols that could in turn contaminate any unprotected food' (Johnson 2004 : 1-2). He went on to say that 'closing the toilet lid before flushing reduced this risk, although not all toilets were fitted with lids and under such circumstances, inmates should be advised not to use the toilet when meals were present' (Johnson 2004 : 2).

Dinner meals carry a printed warning that the toilet should not be used during the consumption of food, and to 'wash hands thoroughly in hot water with soap' (Hines 2004 : 6), despite the fact that cells have no hot running water. At the time, the Public and Environmental Health Service declared that, on balance, they were satisfied that 'with appropriate management, the change to cook-chill and serving meals in cells could be achieved without compromising food safety' (Johnson 2004 : 2). Notwithstanding these arguments, eating, sleeping and going to the toilet in the same space would be unacceptable in the community.

Mess Rooms

For the prison, the rationale for the move away from eating in mess rooms was governed by three major concerns.

1. the safety of officers who supervised the mass movement of inmates to mess rooms
2. the practice of 'sit-ins' involving inmates refusing to move from mess rooms to yards until particular grievances were addressed, and
3. the need to reduce the high volume of rhetoric kitchen officers were subjected to on a daily basis (Hines 2004 : 2)

Inmates saw it differently, saying that sit-ins were mostly about food that was off or inadequate and that such incidents generated a lot of resentment because nothing was ever done about it.

We would be given meals that were off, or just not suitable to eat. One inmate would approach the officer outside the mess room door, "can you look at this meal, take it back, we don't want to eat it. All the meals are like it, here's an example of one". Give it to the officer to give to the cook up in the kitchen, and they would basically just say well, you know, "tough luck, eat it or eat nothing - there's nothing more to give ya". And, um that's when it would start, yeah just start an uproar really in the mess room The last resort was to sleep out in the yards, and refuse to go back to our cells until the meals were changed, or stuff like that, and yeah. It's only ever been over the meals, the whole time I was there.

I mean most of the problems in that prison are caused over food – it's as simple as that – it would – it's definitely at the top – and then it goes down the list from there.

Despite the fact that mess rooms were rundown, the men nevertheless felt a keen sense of loss at their closure.

I enjoyed eating in there because – yeah - we could sit around and have a yarn. I believe that you should be able to sit down to a table and eat your meal - although the mess rooms were cold, and dingy, I still believe that.

The meal time's important, I think – because - all the stress and animosity that builds up in a yard with a group of men stuck in a small area – um - is gone - at meal time. It's a strange thing - you get into that mess room and it disappears - then it sort of builds up again towards tea - then you get in there and it's gone by the morning.

One consequence of the closure of mess rooms is the fact that inmates cannot see into the kitchen on their way to the mess room, as they once could.

The other inmates in the place they used to love coming round 'cause it used to be open area where they could see into the kitchen and see how things were being prepared.

Nor do they experience the usual pleasures associated with food cooking.

...you could always get the smell of the fresh food being cooked, which - which was good – and a lot of guys miss that.

Um, you had no - you know when you sit in a house and you cook a roast... right, and you can smell it like right through the place...well there was none of that, you could not smell the food that was cooked

I guess that there is no real smell there now as far as food goes. Yeah - you don't get that - the things that are taken away from you when you go to prison, to a degree you don't have them, you don't miss them. I guess if you smelt fresh cooked bread or something coming through the jail - I don't know - it'd probably upset you, rather than - oh great - I don't know.

Yards

The unhygienic state of the yards was a major issue. Yards were described as big bird aviaries, with inadequate seating, often overcrowded, filthy, and soiled by birds.

Yeah - there's a couple of tables you can sit at, but the yards are that dirty - there are 40 or 50 blokes smoking all day everyday, throwing it on the ground everywhere - in the yard you just look around when you're trying to eat lunch and just – yeah - puts you off a little bit - just the um, dirtiness.

Just cigarette stubs all over the ground, like, covering all over the ground, and matches, and people been spitting, just papers everywhere.

One man saw "being able to see the sky, and get sunshine" as a benefit of time in the yards.

All the men would like to see the yards cleaned more regularly.

It gets cleaned a couple of times a week - but sometimes the officers won't let the inmates clean it - just to piss us off I think.

Arguably the move to eating in cells has resulted in cost and operational efficiencies for the prison, but the outcome has been to the detriment of inmates. The closure of mess rooms has forced them to eat in cells and yards, in conditions they describe as unsanitary and degrading. The issue of unhygienic yards and the preference for eating in mess rooms was one of the prisoners' demands during the siege at Risdon Prison in May 2005. The prison's response was that advice from the Department of Health and Human Services is that the practice is not unhygienic, that throughout Australia maximum rated inmates receive their meals in yards, and that this would continue as normal practice (The Mercury, Tuesday May 10 2005).

Mealtimes, Conversation & Camaraderie

Meals are one of the most important events in the prison day, establishing a routine for staff, and providing a valued opportunity for inmates to interact with others. One problem with meals in prison is the hour at which they are served and the amount of time available to eat.

Most meals occur far earlier than is normal in the free community and inmates must become accustomed to an entirely new eating schedule that may end by 4.00 pm (Reference World 2005).

Well, it was pretty early ta have tea 4 o'clock - yeah - that shocked me a bit.

How many grown-ups would be eating their meal at half past three, quarter to four? It's not, you know, It's not - normal.

With the closure of mess rooms the desire for a level of normality surrounding mealtimes and the human need to socialize around food has been taken away.

Yeah - it made you feel - still made you feel like a human being. It still made you - um, feel like you was with a family or something sitting down at the table, you know what I mean?

You get to have a chat with your mates - just catching up on the gossip about what's going on in every other yard.

Yeah, that was always good, to sit down and you know, eat your meal or whatever you want to call it - yeah with mates or you know, with other people.

Similar feelings were expressed in relation to preparing and cooking their own food. Although it is recognised that security concerns restrict the freedom for inmates to cook their own food, these sorts of opportunities have been available in the past.

Medium and Hayes, yep, the opportunity's there to do those things. Whenever there's any sort of BBQ isn't it - when there's any sort of get-together with people - it's always a good time.

At the jail farm I've had a BBQ because it was an open place - you know what I mean - but the jail at Risdon itself would not even allow something like that. They wouldn't - you see they are not even allowed on the oval anymore.

Despite security considerations, a BBQ was still seen as a viable opportunity for inmates to prepare and cook for themselves. A submission to the New South Wales Department of Corrective Services by Justice Action in New South Wales, found a similar desire among inmates, and options were put forward for 'cooking in groups, individually or by a few' (JA 1999 : 1).

Overall the biggest issues were the degrading practice of eating in cells and unhygienic overcrowded yards, with no proper place to sit. The mens' perspective on the closure of mess rooms varied to that of prison authorities, creating a site of tension. In the current environment, where food is delivered to the cell door, opportunities to prepare and cook their own food are valued even more. What these insights also reveal is that engaging with others is an important need for inmates, representing not only a break in the day, but also a period of sociability (Smith 2002). This human need to socialize appears to run contrary to prison concerns about security and there is a need to 'strike the right balance between security and containment on the one hand and rehabilitation and restitution of inmates' self-esteem on the other' (OOT 2001 : 27).

FOOD, MOOD AND PRISON MORALE

Differential power relations are experienced in an embodied way. Emotions such as resentment, anger and frustration may find expression in and through the body (Lupton 1996 : 55).

Prisoners are taken out of society and away from the people they love and the places that characterise their daily lives. In prison 'food becomes symbolic of the fact that life has become restricted and previous values of independence and individualism combine to heighten the pains of imprisonment' (Smith 2002 : 203). For inmates, it becomes difficult to separate food from the prison experience.

You know, eating is the main part of prison, 'cause prison meals are crammed into such a small space of time, and then you are in your cell, then you wake up the next day, and all you are doing is waiting for breakfast, and then you are waiting for lunch, and then you are waiting for tea. So, food is prison really, um, and then you are locked in your cell and you wake up and it all starts again.

Um - prison food is something you stress on every day - you're waiting for that next meal - always waiting for that next meal.

The strong link between food and emotion and the capacity for food-related issues to impact on inmate self-esteem and prison morale, is illustrated by the following comments.

I mean most of the problems in that prison are caused over food – it's as simple as that - it would - it's definitely at the top - and then it goes down the list from there - we've had riots over the food.

It's only the peril of inmates - so what do they care - so now, the inmates are a little bit more rowdy, a little bit more aggressive, then they wonder why.

Every blokes just getting more and more pissed off every day - so somethin' will end up happenin'.

For some there was the added pressure of feeling they needed to lie to loved ones about the food, but for others, prison food was a shared experience.

Oh, they hated it you know - it was like they were suffering as well on the outside - as we were on the inside.

In answer to the question – how does prison food make you feel? - the responses speak for themselves.

Um – sad - yes, it's an emotional thing that's for sure – yeah - if you can make yourself um - go back into it - um - cause you don't really notice it when you're there – um - but if you spend time um sort of um going back over it when you're out - which I try not to do.

Sometimes I'd get agitated about the fact I was hungry and I got mad. It does create problems for you.

It's very degrading - very degrading, because it puts you - yeah it makes you think you're a - pardon the expression - a 'bloody refugee' - you know - anything goes and that's the attitude of XX XXXXXX you'll eat it because you'll starve otherwise.

I feel depressed when I do get the tucker - it looks like slop - um, it's cold - there's no quality of it - um, the flavour is not there - so it makes me very depressed.

Well, like an animal really - yeah.

In a 2005 email to the Attorney-General highlighting food-related complaints, inmates were cited as saying they felt 'as though they were going mad' (Douglas 2005).

Clearly, if the food had been better, it would have made a difference to the way in which these men experienced prison.

It probably would have changed my whole - you know - prison experience, because honestly I can't think of one single incident um in a jail, that isn't related to that - comes back to that food. It comes back to the structure that they place on that food.

I am sure it would have made a huge difference if the food was, you know, just of an average standard.

In prison, inmates 'are relegated to a child-like state – told when and what to eat' (Smith 2002 : 210) which runs contrary to their experience as adults. It is clear from the above comments, that 'poor food preparation and/or presentation can significantly affect people's morale and wellbeing' (NSW Ombudsman 1996 : 167).

Complaints, Prison Culture & Impartiality

Arguably, 'the more nutritious the meals, the less likely inmates will have a cause for complaint' (Walter 2004 : 6). Of the 681 complaints received by PAR during the six month period December 2004 to May 2005 - 121 were food-related and 30 related to inadequacies in the canteen list.

The absence of a clear, straightforward process for complaints was a source of frustration, as was the experience that complaints about food attracted disciplinary action.

I can appreciate the fact that there are 600 or so inmates currently incarcerated. I also appreciate that there has to be some display of order, but when inmates have a legitimate request or concern they should be able to express this without being brushed off or having sarcastic remarks made to them (Inmate letter to Ombudsman 15/2/05).

Sometimes an inmate would say you know, "xxxxxx how about cooking us something in this way instead of that way", really politely, and just the abuse you would get xxxx and the next thing you know you would be booked - put on paper - you wouldn't know it until a few days after, and a hearing officer would come up and tell you, you were charged with making this comment to xxxxxx the other day.

They know the importance of food in there - which is all the more reason why it's a purposeful thing.

Although 'the Ombudsman and Official Visitors play an important role in monitoring the implementation of prison reforms' (OOT 2001 : 13), their impartiality remains problematic for some of these men. The fact that the Ombudsman's reporting line to the Minister for Corrective Services and ultimately the Attorney-General, runs parallel to that of the Prison Director, negates the independence of the Ombudsman and Official Visitors in the eyes of inmates.

But then the Ombudsman goes straight back to the prison, which to me they should not be in touch with the prison about the complaint - they should discuss it with you first and then see what - and act on your behalf then. But no - it sort of just goes in that vicious circle all the time - I don't see the Ombudsman as independent.

Existing internal and external grievance processes are seen as overly bureaucratic, controlled, and burdensome.

There's a complaints form - but the process is controlled by the prison - and then of course there's the Ombudsman - generally they're pretty good - but um - you either complain to the system and get nowhere or complain to the Ombudsman and it's just such a huge drama - it's just a massive drama. Most people were either released in that time or something happens that - that side-tracks the system from them.

Any suggestion that complaints about food might be construed as a 'way of kicking-off at the system' (Smith 2002 : 205) or that prisoners used food to draw public attention to their conditions, were strongly refuted.

No, I think that that is the last thing on inmate's minds, to get public attention over this, that and the other - they just want to get by and live day to day and, you know, go home.

The food is an issue - and it therefore draws attention. Which is - I mean - how else do you - you know make people aware. But it's not a manipulation, if that's what you're saying - it's definitely not a manipulation.

I think the community at large think that you know 'be satisfied with what they get'. But no, it's not the way - they wouldn't eat it ... the community itself would not want to eat this sort of thing ... I've seen better food on these food vans that come around for the young blokes and that on the street

Well ... prisoners complain because they want something done and they want the public to know just how bad it is ... but no-one seems to really listen.

For one man, it all came down to this.

Um, well I have had mixed opinions from a lot of people out there - some say, well you know, we make a fuss over nothing, or that we are in prison we

shouldn't expect this, that, and the other - but until one of their family members go there, or they are there themselves, you know - it's a whole different, different, different thing - yeah.

Prison culture

The conduct of custodial officers also plays a part in how prison food is perceived by inmates.

Food is used as a punishment. Food is used as a leverage. If you are giving a little bit of a hassle, they won't feed you, they will feed you when they are ready to feed ya.

Despite the Food Service Manager's best efforts to ensure meals are delivered within a total estimated time of 17 minutes from loading of insulated food containers to distribution to the last cell (Hines 2004), it appears meals are often left to sit on arrival in divisions. In certain circumstances, the tactics of particular custodial officers, mean food is experienced as punishment.

The meals are brought down on a trolley from the kitchen, which would be whatever the meal is up there that day. But um - that's not how it's supplied to you - so you're getting two little boxes of cereal that morning - that officer will take away one of those boxes and you'll only get one - and if it's a hot meal it will be allowed to go cold. Um - it's just part of the set-up in solitary. And you know it's the case, because if you get the right officer on there, that doesn't happen. Um, yeah - so you know that it's a purposeful thing. Yeah, so - you don't get enough to drink and you don't get enough to eat.

Um, it's really terrible around there - they pull the trolley - everyone can hear the trolley and they sing out "breakfast is here" and we could wait up to half an hour, 35 minutes before he would start serving it to everyone in the cells, and we would know it was there, and um, inmates would sing out "are you going to get that breakfast up here boss?" and he would sing out and say "you will get nothing if you keep carrying on" or "you keep asking me and you won't get it at all".

The attitude of custodial officers cannot be underestimated in terms of the impact on individual inmates and the mood of the prison.

They don't understand the people that they're dealing with, and they don't understand the effect that - that - officers have on those people.

Asked whether they thought the new Prison would change things, two points of view emerged.

No, because it is going to be the same management, the same - you know, it's just going to be run by the same people who don't care, you know.

Because they saw a need to build a new prison - so I'm hoping that they're seeing a need to structure it differently - towards the needs of the inmates - I'm hoping - that they're gonna understand - I think they've got individual meal rooms where people can prepare their own food – um - and if that can work - if they've got the right people - that would be an excellent thing.

Clearly, prison officer culture, poor communication and an ineffective complaints system leave inmates feeling frustrated and powerless. A discussion guide prepared for the Twenty-third Asian and Pacific Conference of Correctional Administrators (APCCA), suggests 'a link between major prison disturbances, the way in which staff respond to prisoner's complaints and a poor prison officer culture' (APCCA 2003 : 35). At the end of the day inmates simply want to be listened to, to receive a response devoid of retaliatory action, and to have their point of view taken into consideration, in decisions about food and eating.

TOWARDS BEST PRACTICE

'Put simply, best practice is about not re-inventing the wheel, but learning from others. A "best practice" approach means seeking out ideas and experiences from those who have undertaken similar activities in the past, determining which of these practices are relevant to your situation, and testing them out to see if they work, before incorporating the proven practices in your own documented processes' (Lawes 2005 : 1). In this respect, the experiences of other prisons are a valuable learning resource.

The Victorian Experience

A 1998 survey commissioned by the Victorian Auditor-General's Office, to ascertain prisoners' views on the quality and distribution of meals, found that:

- The quantities of food allocated per prisoner were insufficient
- The snap freeze and reheat process employed in the cook-chill system destroyed the quality and freshness of the food
- There was insufficient variety in the fruits provided
- The meal distribution process needed to be supervised by staff
- The kitchen focused on profit rather than providing ample, healthy and nutritious food
- Prisoners working in the kitchen were inadequately trained in the correct food heating procedures and presentation (VAGO 1999 : 8.168)

Principle areas of concern identified by the consultant dietician were:

- Impact of lack of training and supervision of food delivery and service on the maintenance of food hygiene and safety
- Temperature of food to maintain food hygiene and food enjoyment
- Variety of some foods including cereals and fruits
- Food quantity to meet the needs of all prisoners
- Provision of special diets, including nutritional adequacy of vegetarian meals

- Provision of choice to satisfy all dietary, ethno-specific and food preference needs, including providing sufficient choice for those who wish to have meals according to principles of the Australian Dietary Guidelines Meal presentation
- General supervision of meal collection and service (VAGO 1999 : 8.170)

The above findings are consistent with the views expressed in this study and in keeping with the men's concerns about the cook-chill process; the quantity, quality, variety and presentation of food; the inadequacy of special diets; hygiene issues; the delivery of meals; and the focus on cost-cutting.

Rather than dwelling solely on the negatives, it is useful to look at the improvements that flowed from the Victorian experience, particularly in terms of communication, complaints procedures and auditing of the food service.

- Prisoner menu suggestions forms
- Registers for documenting complaints about food
- Meals ordered by prisoners recorded on a daily basis and collated to inform the catering supervisor of the relative popularity of dishes
- A committee comprising catering staff and prisoners meeting regularly to address issues relating to the quality of food
- Commissioner to conduct a review of catering services
- Food is the subject of independent assessment
- Properly defined performance indicators
- Self-audit and independent audit (VAGO 1999: 8.135, 8.137 & 8.138).

Illustrations of best practice are not limited to Australia and the following examples from Northern Ireland and New Zealand demonstrate some innovative approaches to issues surrounding prison food.

The Northern Ireland Experience

The Northern Ireland Prison Service, in particular, demonstrates a flexible approach to food preparation and delivery, an ongoing engagement and rehabilitative approach to inmates, and a willingness to proactively manage food-related complaints.

- All prisoners are offered a multi-choice menu, with four main meal choices and three light meal choices, which include vegetarian, healthy (low fat) and ethnic options
- Prisoners are surveyed bi-annually and any relevant issues or suggestions raised are acted upon/introduced
- Prisoners have access to serial numbered complaints systems, where a written response from the unit-catering manager is given to the individual prisoner
- The catering department works in partnership with outside educational institutes to facilitate any prisoner who wishes to continue with qualifications
- The catering department works with the Training and Tourism Board in an effort to secure employment in the hospitality industry on a prisoner's release from custody

- The catering department works closely with and actively seeks the guidance of recognised dieticians and religious figures when constructing menu choices
- As a direct result of the most recent prisoner food survey, meals are to be restructured and serving times revised to give greater flexibility for attendance at workshops, education etc
- The introduction of new generic menus
- The prison recognizes the fact that prisoners working in our kitchens are no longer regarded as a readily available labour force, but now leave with a range of nationally accredited qualifications. This training has enabled prisoners not only to gain a vocational qualification but more importantly improve their self-esteem and motivation, to give them a fresh start in life (Northern Ireland Prison Service, 2005).

The New Zealand Experience

New Zealand Corrective Services deliver food according to pre-determined performance standards, procedures and guidelines, taking into account inmate needs.

Best practice performance standards include :

- Prisoners do not eat meals in cells, except in special medical, operational or punishment circumstances
- There is no more than 14 hours between the evening meal and breakfast, unless food for supper is provided (with the dinner meal)
- The method of food delivery reflects the environment in which it is served
- The type and quantity of food served reflects the climate and work needs of the prisoner
- Drinking water is available to every prisoner at convenient locations throughout the prison
- Individual units may organize and fund barbeques/boil-ups/hangis and any other culturally related meals that are outside the provisions of the National Menu, with the approval of the Prison Manager
- Vegetarian and vegan meals are provided on written request and according to a prison-specified process
- Suitable implements are used for the preparation, distribution and eating of meals

Examples of procedures and guidelines for menus include:

- Planning for menus commences at least a month in advance of meal preparation and considers the availability of fresh product, climate, prisoner work requirements, finances, and the need for special meals
- Bread purchased is in equal quantities of white and brown
- Most meat quantities are without bone
- Any variety of economically priced local seafood may be purchased
- Special diet menus are approved by a qualified dietician (Department of Corrections, New Zealand : 2005)

CONCLUSION

I love to smell my food when I am cooking it - and I love to be able to sit down and enjoy my food. And I don't have to worry about how it has been cooked, if it's off, 'cause I know 'cause I buy it. I don't have to worry about it being preheated. I don't have to worry about someone else handling my food. I know the quantity of it is good, and the quality is good

The Inmate's Perspective

From an inmate's perspective, prison food is often unpalatable, unappealing and inadequate. Concerns centre around the introduction of the cook-chill method and the subsequent deterioration in quantity, quality, variety, temperature, and appearance of food. Eating in cells is considered abhorrent from the point of view of sanitary conditions, as well as being personally offensive. The closure of mess rooms represents the loss of a shared place to eat and demonstrates a measure of indifference on the prison's part, to the human need for social interaction. Yards are considered inappropriate dining spaces given their unhygienic state, exposure to the weather, and lack of appropriate seating. Food is perceived by both inmates and their families as an additional layer of punishment, adding to their mutual suffering. Poor inmate/officer relationships, a lack of communication and no simple straightforward impartial complaints process, further compound the situation. Taken together, these issues are damaging to individual self-esteem and harmful to prison morale. In the eyes of male inmates, it is clear that prison food 'cannot be underestimated as a force that shapes morale as much as inmate health' (Walter 2004 : 17).

The Prison Perspective

From the prison perspective, the Food Service is of an appropriate standard (Hines 2005). Menu Control Plans demonstrate a range of meals and an effort to meet minimum dietary requirements, although diet meals appear to be an adjunct to the main menu, rather than individual menu plans in their own right. Risdon's Food Services Manager sees his greatest challenge as 'the perception of quality by inmates' (Hines 2005 : 1). In his view 'it is this healthy, low fat style menu, which has raised the quality issue with the inmates' at Risdon Prison (Hines 2005). The findings of this report indicate that it is portion sizes and the quality and presentation of the end product that are at issue, rather than the fact that meals are low-fat. The prison places an emphasis on cost efficiencies and a low-fat diet, however 'it is arguable whether the food service should be evaluated 'purely in economic and nutritional terms' (Walter 2004 : 17). Despite a belief that inmate issues '... will pass as acceptance of the new process is complete' (Hines 2005 : 1), the experience of other jurisdictions suggests that unless inmate concerns are addressed at a practical level, this is unlikely.

Looking Ahead...The New Prison

As this report goes to print, the new Risdon prison is much closer to completion. For those inmates who will transfer to the facility, it promises to provide an improved physical environment and the opportunity for a return to eating in common areas. As the new facility will not have a kitchen, meals will continue to be prepared in the existing prison kitchen and be delivered to the new facility in insulated trolleys.

This new environment, together with the recently announced case management model for working with inmates, has the potential to change the shape of the corrections landscape in Tasmania. However it poses additional logistical challenges for the delivery of food (the food has to travel further now), and there are certainly no guarantees that the prison culture will undergo significant change in the near future.

An evaluation of food issues, according to the standards and benchmarks identified in this report, would be most useful and interesting once the new and refurbished prison has been operational for twelve months. As we have highlighted, such an evaluation would need to consider the relationship between inmate and prison authorities, and the impact of institutional change on this relationship.

We conclude by noting the proposition that when 'substantial changes are made to an inmate food service regime, any measures that can lessen the impact of, or mitigate, changes in food service routines ought to be fully considered' (Walter 2004 : 17). It is evident that the perspective of inmates is at variance with that of prison authorities in the areas of closure of mess rooms, eating in cells and yards, and the quantity, quality and presentation of food under the cook-chill system. Similar sites of tension exist around the issues of special diets, access to medical care, prison officer culture, and the need for a straightforward effective complaints process. These differences in perception represent an opportunity to bridge the gap between the priorities of the prison organization and the needs of the community of prisoners. Such an approach necessarily requires a commitment to dialogue, compromise and conciliation, on both sides.

Key findings

The essential findings of this study are that :

- The expectation that inmates will sleep, eat and go to the toilet in the same space is offensive. Cells are not designed for food consumption, given their proximity to toilets, and those who share a cell are particularly disadvantaged
- The closure of mess rooms and the move to eating in cells has had a significant impact on inmates, limiting social interaction and increasing time spent

in cells and yards. Yards are overcrowded, unhygienic, open to the weather, have inadequate seating and are regularly soiled by birds

- Since introduction of the cook-chill method and the new food service, inmates maintain there has been a marked deterioration in the quantity, quality, variety and appearance of food. Dinner portions are smaller, fruit and vegetables lack variety, raw vegetables are scarce, meat is often poor quality and portions are stingy. Meals are frequently floating in water and regularly tepid or cold. The lack of a choice-menu for dinner is out of step with best practice in most modern prisons
- The practice of cooking food 48 to 72 hours in advance and re-therming it on the day of consumption is particularly disliked. Inmates believe it is unacceptable to be continuously eating food which is at least two to three days old, and sometimes up to a week old
- Breakfast meals are inadequate, given the 15-16 hour break between dinner at 4.00 pm and breakfast at 8.00 am. Portion sizes take no account of varying levels of physical activity, there is no choice of cereal, and toast is soggy on delivery
- The move from plates to aluminium containers and from metal to plastic utensils is disliked. Concerns exist about the long-term risk of eating out of aluminium, as well as fears about contamination of food. The fact that containers have no divisions to separate food types is also an issue. Plastic utensils are considered impractical and often snap during use
- Standard beverages are limited to hot sweet tea, with milk and sugar, leaving those who prefer black unsweetened tea, or coffee, without a choice.
- The replacement of week-day hot lunches with sandwiches is unpopular and has contributed to the belief that inmates are getting less food than under the old system. Bread is often stale with no option for multigrain or whole-meal varieties and sandwich fillings need further review
- The celebration of festive occasions such as Christmas, Easter and birthdays has diminished over the years. In prison, the significance of such occasions is heightened, given the degree of isolation inmates feel at these times, and the fact that such events are often associated with particular religious customs, favourite foods and/or family gatherings.
- The canteen list offers few healthy food choices and is forever changing, making it an unreliable source for supplementing diets
- Concerns about kitchen cleanliness and the personal hygiene of kitchen staff are underpinned by suspicions that unannounced kitchen inspections are a farce, which in turn exacerbates fears about food poisoning

- There is a perception that since the introduction of the new food service, the focus on cost-cutting has intensified, to the detriment of inmate needs
- Ideally inmates would prefer to prepare and cook their own food or at least have opportunities to do so periodically
- No simple straightforward complaints process exists to deal with grievances and the impartiality of the Ombudsman's office is problematic in the eyes of inmates
- The provision of special diets is at best uncertain and at worst non-existent, and the existing process for requesting a special diet is seen as overly bureaucratic and burdensome. Obstructive practices by individual custodial officers delay food and interfere with requests for both medical attention and special diets.
- Food is an issue, not simply a way of gaining attention or publicity, and food-related concerns evoke strong emotions, taking their toll on inmate self-esteem as well as prison morale
- The process of change to the new food service has not been managed in a way that engages inmates or gives them an ongoing say in decisions about food and eating.

In summary, this study found that food matters. 'What matters is the quality of food on the prisoners' plates' and 'what is required is wholesome food, properly prepared and well presented. It is an essential aspect of having decent conditions in prison' (Irish Prison Service 2002 : 9). What also matters is diluting a penal culture that appears to 'rub salt in the wound' by poor communication and indifference.

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Appendix A : The New South Wales Experience

Extracts from inmates' comments on food-related issues in the New South Wales Inmate Health Survey (Butler & Milner 2001 : 190-221)

- Food rather tasteless and overcooked
- Preferred when it was cooked on the wings – got more of it and it appeared to be better quality
- Food on average is well below my usual intake as a free person
- Coffee would be a welcome refreshment
- More variety of healthy foods
- It would be nice to have a choice of foods
- Can't eat the frozen meals – needs fresh veg and fruit
- I have become unwell because of food
- More food variety and access to fresh foods in canteen eg lettuce, tomatoes, cucumbers etc
- Insufficient food
- Would like protein on normal canteen and other supplements
- Food is disgusting and unfit for human consumption
- Poor variety of food and lack of food
- More fruit ... oranges
- More milk and coffee supplied
- Diabetics not adequately catered for
- Food has deteriorated – no fresh food available
- Unhygienic conditions – vermin such as cockroaches
- Cells unhygienic
- Feel it's unfair to have to purchase decent food on canteen because food is bad
- Not enough meat of good quality
- No fresh vegetables available on canteen or jail menu
- Worried about the preparation of food, makes many people sick
- No fat free diet, no fresh veggies or salad
- Being able to have BBQ regularly where can cook and prepare own food
- More milk, yoghurt etc
- More variety of fruits other than apple and pear
- Better variety of raw vegetables
- Food often close to use by date
- Fruit supply not reliable
- Meal often fatty, veggies overcooked sloppy (not crisp)
- Given only one milk and one small box of cereal

Appendix B: Canteen Form Risdon Prison

CANTEEN FORM – MAXIMUM

SURNAME: _____ FIRST NAME _____

OFENDER NO. _____ DIV _____ week ending 30/9/05

0Code	Item	Price
Tobacco		
0100	White Ox 30g	\$10.20
0117	Winfield Regular 30g	\$10.20
0102	Drum Regular 30g	\$10.20
0118	Drum Mild 30g	\$10.20
0119	Drum Menthol 30g	\$10.20
0120	Champion Ruby 30g	\$10.20
0113	Zig-Zag Papers	\$0.37
0114	Matches	\$0.19
0116	Venti Ultra Slim Filters	\$1.14
Confectionary		
0151	Anticol	\$1.14
0152	Soothers	\$1.14
0153	Allens Butter Menthol's	\$1.14
0154	Snicker 60g	\$1.31
0155	Kit Kat 60g	\$1.38
0156	Mars Bar 60g	\$1.31
0157	Picnic Bars 50g	\$1.31
0158	Licorice Allsorts 400g	\$2.63
0159	Jellybeans Kenman 450g	\$2.76
0160	Chocolate Eclairs 200g	\$2.76
0161	Columbines 200g	\$2.76
0162	Barley Sugar 300g	\$2.76
0163	Butterscotch 300g	\$2.76
0164	Minties 200g	\$2.61
0165	Twisties 100g	\$1.52
0166	Chicken Chips 50g	\$0.99
0167	Salt & Vinegar 50g	\$0.99
0168	Barbecue Chips 50g	\$0.99
0169	Chicken Chips 200g	\$2.89
0170	Salt & Vinegar 200g	\$2.89
0171	BBQ Chips 200g	\$2.89
0173	Lifesavers – Blackcurrant	\$0.49
0175	Lifesavers – Five Flavours	\$0.49
0176	Cadbury Dairy Milk Chocolate 150g	\$2.81
0177	Cadbury Caramello Chocolate 150g	\$2.81
0178	Cadbury Hazel Nut Chocolate 150g	\$2.81

0179	Cadbury Snack Chocolate 150g	\$2.81
0180	Cadbury Dream White Chocolate 150g	\$2.81
0181	Sugar Free Vanilla Chews 100g	\$2.94
0182	Sugar Free Chocolate Chews 70g	\$2.62

Code	Item	Price
	Beverage	
0201	Lift Bottle 390 ml	\$1.08
0202	Coca Cola Bottle 390 ml	\$1.10
0203	Diet Coca Cola Bottle 390ml	\$1.08
0204	Tassie Quench Lime 2 litre	\$1.62
0205	Tassie Quench Orange 2 litre	\$1.62
0206	Tassie Quench Fruit Cocktail 2 litre	\$1.62
0207	Tassie Quench Apple/Blackcurrant 2 litre	\$1.62
0208	Salvital Saline 375g	\$5.94
0209	Hartz Bottled Water 1.5 litre	\$1.92
0210	Nestle Condensed Milk Tube 190g	\$2.43
0211	Nestle Coffee & Milk Tube 190g	\$2.35
0212	Bushells Tea Bags 90g	\$2.83
0213	Sustagen CHOC 400g	\$6.91
0214	International coffee 100g	\$3.97
0215	Sunshine milk 300g	\$4.97
0216	Milo 450g	\$6.34
0217	UHT Milk 125 ml	\$0.62
0218	Cont. Cuppa Soup – Cream Chicken 75g	\$2.04
0219	Cont. Cuppa Soup – Tomato 75g	\$2.04
0220	Cont. Cuppa Soup – Hearty Beef 75g	\$2.04

Assorted

0251	Equal Sweetner	\$4.43
0252	Barnes Honey 500g	\$5.95
0253	Arnotts Cream Biscuits	\$5.02
0254	Arnett's Sao Biscuits 250g	\$2.26
0255	Tim Tams 200g	\$3.25
0256	Fine Fare Family Assorted Biscuits	\$2.97
0257	Musashi Protein Bar 90g	\$4.17
0258	Safcol Tuna Flavour 150gm	\$2.60
0259	Safcol Tuna Chunks 150g	\$2.60
0261	Suimin Noodles – Prawn & Chicken 70g	\$1.65
0262	Suimin Noodles – Curried Prawn 70g	\$1.65
0263	Suimin Noodles – Chicken 70g	\$1.65
0264	Muesli Bars – Caramel/Choc Chip 250g	\$4.46
0265	Muesli Bars – Raspberry Yoghurt Tops 250g	\$4.46

Criminology Research Unit

The Criminology Research Unit (CRU) was established in mid-2000. The aim of the CRU is to foster criminology in Tasmania as a field of study, research, evaluation and policy development. Substantive concerns with which the CRU has been engaged include prison issues and reform, juvenile justice, youth gangs, human rights and hate crimes, and crime prevention.

CRU Services

Information Service

The information service consists of literature checks on specified subjects and the compilation of resource materials for the client. Searches will be undertaken for appropriate literature on selected topics, and the CRU will filter out a representative sample of 15 to 20 publications on the topic. Printed copies of relevant literature will be provided, on topics such as [prison unit management].

Briefing Papers

A briefing paper consists of relevant literature reviews and discussion of current issues of significance. Briefing papers are meant to be concise, though comprehensive, overviews that draw upon contemporary research & scholarship. Briefing papers are 3-6,000 words in length. An example of a briefing paper topic is [what is case management?].

Scoping Papers

Scoping papers consist of in-depth analysis of a particular area of research or practice. These papers offer extended discussion of current practices and strategies, discussion of evolving trends, and key models and questions pertaining to the issue in question. Scoping papers are more than 6,000 words in length. An example of a scoping paper topic is [post-release transition: issues and strategies]. Scoping papers are published under the CRU Occasional Paper series.

Primary Research

Primary research involves developing methodology for a research project, implementing the research program, and analysis of research data. The research may involve interviews, questionnaires, statistical analysis, focus groups, document analysis and ethnographic study. Data and discussions are presented in Report form. An example of primary research is [offender employment histories: an analysis of pre-prison and post-prison experiences].

Evaluation & Strategic Planning

Evaluation involves systematic assessment of the processes and outcomes of a particular project, program or strategy. It can refer to how agencies perform, or to impacts on the wider community or environment. Evaluation and strategic planning are intended to enhance performance in positive and constructive directions. An example of an evaluation project is [measuring the effectiveness of non-government prison programs in assisting prisoners and their families].

Teaching & Curriculum Development

Short course training and staff development seminars are possible across a wide spectrum of areas. These range from generic offerings, such as 'correctional theory and practice' and 'theories and purposes of punishment', through to specialist training and education on topics such as 'models of case and unit management', 'prison culture and workplace stress' and 'restorative justice in a correctional setting'.

CRU Publications & Reports

Books

Massina, M. & White, R. (eds) (2000) *Beyond Imprisonment: Conference Proceedings*. Hobart: Tasmania Council of Social Services & Criminology Research Unit, University of Tasmania.

Occasional Papers

No.1 – Crime Data Collection in Tasmania: A Register (2003)

Rob White & Sue Willis

No.2 – An Evaluation of the 'Inside Out' Prison Program (2003)

Rob White & Ron Mason

No.3 – Food Matters: Issues Surrounding Food in Prison (2006)

Diane Heckenberg & Dannielle Cody

Briefing Papers

No.1 – Community Corrections Service Tasmania (2003)

Rob White & Kevin Tomkins

No.2 – Issues in Community Corrections (2003)

Rob White & Kevin Tomkins

No.3 – Prison Culture and the Pains of Imprisonment (2003)

Prison Action and Reform [PAR]

No.4 – Prisoner Leave and Victim-Offender Relationships: What Section 42 Means to You (2003) Rob White

No.5 – Restructuring Dorian Gray: A New Portrait of Sexual Abuse (2005)

Sr Philippa Chapman

**NB – The publications are sent to key contacts across Australia (e.g., Australian Institute of Criminology, WA Crime Research Centre) as well as relevant Tasmanian bodies (e.g., Corrective Services, Police Service).

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Postgraduate Courses in Criminology and Corrections

*Graduate Certificate
Graduate Diploma
Masters Degree*

*Course Coordinator
Professor Rob White
School of Sociology & Social Work*

Who the Course Is For

This course is designed for practitioners already employed or active in the field of criminal justice/corrections, and for students who wish to gain further professional knowledge and credentials in the field of criminology. It includes specific skills-based hands-on units, especially related to certain types of client services (e.g., cognitive behaviour therapy), as well as critical analysis and evaluation of contemporary issues, policies and practices within criminal justice generally. The course is designed for practitioners working directly in the area of criminal justice and in allied fields (such as juvenile justice, youth and community work, crime prevention projects, social work, prisoner support, victim services and local government). It is also designed to cater to students and researchers who have an interest in pursuing a study program that offers a grounded understanding and practical experience of criminology as an academic field.

The Course as a whole will enhance student professional skills, provide opportunities for their career pathways and be relevant to their professional needs. It will equip them with the skills and knowledge to lead to more senior managerial, policy development or research positions.

Course Structure

In the graduate certificate, there are two components:

- the core units Criminological Theory & Practice and Correctional Theory & Practice (25%); plus
- two electives (25%) from Juvenile Justice, Special Topics in Criminology, Case Management, Mental Health Practice, Cognitive Behaviour Therapy, Forensic Psychology, Contemporary Policing, Foundations in Forensic Studies, Sentencing and Punishment [Total 50%]

In the graduate diploma, students complete:

- the core units Criminological Theory & Practice and Correctional Theory & Practice (25%); plus
- a Field Project unit (25%) [includes social research methods workshop, and substantial field based project]; plus
- four electives (50%) from Juvenile Justice, Special Topics in Criminology, Case Management, Mental Health Practice, Cognitive Behaviour Therapy, Forensic Psychology, Contemporary Policing, Foundations in Forensic Studies, Sentencing and Punishment [Total 100%]

Masters students have four components to complete:

- the core units Criminological Theory & Practice and Correctional Theory & Practice (25%); plus
- a Field Project unit (25%) [includes social research methods workshop, and substantial field based project]; plus
- four electives (50%) from Juvenile Justice, Special Topics in Criminology, Case Management, Mental Health Practice, Cognitive Behaviour Therapy, Forensic Psychology, Contemporary Policing, Foundations in Forensic Studies, Sentencing and Punishment; plus
- a Research Thesis comprising up to 20,000 word report (50%) [Total 150%].

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