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Trends in escapes from NSW Department of Corrective Services custody

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The number and nature of escapes from custody is acknowledged as a key outcome of efficient correctional management. Escapes from NSW Corrective Services custody have fallen from a high of 211 in the 1979/1980 to 22 in 2003/04, a fall of 90%. During the same period, the daily average inmate population has risen by 131% from 3717 to 8581. Since 1979/80, the escape rate has dropped 95% from 5.7 to 0.3 escapes per 100 inmates per year. Escapes from maximum security centres have remained uniformly low since 1979. In recent years escapes from court complexes have increased. Overall, there has been a decrease in escapes from within correctional centres and from external leave programs. Conversely, there has been a recent increase is escapes from court complexes and from escorts between correctional centres and courts.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past 25 years there has been a general downward trend in the number of escapes from NSW Department of Corrective Services custody, despite a substantial increase in the overall inmate population. This report summarises information relating to escapes between 1 July 1979 and 30 June 2004.

The number and nature of escapes is acknowledged as a key outcome of efficient correctional management (Report on Government Services 2006). By providing a safe and secure environment for persons sentenced or remanded by the courts, the correctional system is an integral component of a criminal justice system that seeks, amongst other things, to securely contain offenders and protect the community. Theoretically, almost all escapes could be prevented by housing all inmates in maximum security correctional centres and abolishing external programs or escorted leave.

However, these centres are more expensive to build, operate and maintain than minimum security correctional centres, and the financial impact would be significant.

Putting aside financial considerations, the objectives of the correctional system extend beyond containment. They include the provision of opportunities and incentives for offenders to address their offending behaviour and thereby reduce re-offending by the successful reintegration into lawful society upon their release. To this end, the NSW Department of Corrective Services provides an offender management pathway which actively seeks to reduce re-offending. This pathway commences on reception into custody and continues throughout an individual's imprisonment. As part of the reception process each inmate undergoes a security-risk assessment.

During their imprisonment inmates can progress from their initial security classification through to lower security levels when sufficient progress in addressing their offending behaviour has been made. This progress is managed by the inmate classification process. This classification process assigns each individual inmate to a specific security category, either maximum, medium or minimum security. Progress to a lower security environment provides increased access to re-integrative opportunities.

Some inmates will eventually participate in external programs such as works release, day leave and weekend leave, spending time unsupervised outside a correctional centre. The increased opportunity for escape provided by

lower security environments and external programs must be balanced against the management and rehabilitative value of the hierarchical security structure that includes them.

In the past, the NSW Department of Corrective Service has conducted a number of studies relating to escapes. These studies cover various periods of time between 1974 and 1989 during which the annual escape rate ranged between 5.7 and 1.7 (escapes per 100 inmates per year). Over the same period, escapes involving breaches of minimum security accounted for 55 to 83 percent of all escapes (Porritt, 1982, Gorta, 1989).

AIM OF STUDY

This report forms the first stage in a continuing research program aimed at exploring the extent and nature of escapes from the custody of NSW Department of Corrective Services.

The aim of this first stage is to present a detailed analysis of trends in escapes from Corrective Services custody between 1 July 1979 and 30 June 2004. Periods of decreasing and increasing rates of escape are identified and described in terms of their distribution across defined escape categories. A brief outline of various factors that may be related to the trends in escape rates reported is included in this report.

The second planned stage of the project will explore the motivation behind inmate escapes and the potential risk these inmates pose to the community.

METHODOLOGY

This report is based on data collated by NSW Department of Corrective Services' Corporate Research Evaluation and Statistics (CRES) and from departmental incident reports that are generated whenever an escape occurs. Each escape incident is classified according to the level of security breached during the escape.

Over the past 25 years there has been a downward trend in number and rate of escapes. However, an increase in escapes was experienced over the period 1 July 1989 to 30 June 1996, with the exception of the 1991/1992 financial year. Therefore, for the purposes of this report, the entire study period (1 July 1979 to 30 June 2004) was divided into three periods of analysis:

Figure 1: Total number and rate of escapes per financial year from NSW Department of Corrective Services Custody, 1 July 1979 to 30 June 2004.

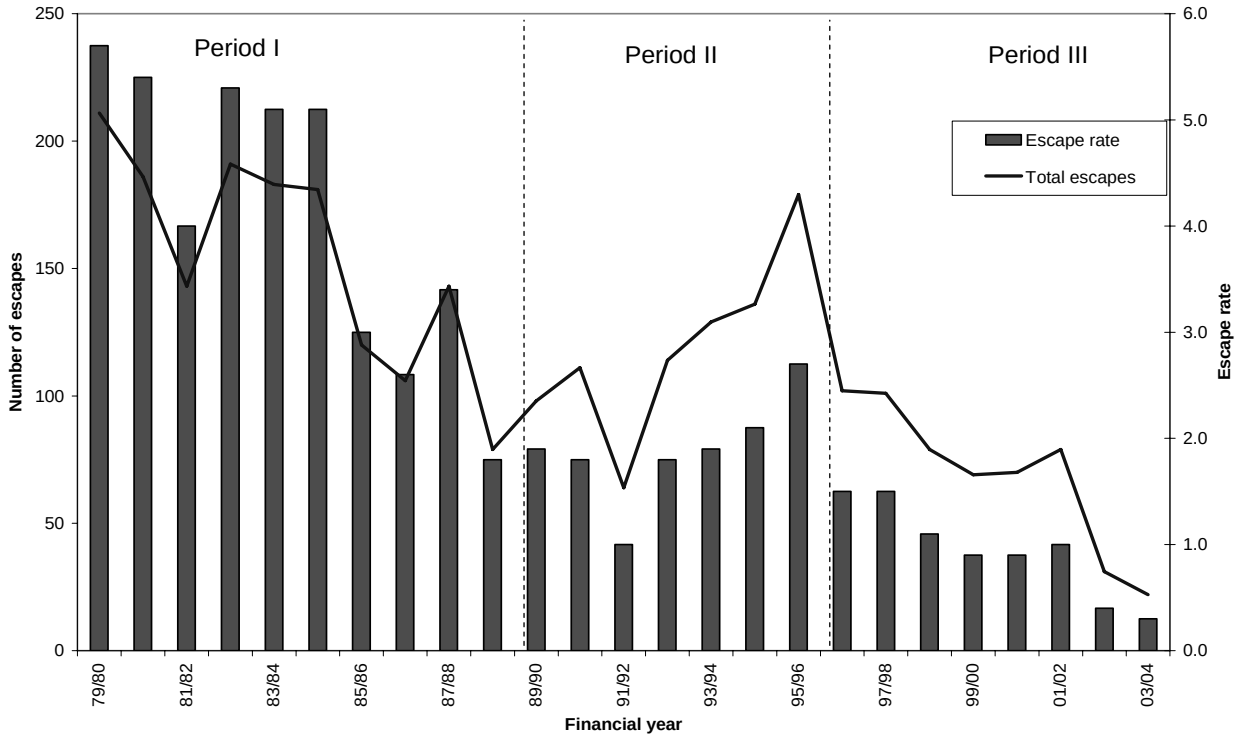


Table 1: Number and rate of escapes study period year from NSW Department of Corrective Services custody by study period

RESULTS	STUDY PERIOD		
	Period I	Period II	Period III
	July 1979 to June 1989	July 1989 to June 1996	July 1996 to June 2004
Years in period	10	7	8
Average number of escapes per year	163	130	61
Number of escapes at start year	211	98	102
Number of escapes at end year	79	179	22
Difference	-132	81	-80
Average change per year (number)	-13.2	11.6	-10.0
Percent change for period (number)	-63 percent	83 percent	-78 percent
Average escape rate	4.0	1.9	0.9
Escape rate at start year	5.7	1.9	1.5
Escape rate at end year	1.8	2.7	0.3
Difference	-3.9	0.8	-1.2
Average change per year (rate)	-0.39	0.11	-0.15
Percent change for period (rate)	-68 percent	42 percent	-80 percent

Period I: 1 July 1979 to 30 June 1989
Period II: 1 July 1989 to 30 June 1996
Period III: 1 July 1996 to 30 June 2004.

A brief discussion of escape trends between 1979 and 2004 is followed by a more detailed description of trends during the three specified time periods and within individual escape categories.

In the Discussion section, relevant legislation and various departmental initiatives relating to security and inmate management are briefly outlined.

RESULTS

Total number of escapes from NSW Department of Corrective Services custody

The total number of escapes in each escape category for each financial year 1979/1980 to 2003/2004 is tabled in Appendix 1. Figure 1 shows that from a high of 211 escapes in the financial year 1979/1980, the number of escapes per year has fallen by 90 percent to 22 escapes in 2003/2004. During the same period, the daily average prison population has risen by 131 percent from 3717 to 8581. Reflecting this, the escape rate has dropped 95 percent from 5.7 to 0.3 (escapes per 100 inmates per year). Figure 1 illustrates a non consistent downtrend trend with the number of escapes falling to 61 during 1991/1992 before rising to a ten-year high of 179 in 1995/1996.

Comparison of time periods and escape categories

Table 1 shows that during Period I there was a 63 percent decrease in the number of escapes per year (an average of 13.2 fewer escapes each year) and a 68 percent decrease in the escape rate. During Period II there was a 83 percent increase in escapes per year (an average of 11.6 more escapes each year) and a 42 percent increase in the escape rate. During Period III, there was a 78 percent decrease in escapes per year (an average of 10.0 fewer escapes each year) and an 80 percent decrease in the escape rate.

Table 2 shows that over the entire study period (1 July 1979 and 30 June 2004) the majority of escapes (61 percent) involved breaches of minimum security (i.e. escapes from minimum security correctional centres). Between Period I and Period II there was a notable decrease in the proportion of escapes involving breaches of maximum or medium security, from 17 to 4 percent, with the average number of escapes per year from this category dropping from 26 to 3 over the entire study period. There was also a decreased in the number of escapes from unescorted absences. There was a notable

Table 2: Proportion of total escapes from NSW Department of Corrective Services custody and annual average number of escapes from each security category by selected time period.

Security level breached	Period I July 1979 to June 1989		Period II July 1989 to June 1996		Period III July 1996 to June 2004		Total	
	%	(Avg No./yr)	%	(Avg No./yr)	%	(Avg No./yr)	%	(Avg No./yr)
Maximum & Medium	17	(26)	4	(5)	4	(3)	**11**	**(13)**
Minimum	59	(91)	71	(84)	56	(39)	**62**	**(72)**
Escorted absence	2	(3)	3	(3)	15	(11)	**5**	**(5)**
Unescorted absence	21	(33)	16	(20)	19	(13)	**20**	**(23)**
Periodic detention	1	(1)	6	(7)	6	(4)	**3**	**(4)**
Total*	100	(154)	100	(119)	100	(69)	**100**	**(117)**

* Totals may not be equal to the sum of individual cells due to rounding.

increase in the proportion of escapes involving breaches from an escorted absence, the proportion increased from 2 to 15 percent over the study period (an increase from 3 to 11 in the average number of these escapes per year).

There was an 83 percent increase in the total number of escapes per year between the start and end of Period II, however the average number of escapes per year during this period (119) was still lower than in Period I (154). Again, most escapes during Period II (71 percent) involved breaches of minimum security. As escapes in the "maximum and medium" and "unescorted absence" categories decreased more substantially during Period II, the proportion of escapes from minimum security actually increased even though the average number per year decreased from 91 to 84.

The overall decrease in escapes experienced in Period III was mainly the result of a significant decrease in escapes involving breaches of minimum security. The number of escapes in this category decreased from an average of 84 during Period II to 39 in Period III. Escapes from unescorted absences also decreased (from an average of 20 during Period II to 13 during Period III), whilst escapes from escorted absences increased from an average of 3 to 11 per year over the same period.

Escapes involving breaches of maximum or medium security environments

Figure 2 shows that from the high of 54 escapes in 1979/1980, the number of escapes per year involving breaches of maximum or medium security dropped by 83 percent over the next six years to 9 escapes in 1985/1986. The number of escapes then continued to drop gradually and since 1985/1986 there has been an average of 5 escapes from this category each financial year, decreasing to zero in 2002/2003 and 2003/2004. The category specific escape rate (i.e. the number of escapes divided by the daily average population of inmates held in maximum or medium security) follows a similar downwards trend from an average of 1.9 escapes per 100 inmates per year prior to 1983/1984 to zero in 2003/2004.

Closer examination of individual sub-categories of escape within the maximum or medium security category (see Figure 2) showed that escapes from within maximum security correctional centres have remained uniformly low between 1 July 1979 and 30 June 2004, with an average of 2.4 escapes per year over that time period and a maximum of 5 in any one year (1980/1981 and 1981/1982).

From 1 July 1979 to 30 June 1983 escapes in this category comprised mainly escapes from within medium security correctional centres. Over this four-year period there was an average of 33.5 medium security escapes per year, comprising 73 percent of escapes within this

category and 18 percent of the total number of escapes from Corrective Services custody. Other individual escape types included in the category "Maximum or medium security" account for relatively little of the total number of escapes. There was an average of 8 escapes per year from areas adjacent to a maximum or medium security correctional centre between 1 July 1979 and 30 June 1985 and 5 escapes from the Prince Henry Hospital Annex in 1983/1984.

There was no increase in the number of escapes from maximum or medium security during Period II. Given the considerably greater static security barriers, it is reasonable to surmise that factors that may influence escape rates in other escape categories would not have the same influence on escapes from within maximum or medium security environments.

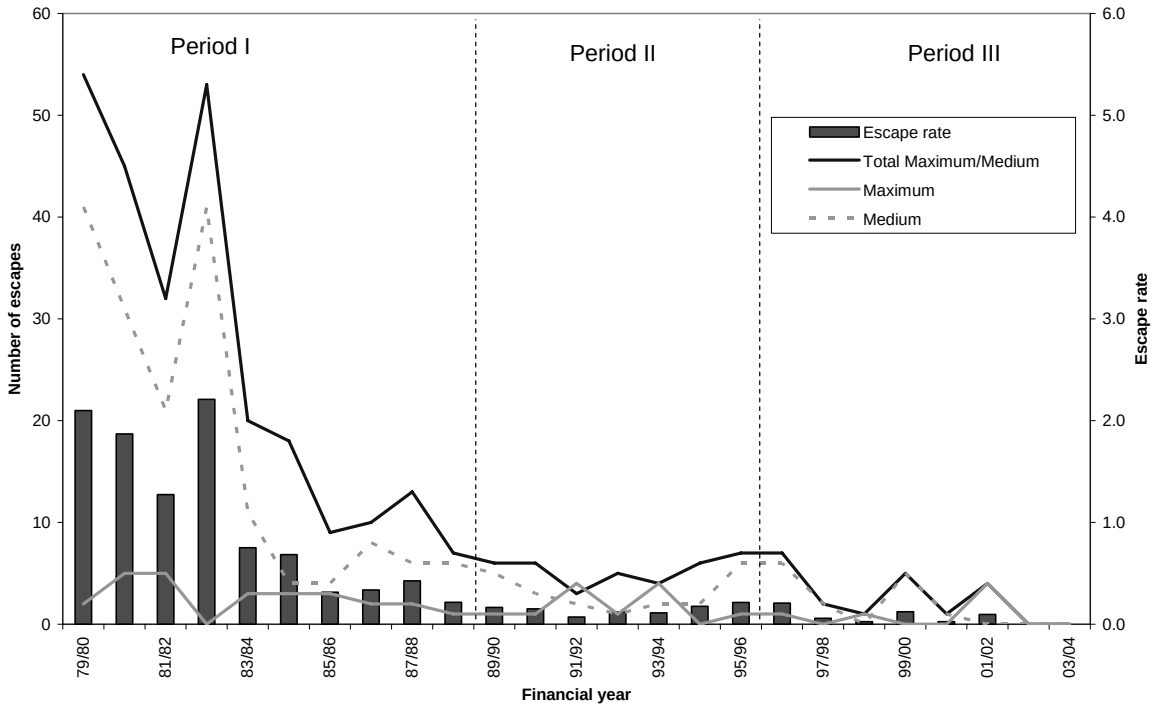
Escapes involving breaches of minimum security

The majority of escapes from NSW Department of Corrective Services custody involve escapes from minimum security correctional centres. Table 2 illustrates that the proportion of escapes in this category for each specified time period was 59, 71 and 56 percent respectively. The fluctuations in escapes from minimum security contributed significantly to the fluctuation in the total number of escapes, Figures 1 and 3 showing similar trends over the entire study period. There was a general decrease in escapes over the entire study period (1 July 1979 and 30 June 2004) with a noticeable increase in the number of escapes between 1993/1994 and 1995/1996.

Table 3 shows that during Period I, there was a decrease of 36 percent in the number of escapes per year involving breaches of minimum security (an average of 3.5 fewer escapes each year). During Period II there was a 50 percent increase in minimum security escapes (an average increase of 5.6 or more escapes each year). During Period III there was a decrease of 88 percent (an average of 6.5 fewer escapes per year). Note that the escape rate during the second time period fell by 32 percent whilst the number of escapes increased. This is because the minimum security population increased significantly during Period II, from 1358 in 1989/1990 to 2813 in 1993/94, an average annual population increase of 21 percent

Figure 4 illustrates that the number of escapes each year from escorted absences from a correctional centre was relatively low during the first half of the total study period. Between 1

Figure 2: Number and rate of escapes per financial year from NSW Department of Corrective Services, 1 July 1979 to 30 June 2004 - Maximum or medium security



July 1979 and 30 June 1984 there was an annual average of 4.6 escapes from this category. For the next nine years, (1 July 1984 to 30 June 1993) escapes dropped to an average of less than one per year. From 1 July 1993 to 30 June 2004, there was an erratic increase in the number of escapes from escorted absences each year with an annual average of 9.5 escapes. The increase in 1997/1998 included 11 escapes from the sub-category which included transfers between correctional centres and escorts to hospitals. Thereafter, the major contribution over the four years between 1 July 1999 and 30 June 2003 came from an annual average of 8.8 escapes from court complexes, with a high of 12 escapes from court complexes in 2000/2001 .

The category specific escape rate has been estimated for escapes from escorted absences by comparing the number of escapes in this category with the number of inmates escorted during the year. Accurate data on the number of inmate escorts was not available prior to 1995/1996. The annual escape rate from escorted absences tends to follow the contour of the number of escapes per year with the increases in 1997/1998 and 2000/2001 having been discussed above.

During 1992/93 the responsibility for security at 10 courts previously managed by NSW Police were transferred to NSW Department of Corrective Services. During 1993/1994 NSW Police formally handed NSW Department of Corrective Services the responsibility for the transport of inmates to metropolitan courts and the Department managed 16 metropolitan courts (NSWDCS Annual Report 1993/4). This transfer of responsibilities added another escape type to the escorted absence category and created an additional sub-category of escape from NSW Department of Corrective Services' custody - escape from a court complex.

Since 1 July 1993 there has been an average of 4.9 escapes from court complexes each year. This represents and average of 57 percent of escapes from escorted absences each year and 8 percent of the total number of escapes from NSW Department of Corrective Services custody each year. In recent years the contribution of escapes from court complexes to the overall escape numbers has been considerable (as a direct result of decreases in other categories). In the five years between 1 July 1999 and 30 June 2004, there has been an average of 7.6 escapes from court complexes each year. This figure represents an average of 71 percent of escapes from escorted absences

Figure 3: Number and rate of escapes per financial year from NSW Department of Corrective Services, 1 July 1979 to 30 June 2004 – Minimum security

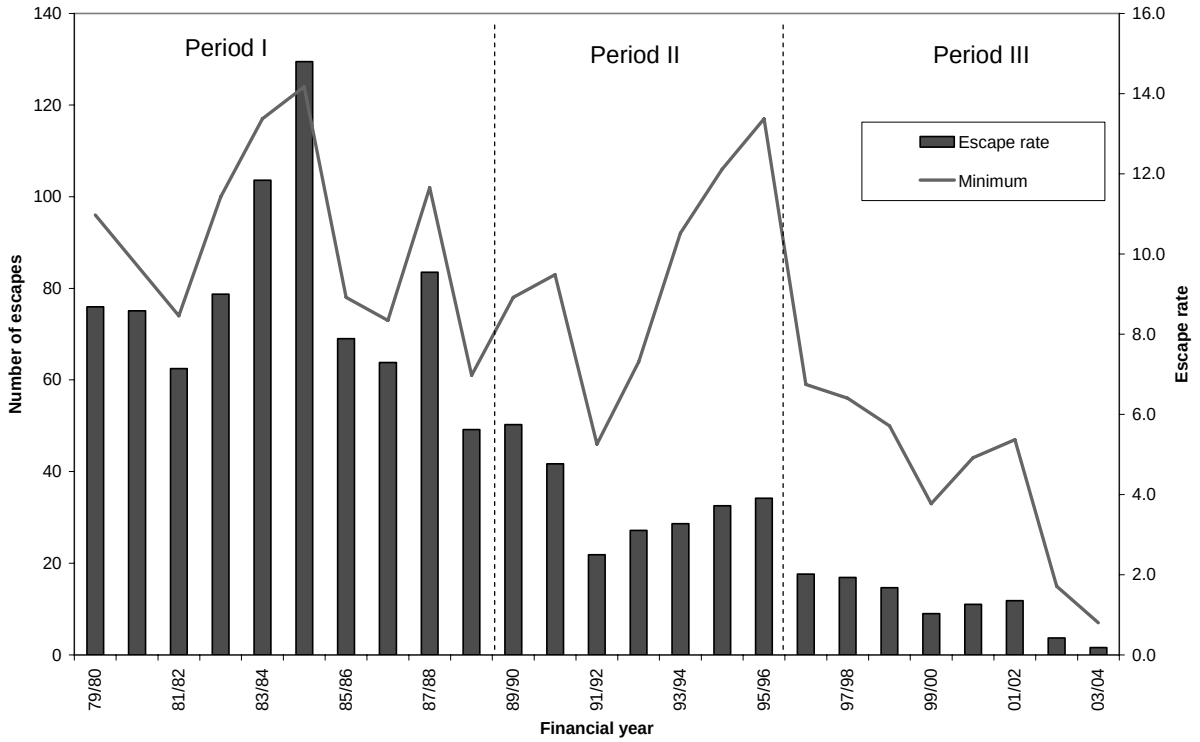


Table 3: Trends in number and rate of escapes per year from NSW Department of Corrective Services minimum security centres by selected time period.

Time Period	Period No.I July 1979 to June 1988	Period No.II July 1988 to June 1996	Period No.III July 1996 to June 2004
Years	9	7	8
Escapes at start year	96	61	117
Escapes at end year	61	117	7
Difference	-35	56	-110
Change/yr (no.)	-3.9	8.0	-13.8
Percent change for period (no.)	-36%	92%	-94%
Escape rate at start year	15.3*	7.1	3.4
Escape rate at end year	7.1*	3.4	0.2
Change/yr (rate)	1.37*	0.53	0.40
Percent change for period (rate)	-54%*	-52%	-94%

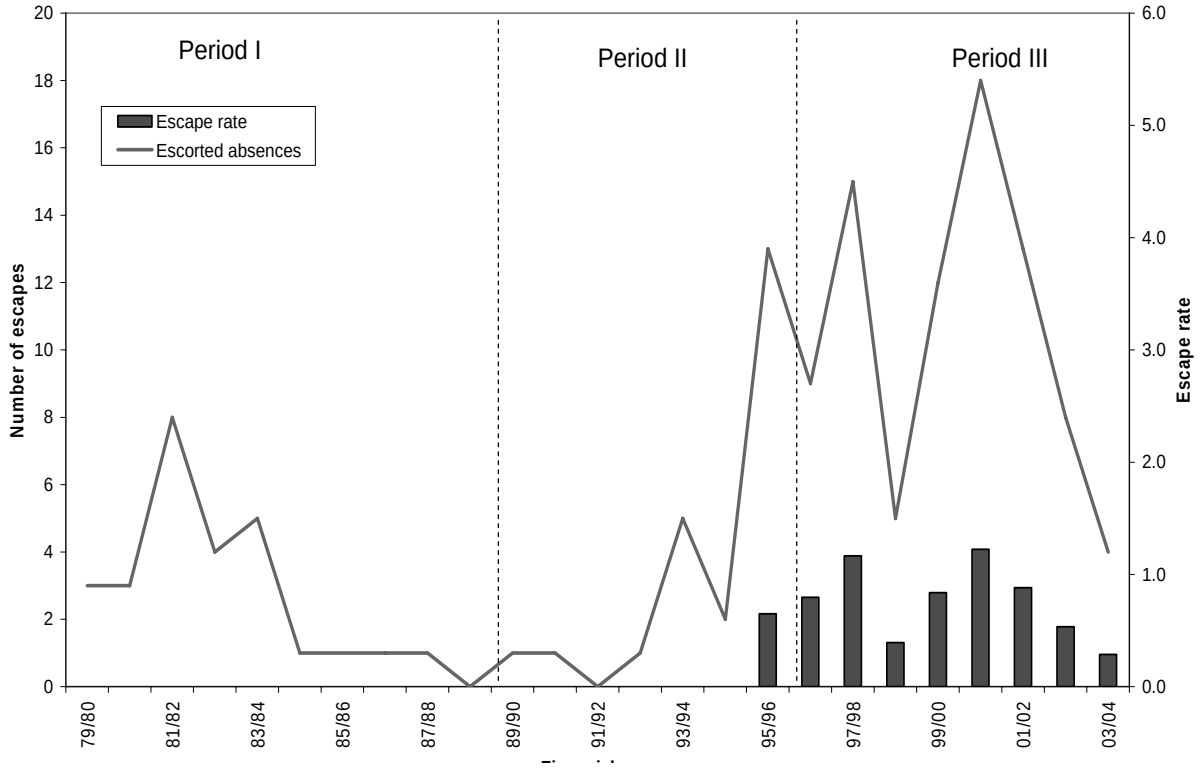
and 15 percent of total escapes from NSW Department of Corrective Services custody each year, peaking at 23 percent of all escapes in 2002/2003.

Escapes from unescorted absence

Between 1 July 1979 and 30 June 2004, there was a decrease of 84 percent in the number of escapes per year from unescorted absences, from 57 to 9 escapes per year.

In Figure 5, the high number of escapes in 1979/1980 comprised of 21 escapes from external work programs and 16 from day/ weekend leave. Over the four-year period from 1 July 1979 to 30 June 1983, there was an average of 15 escapes per year from day/ weekend leave. The main contributors to the abrupt increase in 1992/1993 were 15 escapes from external work programs and 11 escapes from the Work Release Program. The increase in escapes during 1995/1996 was mainly the

Figure 4: Number and rate of escapes per financial year from NSW Department of Corrective Services, 1 July 1979 to 30 June 2004 – Escorted absences



result of 25 escapes from external work programs that year. Figure 5 illustrates that since 1992/1993 escapes from external work programs were the main contributor to the total number of escapes from unescorted absences. Between 1 July 1992 and 30 June 2004 there was an average of 9.7 escapes per year from external work programs, representing an average of 52 percent of the total escapes from the unescorted absence category.

It is difficult to examine trends in rates of escape within this category, as accurate data on the number of inmates involved in unescorted absences such as external work programs and supervised sporting excursions are not maintained. However, as certain programs that involve unescorted absences are available only to inmates of the lowest security classification, it is possible to calculate an escape rate for these specific programs.

Generally, only inmates with the lowest security classification (C3 for males and Category 1 for females) are eligible to participate in identified programs involving extended unescorted absence from a correctional centre, i.e. the Work Release, Day/Weekend Leave and External Education programs. The escape rate has been calculated by dividing the annual number of escapes from these specific programs by the daily average population of inmates eligible to participate in the programs (approximated by the number of inmates with a C3 security classification as at 30 June each year). It should be noted that the level of C3 inmate participation in these programs is not constant, e.g. the level of participation in Work Release depends on the availability of suitable employment, and not all C3 inmates would participate in Day/Weekend leave each and every weekend. For this reason, these trends should be taken as indicative of the overall trend rather than a representation of the actual rate of escape from these programs.

The resulting escape rate for the identified unescorted leave programs is shown in Figure 6.The escape rate shows a similar trend to the overall escape trend in Figure 1, with a decrease in Period I, subsequent increase in Period II and a decrease in Period III. The average escape rate in each period decreased from 7.3 in Period I to 1.7 in Period II to 1.0 in Period III.

Table 4 shows that over the three time periods examined in this report, the general trend for escapes from all unescorted absences follows the trend in total number of escapes. There is a decrease of 84 percent during Period I (an average of 4.8 less escapes each year), during

Figure 5: Number and rate of escapes per financial year from NSW Department of Corrective Services, 1 July 1979 to 30 June 2004 – Unescorted absences

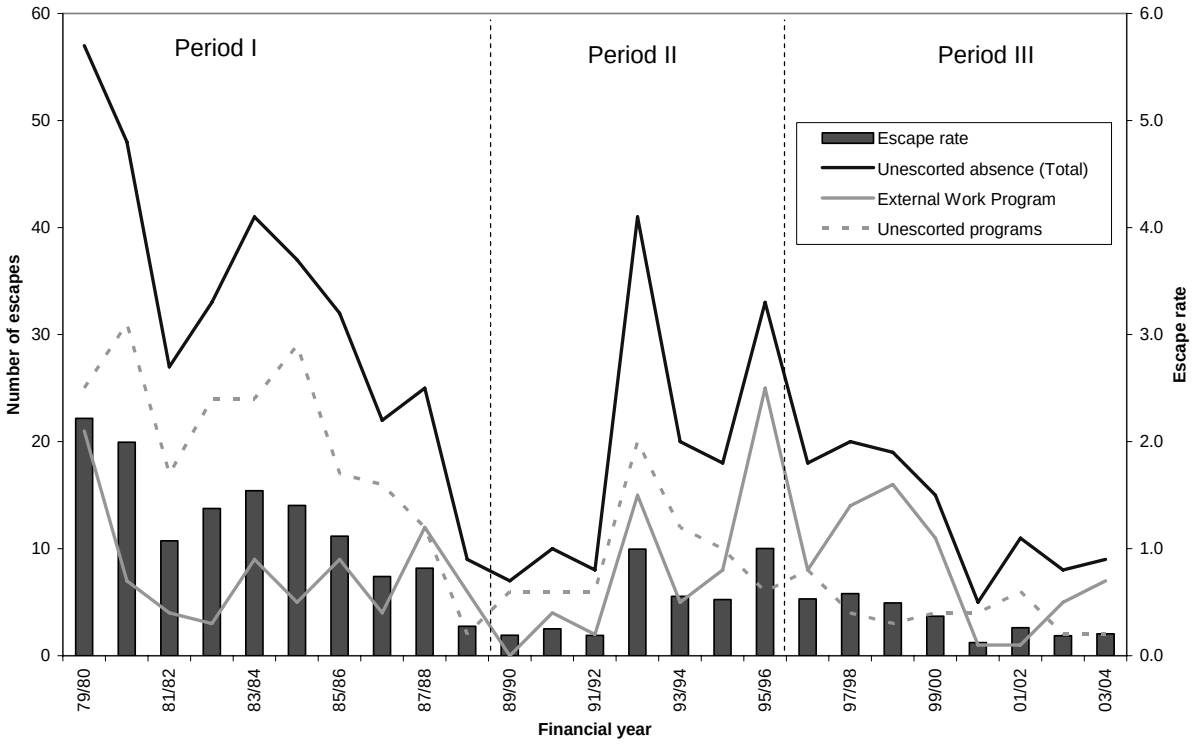
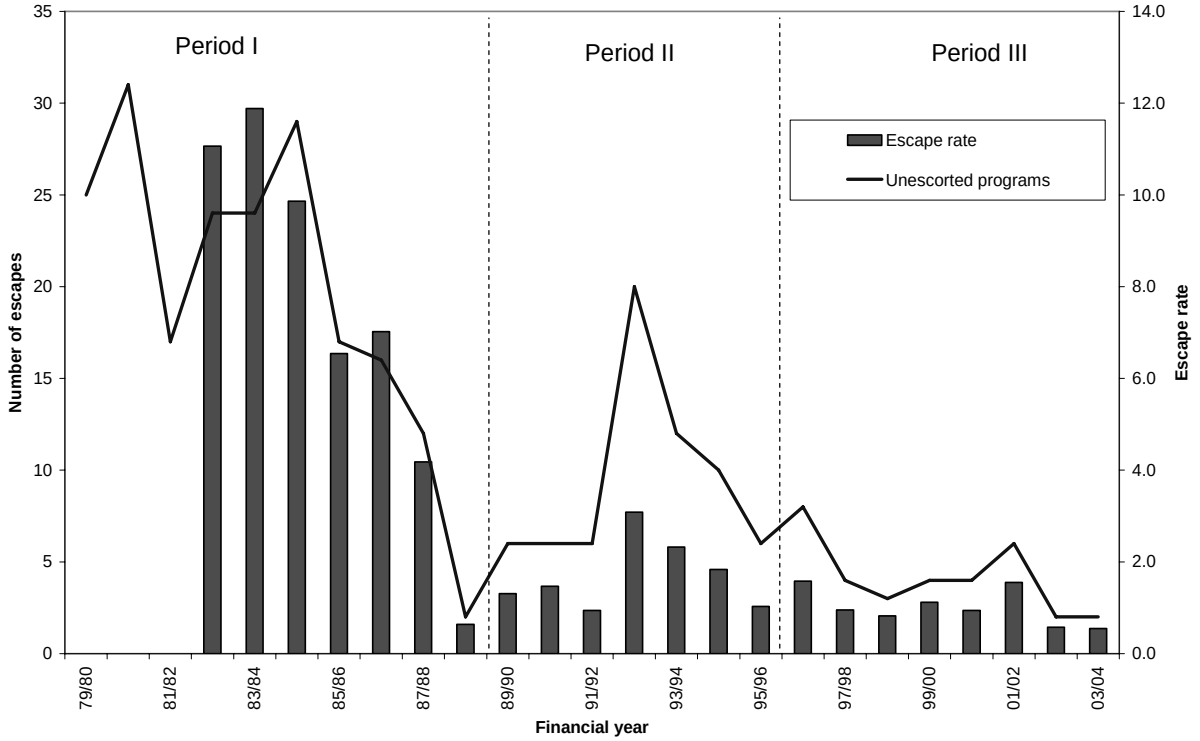


Figure 6: Number and rate of escapes per financial year from NSW Department of Corrective Services, 1 July 1979 to 30 June 2004 – Unescorted programs



Period II the number of escapes per year increased by 371 percent (an average of 3.7 more escapes each year). This is followed by a decrease in Period III of 50 percent (an average of 1.1 less escapes each year). The overall rate of escape in this category, calculated on the basis of the entire inmate population, shows a similar trend.

Escapes by periodic detainees

Escapes by periodic detainees include escapes from within Periodic Detention Centres, escapes from supervised work sites outside the centre and from authorised unescorted absences. Escapes by periodic detainees account for 3 percent of the total number of escapes over the study period. Figure 7 illustrates that aside from the lower level of escapes in Period I and the erratic peak in 1980/1981 the trend in the number and rate of escapes from Periodic Detention follows the overall pattern of escapes with an increase during Period II and subsequent decease in Period III.

DISCUSSION

Trends in the total number of escapes from NSW Corrective Services should be examined on the basis of the various areas of correctional operational management. For example, it has been shown that the overall decrease in escapes observed in Period I was due largely to a reduction in escapes from medium security centres and from unescorted absences. The decrease in escapes since the mid-1990's was largely the result of a decrease in escapes from minimum security centres.

Overall, there has been a decrease in escapes from within correctional centres and from unescorted absences. Conversely, there was an increase in the number of escapes from escorted absences between 1995/1996 and 2001/2002 resulting from an increase in escapes at court complexes and from escorts to/from courts, which represent relatively new areas of the Department's responsibilities.
Throughout the period of time covered by this report there were several significant legislatives and departmental initiatives that may be considered as influential on the escape rate. It is not possible to ascertain the degree to which each piece of legislation or correctional initiative has impacted on the escape rate from the data

Table 4: Number and rate of escapes from NSW Department of Corrective Services escorts, 1 July 1995 to 30 June 2004.

Year	Escorts to/from Court	Escorts between centres	TOTAL escorts	escapes from escort	Rate *
1995/1996	66,604	22,267	88,871	6	0.68
1996/1997	70,915	26,286	97,201	8	0.82
1997/1998	81,157	28,575	109,732	13	1.18
1998/1999	93,282	31,378	124,660	5	0.40
1999/2000	105,223	34,991	140,214	12	0.86
2000/2001	103,388	37,656	141,044	18	1.28
2001/2002	100,883	38,653	139,536	13	0.93
2002/2003	101,294	40,214	141,508	8	0.57
2003/2004	94,537	37,029	131,566	4	0.30

*Rate expressed as escapes per 10,000 escorts.

presented in this report. However, they are presented here for discussion purposes and as suggestions for further study.

Static security – enhancements to physical security at correctional centres.

The following is a summary of major capital works undertaken by the Department which may have had some impact on the number and category of escapes over recent years:
In 1990/91 a number of initiatives were undertaken at correctional centres included the installation of CCTV, movement beam detectors, electronic fence and pressure sensitive alarm systems, erection of external and internal security fences and gates (NSWDCS Annual Report 1990/1991).

In 1995/1996 Corrective Services continued the process of improving the perimeter security of its correctional centres with the installation of electronic surveillance and detection devices such as Video Motion Detection (VMD), replacing armed officers in towers.
Video Motion Detection (VMD) systems were installed at a number of correctional centres across NSW during 1995/1996 (NSWDCS Annual Report 1995/1996).
Upgrades of perimeter security continued into 1997/1998 with the installation of electronic surveillance equipment and duress alarms at two correctional centres (NSWDCS Annual Report 1997/1998).

During 1999/2000 new security systems which provide a graphic representation of entire correctional centre perimeters were introduced into maximum security correctional centres. Surveillance at all centres was improved by the introduction of digital video recorders and further capital works upgrades (NSWDCS Annual Report 1999/2000).

During 2000/2001 improved VMD systems were installed at two correctional centres and upgrades of security and camera surveillance systems were undertaken at another correctional centre (NSWDCS Annual Report 2000/2001).

In 2001/2002 biometric systems were updated at one correctional centre and perimeter microwave security systems were installed at another centre (NSWDCS Annual Report 2001/2002).

Dynamic security – enhancements to inmate management practises (Area Management, Case Management and Throughcare)

The concept of 'area management' was introduced into Corrective Services in 1992/1993 (NSWDCS Annual Report 1992/1993). This correctional centre management approach involved organizing correctional centres into defined areas, each under the command of an Area Manager. Each area is designed to be serviced by a multidisciplinary team including custodial officers, psychologists, welfare, education and parole officers, alcohol and other drug workers and chaplains. Within this framework, custodial case officers manage 10-20 inmates each. The approach was implemented, in part, to facilitate closer relationships between inmates and staff to gain more detailed knowledge of inmate behaviour and thereby enhance dynamic security.

Case Management, which compliments 'area management', was introduced in 1993/1994 and has been progressively phased into the correctional system. A significant revision of the process was undertaken in 1996 (Coulter 1999). Case Management represents the most significant component of the dynamic security approach to correctional centre management.

As a further enhancement of Case Management, Electronic Case Management was trialled in 2001/2002. Electronic Case Management consolidates key information on each offender into a single, co-ordinated case plan allowing staff to monitor, review and share information throughout an offender's sentence (NSWDCS Annual Report 2001/2002).

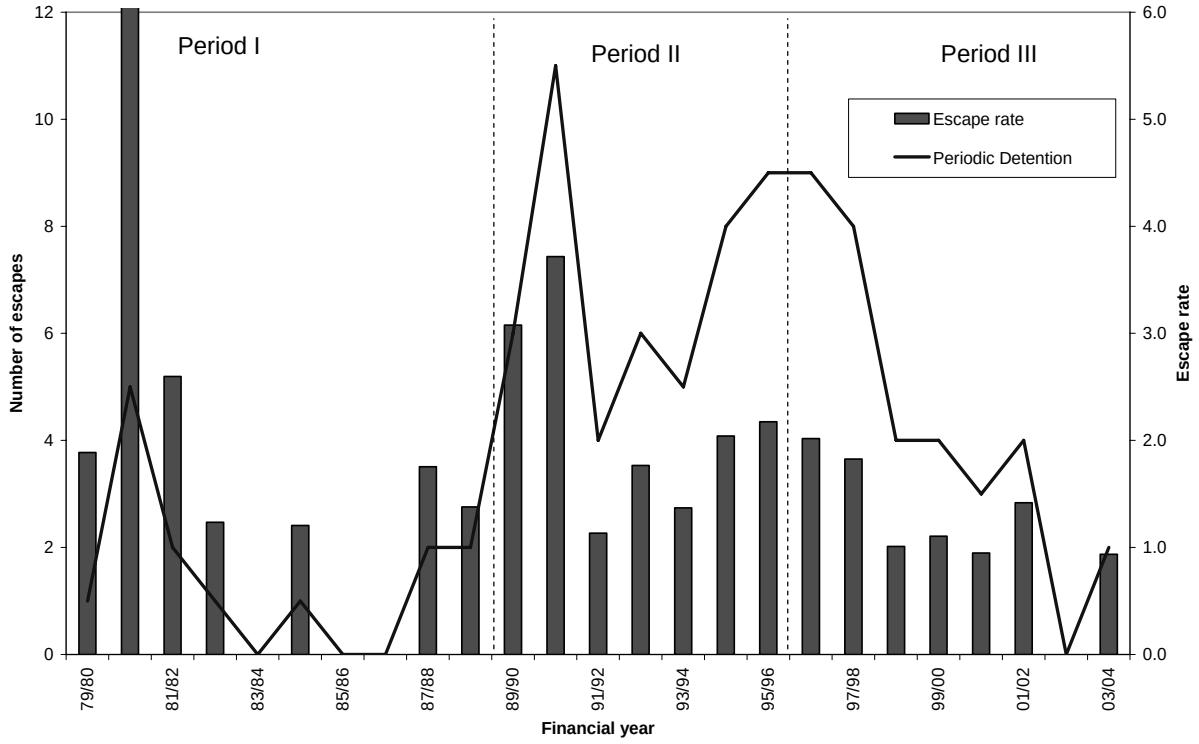
Corrective Services implemented its Throughcare policy in 2001/2002. This represented a substantial upgrade in the approach to managing offenders from the first point of contact to a successful re-integration into the community (NSWDCS Annual Report 2001/2002).

In 2001/2002 the Department implemented the use of the Level of Service Inventory – Revised (LSI-R) to assess offender's needs in relation to addressing their offending behaviour (NSWDCS Annual Report 2001/2002). This assessment tool has allowed Corrective Service to better direct resources to offenders in need and provide opportunities for personal development and assist with strategies to reduce re-offendng.

Throughcare and the LSI-R are aimed at reducing re-offending and may impact on escape rates by giving offenders the opportunity to spend their time in the correctional system more productively and housing them in centres appropriate to their level of need.

Obviously, local correctional centre management initiatives are constantly monitored and improved. For, during 1990/1991 the security procedures around gates and vehicles, the assessment of inmates prior to assignment to external work were improved and the use of metal detectors to detect removal of tools from work areas was introduced to specifically aimed at reducing escapes involving these circumstances.

Figure 7: Number and rate of escapes per financial year from NSW Department of Corrective Services, 1 July 1979 to 30 June 2004 – Periodic Detention



Video Conferencing

Video Conferencing facilities in NSW correctional centres became operational in December 2001. This initiative has reduced the number of inmates being escorted to and from parole and court hearings and therefore decreasing the opportunity for inmates to escape whilst on escort.

In the six months to 30 June 2002, there were 2604 hearings conducted by video conferencing across the state. In 2002/2003 the figure was 8605, and in 2003/2004 it had increased to 13471, accounting for over 30 percent of court attendances in that financial year. During this same time period, from the end of 2000/2001 to the end of 2003/2004 the number of escapes from escorts decreased from 18 to 4 per year. It is possible the reduction in escapes from escorts is directly related to the increasing use of video conferencing. However, the erratic trends in escapes from escort since 1992/1993 and the relatively small numbers involved indicate that this connection should be made cautiously.

Classification of Recaptured Escapees

In 1988 the *Prisons Act 1952* was amended such that prisoners convicted of escape would forfeit all remissions granted to the time of the escape. The *Prisons Regulations 1968* were also amended that same year to provide a more rigorous classification procedure for the reclassification of prisoners convicted of escape or attempted escape. In 1995, legislation passed in NSW consolidated the more exacting classification procedures. In brief, an inmate found guilty of an escape offence would be reclassified to a security level necessitating that they be house behind a secure physical barrier at all times. It is possible that such changes not only provide a further deterrent to escape but also reduce the likelihood of re-escape.

Truth in Sentencing

The *Sentencing Act 1989*, which introduced "*Truth in Sentencing,*" commenced in September 1989. The effect of the Act was to remove the practice of granting remissions for good behaviour, thereby ensuring that convicted persons served at least the minimum sentence imposed by the court. A Corrective Services study completed in 1990 showed the minimum term to be served by inmates sentenced after the Act was, on average, 50 days longer than the time served by inmates sentenced prior to the Act (Gorta and Eyland, 1990).

There are other incentives for good behaviour in the correctional system; however the effect of the *Sentencing Act 1989* was that at least one of these incentives was removed. This may have had some impact on the rate of escapes.

Changes in the inmate profile

This current study covers a period of 25 years, during which inmate population increased by 131 percent. It is possible that there has been measurable change in the characteristics of the inmate population over this significant period of time. It is suggested that, in part, changes to these characteristics (such an increase in impulsivity) could have some effect on the trends in the number and types of escapes detailed in this study.

CONCLUSION

This report has provided an analysis of the overall trends in escapes from Corrective Services over the 25 year period from 1 July 1979 to 30 June 2004. The report has also detailed trends in categories of escape based on level of security breached. As illustrated there have been a number of innovations and changes in correctional management strategies and legislation that may have had an impact on the number of escapes from NSW Corrective Services custody. Future research will explore the self reported reasons for escape from custody and the potential risk escaped inmates pose to the community in therms of the time at large and offences committed whilst at large. Further stages in this overall research project will aim to examine changes in the profile of escaped inmates in terms of demographic and criminogenic characteristics such as sentence length and offence type.

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NOTES

[1] The categories for classification of inmate within the NSW correctional system are detailed under the *Crimes (Administration of Sentences) Regulation 2001*, s22-24.

[2] The escape rate, expressed as the number of escapes per 100 inmates per year, is calculated by dividing the number of escapees for the year by the daily average inmate population for the year and multiplying by 100.

[3] For the purposes of this report escapes were grouped according to the level of security/supervision breached during the escape. The categories are comprised as follows:

- "Maximum or Medium" includes escapes from within a maximum or medium security correctional centre, an area adjacent to maximum or medium security correctional centre or the Prince Henry Hospital Annexe;
- "Minimum" includes escapes from within minimum security and the Malabar Fines Unit;
- "Escorted absence" includes escapes whilst being transferred between correctional centres, to or from a hospital or court complex, escapes from a court complex or a escort/transport vehicle;
- "Unescorted absence" includes escapes from an external work program, external sports/recreation program, day/weekend leave program, unescorted educational leave program, work release program (including the Miroma work site) and other authorised unescorted absence;
- "Periodic Detention" includes escapes from a periodic detention centres, a supervised work program outside the centre and unsupervised authorised absences from a periodic detention centre.

[4] The sub categories "Escorted (external) Work Program" and "Escorted (external) sports/educational program" are included in this category since escapees from these categories have breached a level of security similar to those escaping from unescorted leave – that is, they were not under constant direct supervision. They are hereafter referred to as "External Work Program" and "External Sports/Education Program"

[5] "Escapes from unescorted leave programs" generally refer to programs available only to inmates with a C3 security classification. As, in general, inmates with a C2 security classification are eligible to participate in the "External Work Program" and "External Sports/ Education Program" activities, escapes in these sub-categories have been excluded here.

[6] The NSW Department of Corrective Services has operated a Video Conferencing project since August 2000. This project works in conjunction with other justice agencies such as the NSW Attorney General's Department to facilitate the use of video conferencing in a range of justice procedures.

[7] Regulations for the determination of the security classification for recaptured escapees are specified under the *Crimes (Administration of Sentences) Regulation 2001*, s24.

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