



9 April 2014

C66064

Michelle Richards  
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Dear Ms Richards

Thank you for your email of 25 March 2014, requesting information about the number of female prisoners who have escaped from custody for the period 2000 to 2013. Your request has been considered under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA).

I can advise that escapes from New Zealand prisons have fallen to an all-time low, and have remained relatively consistent over the recent years. All offenders who have escaped during the last decade have been recaptured and returned to custodial control. This is a significant achievement given the continued rise in the prisoner population.

The Department's number one priority is to ensure public safety. Despite our success in reducing the number of escapes, we are always looking to improve upon our high standard of prisoner management. We have invested in a range of security improvements to sites across the country during the last decade, including enhanced perimeter fencing, installation of detection and surveillance systems, and the introduction of single point-of-entry into prisons. In 2010, we also introduced a new security classification system that focused on escape prevention and reviewed the criteria that a prisoner must meet to be considered for employment in a work party outside the perimeter.

A review is undertaken after any escape to identify how the prisoner evaded custodial control; how we can enhance our systems and policies; and whether staff adhered to those guidelines. Recapture is the responsibility of the Police. As a result, all escapes require an immediate notification to Police. Following recapture, a prisoner will also have their security classification reviewed, and will be placed in more secure accommodation.

Following escape and recapture, charges may be laid by Police and a sentence of imprisonment may be imposed by the judiciary. The charges and sentences may vary depending on the circumstances of the escape. The most common charge is section 120 of the Crimes Act 1961, Escape from Lawful Custody. This charge can result in a maximum sentence of five years' imprisonment.

From the 2007/08 financial year till present, the Department has defined escapes in four categories – breakout; from escort; absconding; and breach of temporary release conditions.

A 'breakout' escape means that a prisoner has breached security measures and has physically left the area contained by the outermost perimeter security fence, or, if there is no such fence, from the prison building.

A 'from escort' escape means the prisoner has escaped from escort, while under supervision. This includes escorted outings, such as to hospital, and court escorts by Corrections Services or a contractor. We have increased the use of audio visual links between courts and prisons, meaning that some prisoners are able to 'virtually' attend court hearings without leaving prison. As use of this technology becomes more widespread, fewer prisoners will need to be transported to and from court to attend their hearings. This is more cost efficient and improves public safety by minimising opportunities to escape from escort.

An 'absconding' escape is defined where a prisoner physically leaves a designated area and is away from direct custodial control, including walking away from prisoner work parties.

A 'breach of temporary release conditions' means a prisoner has been found to have breached a condition of their temporary release from prison, which results in either an internal or external charge of escape. This can include the failure to return within reasonable time without reasonable cause. These prisoners are considered at low risk of re-offending or causing harm to others, and are allowed to work in the community or attend an important event such as a funeral. We are currently trialing the use of electronic monitoring for prisoners undertaking employment activities outside prison as a way to reduce the risk of these incidents.

You have requested the number of female prisoners who have escaped from custody from prison for the period of 2000 to 2013. There were nine escape incidents involving female prisoners from 1999/00 to 2012/13. Please refer to the table below for a breakdown by prison and escape category. Please note that the Department records escape data by financial year, being 1 July to 30 June, and the parameters of your request have been altered accordingly.

Financial Year	Prison	Number of escapes	Escape category
2002/03	Christchurch Women's Prison	1	Breach of Temporary Release
	Mt Eden Womens	1	
2004/05	Arohata Prison	2	Breakout escape
2006/07	Arohata Prison	1	From Escort
2007/08	Auckland Region Women's Corrections Facility	2	Breach of Temporary Release
2009/10	Auckland Region Women's Corrections Facility	1	From Escort
2011/12	Auckland Region Women's Corrections Facility	1	From Escort

As you will appreciate, a prison is an extremely difficult and demanding work environment, and our staff are responsible for managing the nations most dangerous offenders. Even with the best practices in place, there will always be the risk that a prisoner will behave in an unpredictable way, such as attempting to escape. The Department treats all escapes from custody with the utmost seriousness. We are continually striving to improve public safety and this will always be our bottom line.

I trust the information provided is of assistance. As you may be aware, you have the right to ask the Ombudsman to review this response. Contact details are: Office of the Ombudsman, PO Box 10152, Wellington 6143.

Yours sincerely



Jeremy Lightfoot  
National Commissioner  
Corrections Services