

REPORT OF AN ANNOUNCED INSPECTION OF CASUARINA PRISON

Concern about the increasingly high number of non-maximum security prisoners being held in the State's highest security prison was identified in the most recent inspection report of Casuarina Prison from the Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services.

On releasing the report of the April 2010 inspection, Inspector Neil Morgan said that at the time of the inspection only 19 per cent of Casuarina's prisoners were actually rated maximum security, raising many questions about the use of Casuarina and about the prison estate as a whole.

'Casuarina is the main maximum-security prison for male prisoners and so it is suitably resourced with a range of state-of-the-art security devices, appropriate staffing and operational policies. However, having such a high number of medium, and particularly minimum, security prisoners at the prison raises issues of value for money. The high security environment also restricts the ability of prisoners to access re-entry services,' Professor Morgan said.

Whilst some prisoners are necessarily placed at Casuarina for security and other operational purposes, a significant number are transferred there from lower security facilities to complete programs that are not available at their 'home' prisons.

The report also raises questions about the high level of expansion currently occurring at Casuarina (256 beds) and the State's two other maximum security facilities Hakea (256 beds) and Albany (128 beds). Professor Morgan said 'This does mean that these facilities are flexible enough to house all categories of prisoner. But concentrating so much of the expansion at maximum security and in the South West of the State is not warranted when you examine prisoners' security classifications and their geographic origins. Soon, we will have more than 2,500 maximum-security beds but fewer than 500 maximum-security prisoners and a large number of prisoners – especially Aboriginal people – are being held in prisons a very long way from home. As a result, it is not clear that the system will be able to maximise the opportunities for rehabilitation and successful re-entry.'

As an example, many prisoners at Casuarina are from the Kimberley and are not receiving the best level of service delivery appropriate to their needs. Almost 50 per cent of Casuarina's prisoners are Aboriginal, with a significant proportion (60 per cent during the inspection) being held 'out of country'. In view of these high numbers, the inspection findings in relation to Aboriginal prisoners were particularly disappointing. They included:

- proportionately higher levels of unemployment and under employment;
- a lack of ongoing cultural awareness training for staff;
- 'out of country' prisoners in Unit 1 lacking an accessible cultural space;
- very limited resources in terms of Aboriginal education and health workers; and
- the Displaced Aboriginal Prisoners (DAP) program having limited coverage and not delivering on stated intentions.

The inspection also found that investment in other supporting infrastructure and staffing had not kept pace with the increased number of prisoners, and expressed concern at the further pressures that would arise from the new accommodation units. At the time of the inspection, the plans for the new units were clear but the extent of any additional commitment to essential services such as kitchen, laundry, programs, counselling and health had not been finalised and communicated to the prison.

'One can only hope that the drop in prisoner numbers across the State since April will offer something of a breathing space for these important issues to be resolved,' Professor Morgan said.

Neil Morgan

8 November 2010

Neil Morgan will be available for comment from 12 noon on Tuesday 9 November and can be contacted on **9212 6200** or **0427 426 471**.

The full Report will be available on the Inspector's website (www.oics.wa.gov.au)