

The Inspector's Overview

PARDELUP PRISON FARM: A SAFE, POSITIVE AND PRODUCTIVE PRISON WITH FURTHER POTENTIAL

INTRODUCTION

Pardelup Prison Farm ('Pardelup'), located 27 kilometres from Mount Barker, has a fascinating 85 year history. It commenced operations in 1927 as an adjunct to Fremantle Prison, and in both national and international terms its philosophy and infrastructure were ground-breaking: an open, fence-free rural location and a focus on positive farm-based work.

Up until 2002, Pardelup operated as a prison, holding a maximum of around 80 prisoners. In 2002, during a short term drop in prisoner numbers, the decision was taken to downgrade it to a small work camp. Its maximum capacity was only 20 prisoners and actual numbers were often lower. Given that prisoner numbers were always destined to move back up, this was a short-sighted decision. It also resulted in a deteriorating state asset and a serious under-utilisation of a site with real potential.ⁱ

In 2009, very sensibly, the government decided to invest in building up Pardelup's prisoner numbers and in appropriate refurbishments. In March 2010, Pardelup formally regained its status as a prison and now has a capacity of 84 prisoners. It is also responsible for the Walpole work camp which has a capacity of 12 prisoners.

This inspection, conducted in July-August 2012, confirmed the wisdom of the decision to reinstate Pardelup as a prison and to expand its operations accordingly. Inevitably, the inspection found that it was still a 'work in progress' and identified some areas where improved procedures and practices needed to be developed or embedded. Overall, however, it was an extremely positive scorecard. Enormous progress had been made and many areas of good practice were already evident. The prison had a sound vision and there were strong and positive connections with the local community. These achievements are a tribute to the careful groundwork undertaken prior to March 2010 as well as to the work that has been undertaken subsequently.

SAFE, PRODUCTIVE AND POSITIVE

Pardelup is unique amongst the state's prisons in that it has no perimeter security fence. It is also a very large and open site where prisoners necessarily have access to tools, chemicals and other materials. However, it has proved to be a secure and safe facility. Careful prisoner selection, a zero tolerance approach to bullying and misbehaviour, positive staff/prisoner relations, and the incentive of having single cell accommodation in a pleasant setting have been key ingredients of this success.

Both staff and prisoners reported a stronger sense of personal safety than at other prisons. In addition, extensive community based work and recreation activities have been successful, safe and warmly embraced by the community. The areas identified for improvement with respect to safety and security are generally easily remedied and many have already been addressed.ⁱⁱ

i OICS, *Report of an Announced Inspection of Albany Regional Prison*, Report No. 60 (April 2009) Chapter 7.
ii See Chapter 3 and Recommendations 8 (reception and property) and 14 (chemical handling and storage).

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WITH FURTHER POTENTIAL

Pardelup is clearly a prison farm, not merely a prison which has a farm attached. Its operations include livestock, tree plantations, fruit production and market gardening. These activities accord with the Department of Corrective Services' twin goals of providing positive employment for prisoners at the same time as enhancing the prison system's self-sustainability.

As part of this inspection, officers from the Department of Food and Agriculture conducted a comprehensive review of Pardelup's farming and production activities.ⁱⁱⁱ Their report aims both to take stock of the current situation and to suggest options for the future. As such, it includes a number of strategic observations as well as some technical recommendations. I am most appreciative of their enthusiastic engagement and assistance. In terms of the future, there are two main strategic challenges. One is to ensure that departmental strategies and planning for production and consumption across the prison estate are more fully developed. The other is to ensure that the best possible balance is being achieved between productivity on the one hand and enhancing prisoners' skills, qualifications and re-entry prospects on the other.^{iv}

Overall, Pardelup provides a positive environment and promotes respectful, pro-social relationships between staff and prisoners. The fact that all prisoners have their own cells was highly prized. Health services, food, clothing and bedding were generally of a high standard and levels of community engagement were impressive.

A good example of Pardelup's positive and proactive work can be seen in its efforts to cater for diversity amongst its prisoner population. At the time of the inspection, 40 per cent of its prisoners were Indonesian nationals who had been convicted of 'people smuggling' offences. The prison had ensured that good signage was posted in Bahasa Indonesian and had also worked hard to meet the prisoners' dietary, religious and cultural needs.^v The prisoners, in turn, were respectful and very appreciative of the consideration shown to them.

CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES AND POTENTIAL

Pardelup has made very good progress over the past two to three years and is very well placed for further development. At an appropriate time in the relatively near future, after a period of further consolidation, consideration should be given to the possibility of adding more accommodation, together with additional staff resources, to support a total population of 100 to 120. This is likely to be feasible and cost-effective and would provide a better 'critical mass' of prisoners for training programs.

iii See Appendix 1.

iv See Recommendation 12, Chapters 7 and 8 and Appendix 1.

v See Chapter 4. A positive development is that the Department of Corrective Services has recently abandoned its policy of denying some foreign national prisoners the ability to remit money home during the course of their sentence: see Recommendation 7. This policy was distressing, detrimental and discriminatory: see OICS, *Report of an Announced Inspection of Albany Regional Prison*, Report No. 78 (June 2012) vi–viii. It had even led to some Indonesian prisoners refusing to work at Pardelup on one occasion by way of protest.

However, three main challenges and opportunities stand out. The first is to increase the number of Aboriginal people accessing Pardelup's excellent facilities and opportunities. The second is to ensure the best balance between productivity and skilling up prisoners for successful re-entry. The third is to maintain the momentum of the past three years in the face of significant recent management changes.

Aboriginal Prisoner Numbers

Aboriginal people constitute four out of every ten prisoners in the state and have high re-entry needs. Minimum security facilities such as Pardelup are explicitly designed to achieve better reintegration outcomes and therefore to enhance public safety through reduced recidivism.

Obviously, decisions about prisoner placement must take full account of a number of considerations including security, safety and prisoner preparedness. However, for many years, I have been expressing concern at the declining proportion of Aboriginal men and women accessing south west re-entry facilities such as Boronia Pre-release Centre for Women, Wooroloo Prison Farm, Karnet Prison Farm, the Pre-release Unit at Bunbury Regional Prison, and the work camps at Pardelup and Walpole.^{vi} If Aboriginal people are not accessing these facilities in sufficient numbers, their benefits are not reaching a priority target group and public investment is not being maximised.

Prior to Pardelup becoming a prison, the Walpole and Pardelup work camps rarely held Aboriginal prisoners. For the first two years after being upgraded to a prison, Pardelup again held very few Aboriginal prisoners. Shortly before the inspection, numbers increased to 10-12 (around 15 per cent) and have stayed at that level subsequently. One of the reasons suggested by the Department was that Aboriginal people do not want to go to Pardelup. That was not what we found: the men we interviewed held very positive views about Pardelup, were actively engaged and valued the opportunities it offers.

In response to the Exit Debrief presented at the end of this inspection in early August 2012, the Department of Corrective Services commissioned an internal review to identify the reasons for the low number of Aboriginal people at re-entry facilities and to develop strategies to increase their numbers.^{vii} It is to be hoped that this review, overdue though it is, will achieve some positive results. I am also currently undertaking an audit of the flow of prisoners through to minimum security facilities, the findings of which have been shared with the Department. A report of this audit will be published on completion.

vi OICS, *Report of an Announced Inspection of Albany Regional Prison*, Report No. 60 (April 2009) Chapter 7; OICS, *Report of an Announced Inspection of Wooroloo Prison*, Report No. 61 (2009); OICS, *Report of an Announced Inspection of Wooroloo Prison*, Report No. 80 (2012); OICS, *Report of an Announced Inspection of Boronia Pre-release Centre for Women*, Report No. 62 (2010); OICS, *Report of an Announced Inspection of Boronia Pre-release Centre for Women*, Report No. 79 (2012); OICS, *Report of an Announced Inspection of Karnet Prison Farm*, Report No. 67 (2010).

vii See Recommendation 3.

Balance Between Productivity and Re-Entry Skilling

Although not made the subject of a formal recommendation, an important theme which underpinned both our inspection work and the work of the Department of Food and Agriculture was the balance between productivity and the skill development of prisoners. Productivity is obviously important in terms of cost and system wide sustainability, especially at times of budgetary pressures. However, prisons must also meet the broader public interest of improving prisoners' chances of not returning to prison and the consequential costs of further imprisonment.



Figure 1: The walking trail on Pardelup Farm roads

This is not always an easy balance to achieve as the most productive prisoners are generally the ones who are already skilled and who already have a strong work ethic. For example, a skilled welder with a history of employment will be far more productive than a trainee with little work history. At Pardelup, the issue is exemplified by fact that Indonesian prisoners are productive workers who are self-motivated and easy to supervise. However, the number of Indonesian prisoners in Western Australia is declining markedly and many of those held at Pardelup will soon be moved to Broome Regional Prison. Pardelup is concerned that this may present some challenges in terms of productivity but it should also provide the opportunity for the prison to further develop its focus on skilling up local prisoners and improving their prospects of successful re-entry.

Impact of Management Changes

At the time of the inspection, Pardelup had its own substantive Superintendent and a small and focused management team. Although small in terms of prisoner numbers, Pardelup has a similar number to Boronia Pre-release Centre for Women. There is no doubt that having a dedicated Superintendent at Pardelup, as at Boronia, has been critical to driving its vision and early progress.

In November 2012, in response to management changes and entrenched challenges at Hakea Prison^{viii}, the Superintendent of Albany Regional Prison was appointed to Hakea. This led, in turn, to the Superintendent of Pardelup being appointed to Albany but also being given responsibility for Pardelup and Walpole.

There is an obvious risk that with Pardelup now being, in effect, an adjunct of Albany, it will lose the momentum of the past three years. This would be most unfortunate. There are also risks to Albany in requiring the Superintendent to also oversee Pardelup. It is to be hoped that he can stretch himself adequately between the various sites. This will not be easy though, fortunately, there are a number of other high quality experienced managers at both sites.

SUMMARY

Pardelup provides a refreshing example of the benefits of simple things like fresh air, single cells, positive work opportunities and respectful relationships. It is important that it retains its values and momentum. Staff, management and prisoners are to be congratulated on their achievements to date.

Neil Morgan

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viii OICS, *Report of an Announced Inspection of Hakea Prison*, Report No. 81 (forthcoming).