

MEDIA RELEASE – EMBARGOED UNTIL 12 NOON ON TUESDAY 11TH MARCH 2014

Report No. 88 – Casuarina Prison

The Inspector of Custodial Services' report on Casuarina Prison released today calls for a sharper strategic focus from the Department of Corrective Services and highlights the complex balance of roles that Casuarina must play in a crowded and difficult prison system.

Casuarina was the subject of media attention in 2013, with publicity surrounding the alleged misdeeds of some staff. Mr Morgan said this had eroded morale:

'It needs to be placed on record that the vast majority of staff are well-motivated, knowledgeable and pragmatic professionals who do their jobs and support efforts to clamp down on unprofessional behaviour.'

In addition to housing maximum-security prisoners, Casuarina performs a number of vital 'state-wide' functions. These include accommodating the highest risk / highest security prisoners (in the Special Handling Unit), those who need the highest degree of protection from others (in the Special Protection Unit), and those in need of specialised medical care (in the Infirmary). Mr Morgan said:

'Casuarina houses a complex and potentially volatile mix of prisoners. It is a credit to all involved that over the past 15 years, and in the face of many challenges, it has maintained a strong record for security and control.'

Reflecting on the changing roles of Casuarina from its opening in June 1991 as a modern replacement for the archaic Fremantle Prison, Mr Morgan said:

'Casuarina was originally designed for 397 prisoners occupying single cells. But it is now holding 700. Although some new accommodation units have been added, prisoners generally have to use bunk beds which have been added to cells that were never intended for two people. In any event, prison capacity is not a simple matter of 'beds versus heads'. If the state is committed to maximising opportunities to reduce reoffending, it needs to provide sufficient supporting infrastructure. To date this has not occurred at Casuarina. Areas of particular need include health services, the kitchen, industries and education, and some areas of security. Staff shortages inside the prison, often due to the need to undertake escorts outside the prison, were further impacting on services and operations.'

The report calls for the Department to develop a much stronger focus on the needs of different groups of prisoners, including younger prisoners and people held on remand. Mr Morgan observed:

'One of my abiding memories was seeing a group of six to eight Aboriginal men sitting around playing cards early one afternoon. Some were teenagers, some were much older. There was little else for them to do and none of them had done much all day. They claimed

they were not gambling but looked sheepish as they said this. It was depressing to witness such aimlessness and to sense that many of the young men saw this as a normalised existence, not something to break out of. Across the system Western Australians are currently spending more than \$300 per prisoner per day to keep one person in prison, or \$115,000 a year. We need to get a better return on this investment and this will require improving the ways we engage, incentivise and rehabilitate young people.'

Casuarina was intended to be a prison for sentenced prisoners but it now accommodates a very different mix, said Mr Morgan:

'Currently, 180 of Casuarina's prisoners are on remand, around a quarter of its population, and a good number of them are from regional and remote areas. These numbers result from the fact that more than one in five of the state's prisoners are now on remand. This is a massive increase from five years ago, and Casuarina has become the 'overflow' facility.

Remand prisoners have a different formal legal status from sentenced prisoners. They are innocent until proved guilty and they require good facilities by way of legal resources, video-link facilities and other technology. The bottom line is that while there may be beds for them at Casuarina, the prison has not been adequately resourced to meet their needs and, by and large, remand prisoners are simply being intermixed with sentenced prisoners.'

Mr Morgan also drew attention to the fact that although Casuarina is a maximum security prison, most of its prisoners are only rated a medium security risk:

'The problem with this is that the Department is imposing on most prisoners a higher level of security than it has itself assessed them to need. This adds to cost and reduces opportunity. In 2012 the Department claimed that prisons would operate 'adaptive regimes' to reflect different security ratings but there was no evidence whatsoever of this at Casuarina or any other prison. It is time for such fanciful claims to stop.'

Positively, Mr Morgan noted that the Department's responses to this report were more realistic, detailed and helpful than has been the norm over recent years:

'This is a good sign: Fortunately, we seem to be moving into a period when the Department is prepared to focus more sharply on the needs of different prisoner groups, something I have been calling for over some time. This is not about being "soft on prisoners": it is an essential component of any intelligent strategy to enhance public safety by reducing re-offending.

Some people will be sceptical of this but they would be well-advised to look at recent New Zealand experience. In 2011 the New Zealand government directed its Department of Corrections to reduce recidivism by 25 per cent between 2012 and 2017, essentially within existing resources. Few would have thought this possible but in late 2013 the New Zealand Auditor General concluded that there had already been a significant reduction in recidivism. This was attributed to strong planning, a reflective and responsive Department, the setting of clear performance measures, and targets and better targeting of expenditure.

There is no reason we cannot aim to do the same in Western Australia, so it is very pleasing to see the Department starting to move in this direction.'

Neil Morgan
Inspector
10 March 2014

For more detail, see the Inspector's Overview to the Report (copy attached)

About Casuarina Prison

Casuarina Prison opened in 1991 and is officially described as Western Australia main maximum-security prison for male prisoners – particularly long-term prisoners. Casuarina also provides specialist statewide services in the Special Handling Unit, the Special Purpose Unit, the Infirmary, and the Crisis Care Unit.

About the Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services (the Office)

The role of the Office is to bring independent external scrutiny to the standards and operational practices relating to custodial services within Western Australia. The Office is required under its legislation to undertake an inspection of each prison every three years. Commencing operations in June 2000 the Office reports directly to Parliament.

For Further Media Information

The Inspector, Mr Neil Morgan, will be available for comment from 12 noon on Tuesday 11 March 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).