

MEDIA RELEASE – EMBARGOED UNTIL 12 NOON ON WEDNESDAY 1st OCTOBER 2014

Report No. Eastern Goldfields Regional Prison

The Acting Inspector of Custodial Services today acknowledged an improvement at Eastern Goldfields Regional Prison, although he stated that the new, replacement prison due to open in late 2015 was long overdue.

Releasing the most recent report of the inspection of Eastern Goldfields Regional Prison, Acting Inspector Andrew Harvey said that while locally the prison had been doing what it could with the extremely limited facilities and resources it has, limitations in infrastructure had undermined staff efforts to focus on services to reduce recidivism.

‘Even though the prison is only 40 years old, it is well past its use by date and cannot meet the needs and demands placed on it. Too many people, especially from the Aboriginal lands, are being held vast distances from their homes and support networks and that has very negative impacts on the success of their rehabilitation efforts,’ Mr Harvey said.

‘Buildings are important but do not make a good prison – they are a human environment where good relationships make for good outcomes. Eastern Goldfields is a prime example of this, where local staff and management have worked hard to improve past, negative inspection findings to achieve sound improvements in service delivery.’

Mr Harvey said it was only through the hard work of local management and staff that the prison had seen a solid improvement in its operations, which now provided a sound foundation for the future relocation of the prison to an adjoining site.

The new prison will see an increase in capacity from 110 (including 27 women) mainly minimum security prisoners, to 350 (including 50 women). Mr Harvey said that the new prison had been intelligently designed not just for more prisoners, but for a wider range (including security classifications) and more specifically for the local groups likely to be accommodated there.

‘This means that as long as the ongoing service delivery is properly resourced, there is more chance that prisoners will not merely be ‘kept’ there, but have better opportunity for engagement in services that will improve their chances of staying out of prison in the future,’ Mr Harvey said.

The inspection found that even with the ongoing paucity of proper facilities and some services, prisoners would much rather remain at Eastern Goldfields than be sent away to better serviced prisons with newer facilities. The most valued aspect of the prison was being close to home and country, particularly for Aboriginal prisoners.

Mr Harvey said that in moving forward it was imperative that the prison and Department of Corrective Services invest in proper thorough transition planning to ensure the move to the new prison was a success. At the time of the inspection there was some concern about a lack of Departmental commitment to resources to allow for proper planning.

'After the disaster of the transition of young offenders to the new Banksia Hill Detention Centre that ultimately resulted in riot, it is hoped the Department has learnt lessons about the importance of proper planning. This is not just the physical and security aspects, but also the philosophical direction and operational procedures that reflect these. Local recruitment of staff will also be essential,' Mr Harvey said.

Andrew Harvey
Acting Inspector

30 September 2014

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

About Eastern Goldfields Regional Prison (the Prison)

The Prison is located in the town of Kalgoorlie –Boulder and was opened in December 1980. The Prison was designed as a minimum-security prison for men and women, with the capacity to hold medium- and maximum-security prisoners for short periods. It services the Goldfields district from Wiluna in the north to Esperance on the south coast, and the 13 remote communities east to the South Australia and Northern Territory borders. The prison has a large Aboriginal population from the Goldfields/Ngaanyatjarra region. EGRP's total operational capacity is 140, with 110 beds at the prison, and the work camp at Warburton has 24 minimum-security beds and six secure cells.

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 Inspector reports directly to Parliament.

For Further Media Information

The Acting Inspector, Mr Andrew Harvey, will be available for comment from 12 noon on Wednesday 1 October and can be contacted on 6551 4217 or 0477 307 559

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

Key Findings

- The Inspector, in his Overview to the report, described Eastern Goldfields as a “prison in transition”. A new prison is being constructed and is due to open in late 2015.
- The prison was coping as well given the impending transition to the new facility, however, the infrastructure had outlived its ‘use-by’ date.
- More significantly, the majority of prisoners would prefer to stay in the infrastructure-impooverished Eastern Goldfields Prison, in country and close to family, rather than move to another better-equipped facility.
- An OICS analysis of the social and cultural context for an Aboriginal prison in the Eastern Goldfields, and in particular the various Aboriginal groupings in the area provides insight into the population of the area that may be reflected in the new prison, and how prison operations and services can be tailored to meet the cultural needs of this population.
- There were 19 female prisoners at the time of the inspection. In general the women were satisfied with life for them at the prison – mostly attributed to being grateful to be in country.
- There was scope for the prison to more actively pursue access for the women to section 95 activities.
- There was appropriate integration between the male and female prisoners during recreation, in education and supervised work locations.
- There was no facility for Skype contact.
- Better access to more relevant cross-cultural training for staff was needed.
- Strategies to increase the custodial staff complement of Aboriginal officers should be developed.
- Warburton Work Camp was significantly underused and the Department needed to implement strategies to address this.