



Government of **Western Australia**  
Department of **Corrective Services**

# **Response to the Report on Escapes and Attempted Escapes from Corrections in Western Australia**

## **Department of Corrective Services**

**January 2015**

The Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services (OICS) has conducted an inspection on Escapes and Attempted Escapes from Corrections in Western Australia. The report covers the period January 2008 to August 2014. OICS have prepared a draft report and requested that DCS provide a response by 28 January 2015. This document contains DCS' response to specific recommendations contained in the report. At the request of OICs, advice on future actions is also included.

## Key Findings

During the period of January 2008 and August 2014 there were 70 escapes and 38 attempted escapes. OICS found that DCS has generally been very successful in managing escape risks, with the number of escapes being low in comparison to the number of opportunities.

However, OICS were concerned at the increased number of escapes in 2013 and 2014. While they praised DCS for learning from each escape, they indicated that there is room to improve in some areas specifically improving the escape alert system and monitoring the impact of changes to policies and procedures.

The Report contains six recommendations for DCS. These are:

- 1. The Department and its contractors enhance the focus on dynamic security.*
- 2. The Department implement initiatives to support the objectives of the Western Australian Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Services Plan 2015-2025, including improved mental health services and dedicated, appropriately staffed mental health units in prisons.*
- 3. The Department ensure unnecessary escape alerts are removed and a risk level is identified for every remaining alert.*
- 4. The Department ensure new policies or policy changes are undertaken sparingly and are always accompanied by an impact assessment within six months of implementation.*
- 5. The Department ensure that prisons and detention centres comply with emergency management requirements, as specified by the Emergency Management Framework.*
- 6. The Department ensure every escape and attempted escape is reviewed and documented allowing proactive analysis of systemic issues to be undertaken.*

Similar safety and security themes are included in previous reports. A list of relevant recommendations can be found at Attachment A.

The Department has identified opportunities to learn from these themes and will be integrating key messages into future programs of work.

## Responses to Recommendations

### **1. *The Department and its contractors enhance the focus on dynamic security.***

#### **Response:**

OICS has identified that addressing offenders' concerns about external issues has the potential to reduce the number of escapes and attempted escapes. In order to provide this intervention, effective interaction between prisoners and prison officers is required.

The Department is in the business of managing risk to ensure the safety of communities and will be increasing its focus on the safety and security of staff and offenders. A focus on the security of detainees and prisoners is a key feature of the Department's new vision, mission and values.

A new Security and Safety Framework will be prepared. The Department will ensure that the formulation of this framework includes a focus on understanding why prisoners choose to escape and the benefits of dynamic security.

#### **Level of Acceptance:**

Supported in Part

#### **Action required:**

- Ensure the Department's proposed strategy for increased security and safety of staff and prisoners includes an adequate focus on dynamic security.

**2. *The Department implement initiatives to support the objectives of the Western Australian Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Services Plan 2015-2025, including improved mental health services and dedicated, appropriately staffed mental health units in prisons.***

**Response:**

The Department is a joint sponsor of the Western Australian Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Services Plan 2015-2025 and is committed to the implementation of the objectives in that Plan.

The Department is committed to improving mental health services for prisoners. Addressing mental health improves the safety and wellbeing of offenders, increases the chances of rehabilitation, and ultimately leads to more successful rates of community re-integration and reduces the risk of recidivism.

The Department has initiated a new work program to identify ways of giving effect to deliverables in the draft Mental Health Plan. This work includes costing the provision of in-prison mental health services across the three estates and working with the MHC to assess demand and to identify the types of services required.

**Level of Acceptance:**

Supported in Part

**Action required:**

- The Department is a joint sponsor of the Western Australian Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Services Plan 2015-2025 and is committed to the implementation of its objectives. Specific initiatives for the three estates are in the process of being identified and costed.

**3. *The Department ensure unnecessary escape alerts are removed and a risk level is identified for every remaining alert.***

**Response:**

The OICS has identified that it is not uncommon for escape alerts to remain on the offender's file indefinitely. The risk is that officers may be expected to monitor an unmanageable number of offenders with alerts or manage offenders who no longer pose a significant risk of escape.

Escape alerts are entered onto the offender's profile. The Department presently reviews its current alerts system with the aim of cleaning up old alerts. Known as Operation Clearance, this is an ongoing program to review and validate all alerts. The review process enables staff to record the alerts as inactive if they are deemed unnecessary.

A Security and Safety Framework will be prepared as part of a renewed focus on the security of prisoners. The Department will also update and consolidate existing policy directives and rules to provide a clear and unambiguous set of guiding principles for the safety and security of staff and offenders.

**Level of Acceptance:**

Supported in Part

**Action required:**

- Include consideration of identified opportunities to improve the current alerts system in the new Security and Safety Framework.

**4. The Department ensure new policies or policy changes are undertaken sparingly and are always accompanied by an impact assessment within six months of implementation.**

**Response:**

The OICS has observed that the Department undertakes frequent policy changes in response to operational incidents such as escapes. The intent of these changes is to address known risks although regular policy changes can have unintended consequences such as lack of staff familiarity and inconsistencies with implementation.

The intent is to assess the impact of these policies before they are implemented and to build in regular reviews to ensure that they remain relevant.

As part of the change program, the Department will be initiating a project to review its Handbook, and to consolidate its policy directives and adult justice custodial rules to ensure operational excellence in all custodial processes and procedures.

**Level of Acceptance:**

Supported in Part

**Action required:**

- Ensure that a regular process of review and evaluation is built into the development of a consolidated set of policies, processes and procedures.
- Ensure that changes to policies, processes and procedures are adequately promoted to staff that will use and be guided by them.

**5. *The Department ensure that prisons and detention centres comply with emergency management requirements, as specified by the Emergency Management Framework.***

**Response:**

The OICS has identified that four facilities did not conduct any escape-related emergency drills during 2012 or 2013. They state that staff could benefit from additional training related to managing an escape.

Adult Custodial Policy Directive 72 and Youth Custodial Rule 208 stipulate that Superintendents are required to comply with the Emergency Management Framework.

The Department is developing a safety and security framework. As part of this exercise an assurance framework will be developed to ensure that the Department is complying with its relevant policies and procedures, including emergency management policies.

This process will allow the Department to evaluate what policies are essential to achieving its vision and mission and determine whether these policies should be adjusted.

**Level of Acceptance:**

Supported in Part

**Action required:**

- As part of the new safety and security framework ensure that adequate mechanisms are included to ensure compliance with new or amended emergency management requirements.

**6. *The Department ensure every escape and attempted escape is reviewed and documented allowing proactive analysis of systemic issues to be undertaken.***

**Response:**

The OICS has identified that there is no documented, formalised process for reviewing each escape or escape attempt. As a result OICs believes that the Department is missing an opportunity to identify any systemic issues that may increase the risk of escape.

The Department evaluates and investigates all escapes and attempted escapes. This process is aimed at identifying both the individual circumstances of the escape and systemic issues that may have contributed. This process is intended to contribute to an environment of continuous improvement and help ensure that future escapes are less likely to occur.

The Department's new strategic plan has a focus on identifying and continuously managing risks, including escapes. Specifically, under the plan the Department will develop and implement a framework that enables it to manage risks, especially those that threaten the achievement of its vision, mission and key deliverables. This process involves identifying and managing systemic issues that contribute to escapes.

**Level of Acceptance:**

Supported in Part

**Action required:**

- Ensure that future risk management planning considers the lessons learnt from all escapes and attempted escapes, including the clear identification of any underlying systemic issues.