

MEDIA RELEASE – EMBARGOED UNTIL 12 NOON ON TUESDAY 11TH AUGUST 2015

Report No. 98 – Bunbury Regional Prison

Bunbury Regional Prison has faced some major challenges over the past twelve years. It has moved from being a small prison with 120 prisoners that faced a real threat of closure to a 300 prisoner facility that is performing well, plays a critical role in the total prison system, and should have a vibrant future, according to the Inspector of Custodial Services Neil Morgan.

But in releasing the most recent inspection report of the prison Mr Morgan said that Bunbury faces a major challenge in that while it is operated and funded as a single prison, it is in reality two distinct facilities, with clearly separate independent roles.

‘Management and staff at Bunbury face real challenges in balancing the priorities of the two facilities. The Pre-Release Unit (‘PRU’) is a new facility for low risk offenders. It stands quite separately from the main prison and has a reintegration focus, with a number of prisoners undertaking external work activities. The old prison has a very different role. It houses higher risk prisoners and must meet very different security and management requirements.

It can be difficult for staff to adjust to working between both places, as different skills are required. Indeed, some Bunbury staff saw the PRU as a problem more than an asset. Other prisons with a re-entry focus, some of which are roughly the same size as the PRU, have dedicated management, budgets, staff and performance expectations.

While both the PRU and the main prison have been performing reasonably well to date, the PRU would benefit from having a more stand-alone approach to operations. Without this, it is unlikely to achieve its full potential to reduce re-offending, especially in a climate of reduced prison budgets.’

The older prison generally holds around 230 prisoners. It is predominantly a medium security prison but also has a number of maximum security cells, mainly to accommodate short term remand prisoners. It has a focus on delivering therapeutic programs to high-risk, high-need prisoners within a secure environment. Some parts of the prison are in good shape, but others fail to meet Australian and international standards, are not fit for purpose, and amount to inhumane conditions.

The PRU is a self-contained 72 bed facility, surrounded by its own fence, and houses minimum security prisoners who meet strict selection criteria. The prisoners live in shared houses and must demonstrate personal responsibility and collaboration, catering for themselves, looking after their houses, and undertaking education or employment. The PRU has its own entrance, reception, visits area, health centre, education centre and gym. Trustworthy prisoners who satisfy additional risk assessments are able to work outside the PRU itself. Some work in the large market gardens, some undertake supervised community work, and a handful undertake job-seeking activities or employment. Within the PRU, a dedicated re-entry manager and team cooperated well with the re-entry services provider to support prisoners’ education and training, employment, life skills and transitional needs.

The inspection found that overall, Bunbury is a well-performing prison and a good deal had improved at Bunbury since 2011. The prison generally had very good staff-prisoner relations, most services were good, and industries were highly productive, with some areas excelling in the provision of employment-relevant training.

However, the report also identifies a number of areas for improvement. One of these is staff morale / culture. Mr Morgan said:

‘Staff should be positive about the prison and take pride in what they have achieved. But unfortunately, they were overly-negative and conflicted. Many staff blamed management, but addressing these issues is a shared responsibility: it is one for staff themselves as well as for local and head office management.’

Other issues that the report identified as needing to be addressed included:

- Inadequate strategies to reduce prisoners’ access to and use of illicit substances;
- Lack of resocialisation opportunities for some long sentence prisoners;
- An understaffed management team; and
- Further work to address Aboriginal prisoners’ rehabilitation and re-entry needs.

Neil Morgan
Inspector

11 August 2015

For more detail, see the Inspector's Overview to the Report and Key Findings (copies attached)

For Further Media Information

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

About Bunbury Regional Prison

Bunbury Regional Prison, opened in February 1971, is located 11 kilometres south of Bunbury, and 183 kilometres south of Perth. Bunbury is a multifunctional prison holding medium- and minimum-security male prisoners and remandees, as well as some maximum rated remandees on a short-term basis. The prison is a key producer with the market garden supplying over 40 per cent of Western Australian prison needs.

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. The Office commenced operations in June 2000 and reports directly to Parliament.