



OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR OF CUSTODIAL SERVICES

MEDIA RELEASE

Report Name: ***Western Australia's rapidly increasing remand population***

The rapidly increasing remand population in Western Australia's prisons is the subject of a new report released today by the Inspector of Custodial Services.

Inspector Neil Morgan said:

'A quarter of WA's prisoners have not yet been sentenced, and the vast majority have not even been convicted. These 1450 people are in prison because they are awaiting the outcome of court cases. Given that the presumption of innocence underpins our legal system, everyone should be concerned that this figure is so high.

It is also very hard to understand why the number of people held on remand has more than doubled in the past six years, when the sentenced prisoner population has grown by only 13 per cent. We found that the number of people appearing before the courts has increased, and that the average number of charges they face has also increased. However, this does not explain why remand numbers have blown out so dramatically compared with sentenced prisoner numbers.'

The report found some disconcerting gender differences. In mid-2009, roughly equal proportions of men and women were on remand. The situation has changed, with close to 30 per cent of women in prison now on remand, compared with 25 per cent of men.

Mr Morgan expressed concern at the number of people being held in prison for short periods of time or waiting to meet bail conditions.

'Imprisonment is meant to be the last resort even for people who have been convicted, and that principle has even greater pertinence if the person is unconvicted. Two of our findings were of particular concern. First, around ten per cent of remandees (150 people each day) have in fact been granted bail, but are being held in prison because they have not met the conditions set by the court.

Secondly, a quarter of all stays on remand are for less than a week, and over half are for less than a month. Sometimes this is because the matter is finalised and the person is sentenced. However, in other cases, the person makes a later, successful, application for bail. This raises the awkward question of whether they needed to be remanded in custody in the first place.'

The Inspector also examined the cost of housing people on remand, especially on a short term basis. He said:

In short, we know that imprisonment is very expensive; we know that many of the stays on remand are short; and we know that imprisoning a person for a short period is far more expensive per day than holding them for a longer period. However, the Department of Corrective Services has not been able to provide Parliament, the Auditor General, the Economic Regulation Authority, or us with a robust estimate of system-wide costs or of individual prison costs.

The absence of robust data on such issues is concerning in itself. It is all the more so at a time when comparisons are being drawn between the relative costs of different prisons, and the focus is on 'costing models', 'comparators' and 'contestability'. The absence of robust data on such issues impacts negatively on political debate, public understanding, and the capacity for evidence-based decision making.

The report was designed as a brief examination of recent trends and was based only on Department of Corrective Services' data. Mr Morgan urged that immediate research be undertaken across all government agencies to understand the underlying factors leading to the increase in the remand population:

As the Auditor General also found in his June report on *Management of Adults on Bail*, the social and economic costs of imprisoning people on remand, especially for short periods, are both very high. Based on the Department's estimate of the average cost for remand prisoners, if we can reduce the remand population by just ten per cent, the state could save upwards of \$30 million in annual operating costs. This would also reduce the pressure for additional capital expenditure on prisons. But in order to consider potential responses, we need a better understanding of the causes of the blow out in remand numbers.

The report is available on the Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services website at (<http://www.custodialinspector.wa.gov.au/go/reviews>).