**Aboriginal staff in WA custodial corrections**

**Background**

Within the custodial environment in Western Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people constitute approximately 39 per cent of the adult custodial population.[[1]](#footnote-1) This is an extreme overrepresentation given Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up approximately 3.1 per cent of the total WA population.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The Department of Corrective Services (‘the Department’) recognises the significant over-representation of Aboriginal people in the justice system and accepts that Aboriginal issues are a core component of its business. It has documented its commitment to implementing innovative strategies to increase Aboriginal representation within its workforce as a means of improving Aboriginal offender management and rehabilitation services. It recognises the importance of successfully implementing employment policies and practice which can contribute to improving outcomes for Aboriginal people through long term, sustainable employment opportunities and career pathways. [[3]](#footnote-3)

The Department has an Aboriginal Workforce Development Unit (within Workforce Planning and Strategy) which is dedicated to the attraction, employment and retention of Aboriginal people. As such the Department set a 7.25 per cent Aboriginal employee target which equates to approximately 330-340 staff across the state.

As at 1 July 2013, 4.8 per cent of departmental staff were Aboriginal, up from 4.4 per cent in 1 April.[[4]](#footnote-4) There are 120 positions reserved specifically for people of Aboriginal descent (50d positions), 81 of which are either permanently or temporarily filled while the others positions remain vacant.[[5]](#footnote-5) The Department previously had an Aboriginal Justice Directorate, headed by an Assistant Commissioner Aboriginal Justice. This position was abolished in the 2009/2010 financial year.

**Purpose of the review**

This review will seek to determine whether the Department is meeting its commitment to increase Aboriginal employment. It will also review the effectiveness of its strategies in attracting, employing and retaining Aboriginal people.

**Terms of Reference**

1. Has the Department maintained an appropriate level of Aboriginal employment in the custodial area in the past five years?
2. Has the Department adequately addressed barriers to attracting, recruiting, retaining and promoting Aboriginal employment over the past five years?
3. Is the vacancy rate of 50d positions comparable to other vacancy rates in the Department, and vacancy rates of 50d positions in other state departments?

**Methodology**

* Review staff diversity patterns from 2009-2013
* Review of policy documents, workforce plans and strategies
* Compare corrective services departments’ employment strategies in Australian and New Zealand jurisdictions
* Undertake interviews and conduct a survey of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff
* Undertake interviews of staff responsible for recruitment, and those setting and implementing strategic priorities

## Limitations

This review will only include staff employed in the custodial environment, excluding those responsible for community corrections as the latter is not the focus of the Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services.

**Timeline**

The review is expected to begin in February 2014 and will be provided to the Standing Committee on Public Administration or tabled in Parliament in October 2014.

* 13/02/2014 Review initiated, DCS notified
* 01/09/2014 Draft to DCS
* 29/09/2014 Response by DCS
* 06/10/2014 Report tabled or provided to Standing Committee on Public Administration
1. Department of Corrective Services (DCS), *Annual Report 2011-2012* (September), 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. ABS, 2011 Census Counts – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/2075.0main+features32011 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Department of Corrective Services (DCS), *Workforce Strategic Framework 2012-2014.* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The total number of departmental employees reduced by three between April and July 2013 however the number of Aboriginal staff increased by 21. This may be explained by the improved EEO Diversity Survey response rate between these dates from 58.9% to 60.3%. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Advice provided by Department of Corrective Services, Aboriginal Workforce Development Unit. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)