

MEDIA RELEASE – EMBARGOED UNTIL 12NOON ON MONDAY 19TH DECEMBER 2016

Review - Western Australia's Prison Capacity

A report by the Inspector of Custodial Services has found that WA's prisons are operating well above their intended capacity, and that too many prisoners are held in cells that fall short of national and international standards. It also concludes that crowding has compromised prisoners' privacy and poses risks to their safety and rehabilitation.

In releasing his report, the Inspector Neil Morgan said:

"Prisoner numbers have increased rapidly since 2009. In order to accommodate the growing numbers, cells that were designed for one person have increasingly been 'double-bunked'. Staff, management, and prisoners deserve the public's thanks for the way they have coped with the pressures, but there is no escaping the fact that our prison system is crowded. The only question is by how much."

The report concludes, in line with the Productivity Commission, the Economic Regulation Authority, and the NSW Inspector of Custodial Services, that the best measure of crowding is to compare the number of prisoners being held at a facility with its 'design capacity'. Design capacity is based on the number of prisoners a prison was originally designed to hold plus any additional accommodation added later. Mr Morgan said:

"Using this nationally accepted benchmark, the WA prison system was at 148 per cent of capacity on 30 June this year. However, in 2010, as prison crowding became worse, the Department changed the way it counted capacity. Its methodology, which includes double bunks in single cells, puts the prison system at only 97 per cent of capacity on 30 June.

Even on Departmental numbers, the prison system is well above the 5-15 per cent buffer needed for the efficient and effective management of prisoners. Also, many of the apparently 'spare' beds are in the wrong place, or at the wrong security classification.

I am also concerned that the way the Department is now reporting to the Productivity Commission breaches the Commission's guidelines and obscures both the extent of crowding and the need for new prison infrastructure."

The report also examined cell sizes and occupancy across the system. Mr Morgan said:

"Too many prisoners are being held in cells that do not comply with Australasian standards. Some are even held in cells that fall short of International Committee of the Red Cross standards for developing countries.

Operating small cells above intended capacity is compromising prisoners' rights to privacy and decent treatment. It is also generating risks to safety and rehabilitation."

In concluding, the Inspector said that:

“As the Commissioner for Corrective Services said in 2015, a large new metropolitan prison is required soon. Although the most obvious need is for a large metropolitan remand prison for men, the new prison needs to be designed with flexibility to cater for different groups. It is also important to examine ways to reduce the prison population.”

Neil Morgan
Inspector

About the Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services (www.oics.wa.gov.au)

The Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services is an independent statutory body with a strong focus on performance standards in custodial facilities and the rights of prisoners and staff. We report directly to Parliament, ensuring a high level of transparency and accountability.

Our responsibilities include:

- inspecting adult custodial facilities, juvenile detention centres, court custody centres and
- custodial transport services
- reviewing specific aspects of custodial services and the experience of individuals or groups
- carrying out thematic reviews
- managing the Independent Visitor Service

Addendum

The Department of Corrective Services did not provide a response to our report until after the report had been printed. A copy of their response is available on our website. The response did not disagree with, or provide any evidence to contradict, our key findings.

For more detail, please see the Inspector’s Overview and Key Findings (copies attached).

For Further Media Information

The Inspector, Mr Neil Morgan, will be available for comment from 12 noon on Monday 19th December 2016 and can be contacted on 0427 426 471.

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