

# Inspector's Overview

## GREENOUGH REGIONAL PRISON: STRESSED BY EXTERNAL FACTORS

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This is the fifth time we have reported to Parliament on Greenough Regional Prison ('Greenough'). The inspection took place in late May/early June 2016, in a difficult financial environment. Over 2015–2016, the Department of Corrective Services ('the Department') had to manage an 8.3 per cent increase in prisoner numbers, but a fall in income from \$905 million to \$889 million (DCS, 2016a).

In 2013 we said that the prison: 'generally goes about its business in an efficient way, free of major controversies and major incidents.' However, we expressed concern about the future: 'it is in the midst of some very significant changes.... These pose some very real challenges and some potential risks' (OICS, 2013, iii). While many positive qualities remained our concerns proved well-founded:

- although the prison had made positive progress in some areas, such as women's services, there were significant problems and service shortfalls. Some related to the Department's efforts to manage the competing priorities of growing prison numbers and declining budget. Others were local matters that the prison needed to address
- there were a number of serious incidents at the prison in the second half of 2015 but I am pleased to report that security had generally improved by the time of the inspection.

### OUR KEY FINDINGS

We found that:

- cost cutting measures had impacted on operations and services, with critical services like health, prisoner employment, education, and rehabilitation programs not meeting demand
- staff/management relations were poor
- staff/prisoner relations had deteriorated, creating safety and security risks
- staff training rates were very good
- new roofs and a new external fence had improved the basic prison infrastructure
- too many prison facilities (including visits and men's education and health) were too small.

A quarter of Greenough's prisoners are women. We found that:

- they had good access to support, education, and personal development
- they had too little access to employment, recreation, and out of prison activities
- women and men had too few opportunities for positive social contact and were therefore communicating in illicit and negative ways.

### THE PRISON HAD BEEN ALLOCATED TOO LITTLE MONEY TO PAY ITS STAFF

In 2014–15 Greenough over-spent its budget by around \$200,000. This was not due to extravagance but to inadequate funding. The prison was not given enough money in the first place to pay all its staff: it had 100 approved positions for prison officers but only enough money for 89.

During this inspection we were told that the prison's overspend in 2015–16 was expected to be even larger because its budget had been cut by a further eight per cent, in line with the Department's overall cut.

To live within budget, local management had introduced severe restrictions on overtime and a redeployment policy to cover positions not filled on the roster. These cost-cutting measures had impacted on service delivery and operations. They had also affected staff morale and staff/management relations.

#### **STAFF/MANAGEMENT RELATIONS WERE POOR**

While other prisons had experienced similar pressures, staff morale at Greenough was low. They felt unsupported, unappreciated, and unable to meet expectations. While most were still trying to do their best, others were disengaging. Some even wanted management to fail.

The causes of this had been cumulative and included: spikes in prisoner numbers, recruitment freezes, reduced budgets, staff shortages, having to lock down prisoners due to staff numbers, and ineffective communication between staff and management.

We present our interim findings at the end of every inspection. On this occasion this led to immediate steps to improve management/staff relations, with Head Office providing support to the prison. It is important for this to continue, and for management and staff to work together in the challenging fiscal environment that lies ahead.

#### **STAFF/PRISONER RELATIONS HAD DECLINED**

Inevitably, the pressures on services and staff were affecting prisoners. Staff/prisoner interaction had deteriorated and many prisoners felt staff did not treat them with respect. When prisoners have this perception, it is more difficult to achieve security, safety, and rehabilitation.

I hope that the focus on improving management/staff relations will have a positive flow-on effect to staff/prisoner relations.

#### **CRITICAL SERVICES WERE NOT MEETING DEMAND**

In many key areas, services were not meeting demand.

##### **Programs**

The Department and the Prisoners Review Board regard treatment programs as an important element in rehabilitating offenders and enhancing public safety. Offenders who have successfully completed programs are more likely to be granted parole than those who have not. Program providers at Greenough were doing their best but the system was in disarray. Issues included:

- a large backlog in Departmental assessments of prisoners' treatment needs
- some prisoners reaching their parole date without even having been assessed
- some being assessed as needing non-existent programs
- many prisoners unable to access programs before their parole date.

### Health

Health services were under serious infrastructure and resourcing pressures. An example was the fact that nurses were working long hours under significant pressure. They did not have time to keep up with important work like chronic illness care planning, providing health education, or even doing PAP smear or mammogram screening for women. This was not only a risk to prisoners' health, but a risk to the nurses, who seemed close to burn out.

### Employment

Some prisoners had good opportunities to engage in meaningful work in the various industries at Greenough. However, there were not enough worthwhile jobs for the prisoner population. Again this creates risks.

### Education

Recent research found that the more classes the inmate successfully completes, the less likely they are to reoffend (Giles, 2016). Investing in education can therefore have real pay-offs. The education team was providing a good service within their limited resources but there were serious limitations.

## WOMEN HAVE BETTER SERVICES BUT FACE INEQUALITIES AND AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

We have given particular attention to the women at Greenough because we have had long-standing concerns about women's imprisonment in general and issues specific to the prison.

In 2012, in belated response to intolerable overcrowding at Bandyup Women's Prison, the Department increased Greenough's female population from 25 to 69. It did this by converting one of the previous male units to a female unit. Another 11 bunk beds were added in 2016.

The Greenough women's unit is, in effect, a 'prison within a prison'. It has almost the same capacity as some of the state's smaller prisons (Boronia, Pardelup and Wandoo), but has never been resourced as such. Nor did the prison receive any significant additional funding to take on the role.

### Pluses and minuses

There were some fundamental problems with the decision to use Greenough to house Bandyup's overflow, not least that it required women from the metropolitan area to be transferred 400km from home, often against their will. But it also had some positive elements (OICS, 2014):

- the old women's unit had been small, restrictive, claustrophobic and stressed
- higher prisoner numbers allowed better education, programs and support
- the environment was far calmer than Bandyup.

This inspection found that women still had good support, education and personal development opportunities. The full-time Women's Support Officer was doing an outstanding job, and education staff were engaging very well with the women.

Despite these efforts, the women had very limited options in relation to employment, section 95 opportunities, and recreation. In these areas, they were worse off than their male counterparts. The Department must not lose sight of its obligation to achieve substantive equality for women at all the regional mixed gender prisons.

Our health expert also found that for many women transferred from the metropolitan area, and isolated from close family and friends in Perth, the transfers were a source of preventable, acute psychological distress.

Greenough had failed to address our 2014 recommendation that subject to individual risk assessments and appropriate supervision, male and female prisoners at Greenough Regional Prison should be allowed regular, voluntary, meaningful and respectful interaction with each other (OICS, 2014). This happens at other prisons but Greenough has never been on board and the Department has not required any change. As a result, the men and women were communicating in inappropriate and undignified ways, including shouting, screaming and swearing. The prison can do much better and the Department should require this.

#### The future: don't lose what's been achieved

Later this year, the Melaleuca Remand and Reintegration Facility ('Melaleuca') will open at the Hakea Prison site in Perth. This will increase by 256 the number of beds for women in the metropolitan area, and allow women to return to Perth.

However, the decision to convert the Hakea units for women has caused immense pressure at the major male prisons, especially Hakea and Casuarina. It is therefore inevitable that the Department will consider whether the Greenough women's unit should revert to male use.

I can only say that if that does happen, the Department must find a way to maintain the progress made at Greenough for women from the region. It must not allow them to become once more a marginalised, disadvantaged group housed in impoverished and claustrophobic conditions.

#### THE DEPARTMENT NEEDS TO DEVELOP A PLAN FOR GREENOUGH WITH A STRONG ABORIGINAL FOCUS

It is time for a medium and long-term plan for justice services in the mid-west region, including Greenough. The prison still houses a significant number of prisoners from the region, but has also become, increasingly, an overflow prison for male as well as female prisoners from the metropolitan region and its focus has been diluted as a result.

The Department needs to give Greenough a more defined role in the system. This will allow it to focus on the future, move on from the recent angst and pressures, and provide improved services. Better engagement with Aboriginal service providers and communities are an essential element of this, in line with the Department's Reconciliation Action Plan ('RAP').

The Department has recently introduced capability and development agreements for all public prisons. These set out performance targets and indicators for Superintendents, and are a welcome first step in driving accountability, performance, innovation and better outcomes. At present, however, they are identical for all prisons, and do not recognise the differences between facilities. Over time, the Department intends to modify them to reflect each prison's role and focus.

We hope to see a Greenough-specific capability and development agreement in place by the end of 2017, and some tangible positive outcomes when we next inspect the prison in 2019.

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Inspector  
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