

# Inspector's Overview

EASTERN GOLDFIELDS REGIONAL PRISON AND WARBURTON WORK CAMP:  
EXCELLENT INFRASTRUCTURE, HUGE POTENTIAL, AND POSITIVE PROGRESS

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## FROM CHALK TO CHEESE - THE OLD AND THE NEW

The new Eastern Goldfields Regional Prison (EGRP) opened in August 2016. This is the report of our first 'baseline' inspection of the prison, conducted in January 2017.

The old prison was a very curious mix. It was cramped, decrepit and unfit for purpose, but people from the Goldfields and Ngaanyatjarra Lands much preferred to be there, closer to 'country', than in modern, physically better prisons in Perth. Despite the physical conditions, the old prison had also managed to build a positive staff/prisoner culture, especially over the previous five years.

The new EGRP is a world-class, state of the art facility. Intelligently designed, it strikes an excellent balance between security and a positive rehabilitative environment. Different parts of the prison serve different purposes, including male and female zones, and minimum- and higher-security areas. All of them are well-designed to meet their purpose, and form part of an integrated whole. There is excellent infrastructure in all key areas, including workshops, health services, education, recreation, gatehouse, visits, and administration. Line of sight vision and movement control are very good, and prisoners have a sense of space and decency. The prison also enjoys high quality modern security technology.

In short, EGRP is an outstanding asset. It has enormous potential to reduce recidivism as well as improving safe and decent custody.

## WHAT WE FOUND IN JANUARY 2017

We found that the transition to the new site had been hurried but safely managed. The positive culture had also been maintained, though pockets of sexism needed to be addressed. There were a large number of new staff, many of whom had little operational experience. However, they were working positively and professionally under the guidance of more senior staff. The staff group as a whole is a big asset for the prison. The management team also has a good mix of skills, experience, and values.

Prisoners from the area were very pleased to be 'home' and generally complimentary of staff. But they were frustrated that the prison had not yet operated to its full potential. To some extent this was understandable as the prison had only been operating for five months, and processes were still bedding in. But it was very disappointing.

The regime was particularly restrictive at the time of the inspection because of a short-lived escape ten days earlier. Despite calling it only an 'attempted' escape, the Department directed that EGRP be locked down, with minimal movements or activities. It is necessary to lock a prison down in the immediate aftermath of an escape. However, the prison had quickly identified the weaknesses that had allowed the escape, and had closed them off. There was no good reason for the lockdown to have continued so long.

The issues and opportunities for improvement included:

- too few employment and training opportunities for prisoners, despite excellent infrastructure
- lack of rehabilitative programs, especially for prisoners from the region

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- women had good accommodation but very little to do
- despite the efforts of staff, EGRP was not delivering adequate primary healthcare
- few recreational opportunities
- no opportunities for supervised mixing of male and female prisoners
- opportunities for greater engagement from local Aboriginal organisations.

In recent years, education has been a strong point at EGRP. That had carried over from the old prison but the combined effect of the Christmas shutdown and the escape meant that nothing was happening when we were there.

#### PROGRESS SINCE JANUARY

We must report to Parliament on each of the state's prisons at least once every three years. On top of that, we actively monitor all facilities through regular visits. I am pleased to report that there has been significant progress at EGRP since January.

Areas of improvement include:

- education is functioning very well
- there are more employment and training opportunities (but still too few)
- local Aboriginal organisations and support services are more visible and engaged
- there was an excellent NAIDOC week
- there are now opportunities for appropriately supervised mixed-gender education classes, recreation, and church services
- an excellent arts program for prisoners with disabilities has started
- some programs are now scheduled for 2017.

It is a credit to management and staff that there has been such tangible progress in the last six months. Obviously it is now important to build on that momentum.

#### WARBURTON WORK CAMP

This report also discusses the Warburton Work Camp which is managed from EGRP. Warburton opened with some fanfare in 2011. Again, it is excellent infrastructure. It has a capacity of 24 but has rarely held more than eight prisoners. It is not alone, as other work camps have also been under-used (OICS 2012, 2015a).

In November 2015, Warburton was mothballed. A good deal of money was then spent undertaking reviews, and flying people from Perth to the region. But this only led as far as options papers. In the first few months of 2017, there was still no clarity of intent, let alone action. The results were a wasted valuable asset and community frustration.

Again, I am pleased to report positive progress. The new government has said that there is no money for a new prison, and that existing assets must be used. This has helped to re-ignite the work camps, including Warburton. There have been around ten men at Warburton since late June. Numbers have also gone up at other work camps. This is most welcome. As with the prison itself, the challenge is to build on that momentum.



#### A PUBLIC PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP

The new EGRP is a Public Private Partnership project based on a Design, Build, Finance and Maintain ('DBFM') model. Under government oversight, a private sector consortium was responsible for designing and constructing the prison, and for financing the project. Maintenance and facility management are the responsibility of Honeywell Inc. for 25 years. Although the DBFM model was new for prisons in WA, it has been used for prisons interstate and overseas. It has also been used for other major projects, such as the new Perth Stadium.

Under the DBFM model, the Department of Justice (formerly the Department of Corrective Services) is responsible for managing prisoners, and for staffing and operating the prison. EGRP is therefore very different from prisons such as Acacia and Wandoo, where the private sector has been contracted to operate the facility.

Viewed in terms of the physical facility, the result of this DBFM arrangement is certainly impressive. And while there were some delays to the project, these involved unforeseen complications such as contamination.

It is too early to form a conclusion about the maintenance aspect of the DBFM arrangement. However, the early signs are very promising. Budget constraints mean that in most publicly operated prisons maintenance and repair becomes ad hoc and reactive, not preventive and proactive. These prisons can also find it difficult to get equipment replaced or upgraded.

The contract with Honeywell guarantees whole-of-life replacement of infrastructure and equipment that was part of the initial build, and regular software upgrades. In short, in 25 years' time, the prison must be 'handed back' by Honeywell in the same condition as it was at the time of completion.

#### LOOKING BACK AND LOOKING AHEAD

Fifteen years ago, the Goldfields and the Lands were severely neglected in terms of their custodial needs. Far too many men and women from the area were being held in metropolitan prisons. They were dislocated, dispirited, and disengaged. All they wanted was to 'go home', even if it was to a dingy, decrepit prison. It was obvious that something needed to be done.

The urgency increased after the heat-related death of Mr Ward in 2008. Mr Ward was from Warburton and had been moved in inhumane and degrading conditions in a prisoner transport vehicle. In 2009, the Coroner described his death as both 'terrible' and 'wholly avoidable'.

We now have the infrastructure, and it is excellent. EGRP has got off to a promising start and Warburton has reopened. Custodial services in the Goldfields and the Lands have never been in a better position.

The challenge for everyone associated with corrections is now to maintain the momentum and to build innovatively on what has already been achieved. The key to long-term success will be engagement with local communities and service providers and the delivery of programs that meet the specific needs of the local prisoners.

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