

MEDIA RELEASE – EMBARGOED UNTIL 12 NOON ON THURSDAY 12TH APRIL 2018

Report No. 115 – Bunbury Regional Prison

The most recent inspection of Bunbury Regional Prison showed it continued to perform well, but an impending infrastructure and population expansion would need to be carefully managed.

Acting Inspector of Custodial Services, Andrew Harvey, said that, in the past, the prison had shown the ability to respond to pressures and to manage change, usually with a minimum of fuss. Mr Harvey said that while this placed Bunbury in a position to manage the expansion, there were pressure points that would need to be carefully managed.

In December 2017, the Government announced that Bunbury was to have a new, double-bunked accommodation unit built inside the main prison, and was to re-open an unused minimum-security section situated just outside the main prison. In total, Bunbury will hold another 160 prisoners.

‘Bunbury has already faced population expansion in both its medium security main prison and minimum-security reintegration unit, without the benefit of appropriately increased resources. So, this pressure will only increase,’ Mr Harvey said.

‘The main prison is already operating at 50 per cent above its design capacity. Most prisoners are sharing cells, some of which do not even meet Red Cross standards for single cells in developing countries. The reintegration unit is 70 per cent above design capacity and is struggling to meet its goal of helping prisoners back into the community.’

Mr Harvey said the prison has astutely managed its resources, and some areas such as education have improved. But most services are under pressure, and backlogs or delays are too common. Health Services have not kept pace with increased numbers and increased demand.

The Government has said that the Bunbury expansion project will include any necessary upgrades to kitchens, laundries, and video-links. But Mr Harvey emphasised that it is important that areas such as security, education, health, recreation and employment also receive adequate investment.

‘And it is essential that the Department engage, listen and respond to the prison itself in identifying the needs of its prisoners, staff and the community to ensure the prison can continue to deliver a good quality of service,’ he said.

Reflecting on past opportunities lost, Mr Harvey said it was essential that the Department of Justice use the expansions at Bunbury and Casuarina to better meet the needs of specific cohorts of offenders:

‘Expansion projects in recent years have been all about beds and not about need and purpose. The Department needs to better target its resources at specific needs, including mental health, substance abuse, and older or infirm prisoners. Better targeted services will improve services and reduce the risk of recidivism. Bunbury is ideally placed to meet some of these needs.’

Finally, Mr Harvey hoped that the expansion of the prison system would not overshadow the need for hard work to be done on finding appropriate ways to limit prisoner population growth.

'It is not socially desirable or economically sustainable for prisoner numbers to continue to grow so fast. The state needs to improve its evidence base on what is driving numbers, and to develop new strategies.'

Andrew Harvey
Acting Inspector

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

For Further Media Information:

The Acting Inspector, Mr Andrew Harvey, will be available for comment from 12noon on Thursday 12th April 2018 and can be contacted on 0477 307 559.

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