

Inspector's Overview

OVERALL ALBANY IS DOING WELL BUT HAVING DOUBLED ITS POPULATION IS UNDER PRESSURE

INTRODUCTION

This is the report of our sixth announced inspection of Albany Regional Prison (Albany). The inspection, undertaken in February 2018, found that Albany had improved in several areas since the last inspection, and is generally doing well. However, its population had doubled since our last inspection in 2015, and was now at 200 per cent of design capacity. This had placed stress on Albany's infrastructure and support services which had not kept pace.

In addition, there had been a significant increase in the number of maximum-security prisoners since 2015. Although the proportion has remained roughly similar the actual number had increased from 34 to 69. This meant the prison was operating at a higher level of security than it had previously needed to.

There has also been a significant increase in both the number and proportion of remand prisoners. Remandees now made up 25.5 per cent of the population, up from 6.4 per cent in 2015. Remand prisoners were less likely to have work and were unable to access many educational, training opportunities, or programs to address offending behaviours. In addition, most remandees were displaced from their home regions, and were therefore unable to use their right to daily visits.

AN AGING INFRASTRUCTURE

Crowding, and age, was placing a significant stress on the physical infrastructure of the prison. Many of the buildings had not been scaled up to meet the increased number of prisoners they were expected to service.

The cells in Unit 1 A and B wings were too small to hold two prisoners in humane conditions and the entire Unit 1 (built in 1966 as the original prison) needed to be rebuilt.

Significant investment was also needed in most service areas including:

- Kitchen
- Laundry
- Reception
- Medical centres
- Industries

Recommendations 15 to 18 are directed at improving this situation. In their response, the Department acknowledged the age, capacity and condition of the Unit 1 precinct (which includes the kitchen, medical centre, education, programs, counselling, general purpose accommodation and the Management Unit). However, the Department has only supported the recommendations in principle, as any upgrade and extensions will be dependent on the Department's long term custodial infrastructure plan for the State gaining support from the Government.

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PRISONERS

We were also concerned at the situation of women at the prison. Women held at Albany are acutely isolated and often alone. Clearance from the prison only occurs weekly. Their room lacks windows or any direct access to an outdoor area. While not unpleasant we were concerned that women could be held alone for up to a week and recommended that women were transferred out of Albany in a timelier manner.

While stating that the situation 'was not ideal', the Department did not support this recommendation.

A further concern we identified was that protection prisoners felt unsafe in their own unit. They claimed bullying occurred, and fights occurred regularly out of sight from cameras. We recommended that Albany 'must determine how a safe and decent protection regime can be provided ...' We are concerned that the Department did not respond to this part of the recommendation, although we understand that Albany is now considering what it can do.

DRUGS

Albany's drug strategy, as in almost all prisons in WA, was focused on reducing supply of drugs, and lacked strategies to reduce demand. We acknowledge that Bunbury Regional Prison's drug reduction trial appears to have demonstrated that it is possible to reduce supply. However, at Bunbury we formed the view that 'prisoners were complying because of fear of the consequences, not because their capacity to fight addiction had increased.' (OICS 2018). This raises serious questions about the likelihood they will re-use on release.

Unfortunately, the Department failed to fully support our recommendation that Albany 'should refine its drug strategy to include new measures and resources to reduce drug demand and harm for users' (Recommendation 14).

CONCLUSION

Albany has successfully faced and overcome many of the challenges we had identified it faced in 2015. The prison needs to be commended for that, and the way in which it is presently going about its work. I am particularly pleased that Albany has already made a good start in addressing some of the concerns we identified during the inspection. However, some areas (such as infrastructure upgrades or replacement) are simply beyond it, or the Department, and need resourcing and support from the Government.

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18 June 2018