

MEDIA RELEASE – EMBARGOED UNTIL 12 NOON ON TUESDAY 14 AUGUST 2018

Report No. 118 – Albany Regional Prison

The number, mix and complexity of the prisoner population at Albany Regional Prison have changed remarkably in the past three years, and investment has not kept pace with demand. Despite the excellent efforts of management and staff, this brings significant risks and challenges.

These are the key findings from the most recent inspection of Albany by the Inspector of Custodial Services, Neil Morgan.

The report found that the prison was overcrowded, with almost all cells double-bunked. The population profile had also changed. Compared with three years ago, it held a lot more remand prisoners and maximum security prisoners. Over 40% of the prisoners were Aboriginal, including too many from the Pilbara and Kimberley, and over 20% were foreign nationals.

Mr Morgan said:

‘By and large, management, staff and prisoners make Albany work despite the pressures. The Acting Superintendent and his management team had a good connection with staff, strong values, and a positive vision for the prison. Custodial officers generally had a positive attitude, interacting well with prisoners when the grilles were open. And people working in areas such as education, the kitchen, and prisoner support services were doing remarkably well with what they had.

But commitment, good will and flexibility can only go so far. The prison is under stress as its infrastructure, staff resources and support services have not kept pace with numbers, let alone with changing demographics, needs and complexities. The prison has insufficient employment for prisoners, too few programs, and limited education.

Like other prisons, Albany has also been affected by overtime restrictions and increased lockdowns. When staff positions are unfilled, prisoners are progressively denied access to recreation and other activities. They are confined to their units, where they are locked behind grilles or in cells. Not surprisingly, frustration has increased.

Albany has responded well to the critical incidents that have occurred, but disengagement, crowding and frustration pose significant risks in any prison.’

The report calls for infrastructure investment. Mr Morgan said:

‘The prisoner accommodation in Unit 1 is dehumanising and unfit for purpose. So is the rest of the Unit 1 precinct, which includes the kitchen, medical centre, education, programs and the management unit for problematic prisoners. The adjacent reception area, the laundry and the industries and employment areas also need upgrading. And none of Albany’s cells meet national or international standards for doubled up accommodation.

The Department of Justice is well aware of these deficiencies and risks, but says that Treasury is unlikely to support any upgrade proposals until a long term state-wide custodial

plan is finalised. This is understandable given the high cost of prison builds, the State's financial situation, and the need for proper planning. But sometimes things just need to be done, and done now. The Unit 1 precinct is one of those things. Whatever the long term state-wide plan, Albany Prison will not be closing, and will always need the basic services that Unit 1 provides.'

Neil Morgan
Inspector

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

For Further Media Information:

The Inspector, Mr Neil Morgan, will be available for comment from 12noon on Tuesday 14 August 2018 and can be contacted on 0427 426 471.

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