

MEDIA RELEASE

REPORT NO. 121 – HAKEA PRISON

EMBARGOED UNTIL 12 NOON ON TUESDAY 2ND APRIL 2019

The Inspector of Custodial Services has found that Hakea prison does remarkably well in providing services to the justice system in the face of serious pressures. On releasing his latest report, Neil Morgan said:

‘As a busy remand centre, prisoners are constantly coming and going. In each of the last couple of years, there have been over 16,500 prisoner movements a year in and out of Hakea, without any major incident. Other areas that were working particularly well included prisoner property, and video links to the courts. Staff and management deserve credit for ensuring that key justice system services are provided.’

Mr Morgan warmly welcomed the opening of a new video link facility:

‘The old video link area facilitated more than 25,000 court appearances a year, despite being small, run-down, volatile and unfit for purpose. I’d called for a new video link facility for years, so I am pleased that one recently opened. It will undoubtedly improve efficiency, decency and safety.’

Overall, however, Mr Morgan said that Hakea is over-stretched, overcrowded, and over-stressed:

‘It is an aged prison, and most of it is too small and no longer fit for purpose. It is also severely overcrowded, with no signs of reprieve. In 2015, it held 900 people in 12 residential units. Remarkably, at the time of this inspection it held almost 1,200 men in just 10 units.

Infrastructure deficits and overcrowding mean that conditions in most of the living units are not decent or humane. And investment in physical and human resources has not kept pace with the growth in prisoner numbers. For example, the kitchen is too small, prisoners were waiting too long for medical appointments, the telephone-based visits booking system was jammed, and there were not enough visit times for remand prisoners.

The problems were compounded by regular staff shortages, and excessive ‘lockdowns’ and ‘barrier management’. Despite some positive efforts by management, staff/prisoner relations had declined, prisoners felt more unsafe, and access to recreation and other activities was severely restricted.

I am also actively monitoring the level of prisoner-on-prisoner assaults at Hakea. They appear to have increased since mid-2018, with a number of very serious recent incidents. The crowded conditions make it extremely difficult for the prison to manage the different prisoner cohorts, and the forced doubling up of single cells adds to the risks.’

Mr Morgan also expressed concern at what he called ‘an unacceptable and inexcusable backlog’ in prisoner assessments. Hakea is responsible for drawing up ‘Individual Management Plans’ (IMPs) for newly sentenced prisoners as well as servicing remand prisoners. IMPs dictate the prisoner’s placement options and their program and educational needs. They are therefore critical to both prison system management and community safety. Mr Morgan said:

There is a massive backlog in IMPs. At the end of January 2019, around 1,000 prisoners – 20% of all sentenced prisoners - were still awaiting an initial IMP. Acacia Prison alone had over 500. Under the current system, Hakea staff travel to other prisons to do the assessments. This is both inefficient and expensive. A new approach and additional resources are needed. On a positive note, the Commissioner recently advised me that he has asked Serco, who operate Acacia, to assist in clearing the backlog. I hope the negotiations are concluded soon, so that the system can start to function again.

Neil Morgan
Inspector

For Further Media Information:

The Inspector, Mr Neil Morgan, will be available for comment from 12 noon on Tuesday 2nd April 2019 and can be contacted on 0427 426 471.