

Inspector's Overview

CASUARINA IS FACING SOME SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES IN THE COMING YEARS

Casuarina Prison is a large and complex facility housing almost 1,000 sentenced and remand maximum-security prisoners. Over the years we have been inspecting the prison it has been faced with many challenges and in the main handled them reasonably well.

This report identifies several medium and long term challenges and risks facing the prison which will require solid leadership, resourcing and planning. Fortunately, our inspection found that the senior leadership team was cohesive and effective, despite some instability arising from several individuals only acting in their roles.

The current expansion of Casuarina is due to be completed in mid-2020. This will increase the prison's capacity by 512 beds, bringing the total capacity to just under 1,500 prisoners. A further expansion project is planned for an additional 344 beds mostly in specialist units with completion expected sometime in 2023. This will place significant pressure on the prison and impact its capacity to provide a meaningful and constructive daily regime for a very large and complex cohort of prisoners.

Strong planning and preparedness will be critical as Casuarina expands. Although it was somewhat disappointing that the Department did not accept our recommendation that Casuarina develop a strategic plan, it was reassuring that they have plans for the development of an operating philosophy and model that will be consistent with the consolidated plan for the whole prison estate.

During this inspection, we heard from many staff and prisoners who raised concerns about the impact of staff shortages leading to staff being redeployed away from support services such as assessments, education, industries and recreation. This problem is not unique to Casuarina, but the impact is that many prisoners are missing key support services essential for their wellbeing and/or rehabilitation.

Rehabilitation programs continue to be impacted by the backlog in assessments, and although the Department has implemented strategies to deal with the backlog, it will take some time to flow on to the delivery of programs to prisoners who need them. A further complication is the availability of dedicated program rooms within the prison.

Education and training in Casuarina continues to be a highlight with prisoners benefiting from a good range of education and training opportunities. Many prisoners were undertaking certificate level training which is essential for their rehabilitation and preparation for eventual release. Space and resources are the most pressing limitations on the expansion of education delivery at Casuarina.

Casuarina provides good employment options for those prisoners who have a job but there are high levels of unemployment and under-employment.

These observations arose from our current inspection where we were considering the present situation at the prison and the services it provides for the current population of just under 1,000 prisoners.

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When the prison expands in mid-2020 and again with the further planned expansion there will be additional pressure on these essential services. Perhaps the single most important challenge for Casuarina into the future will be its ability to provide a meaningful and constructive daily regime for the large and complex population it will be expected to manage.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the cooperation and support we received throughout this inspection from the Superintendent and staff at Casuarina and from key personnel within the Department.

I would also like to thank each of the members of our inspection team and our two independent experts for their significant contribution to this inspection. I would particularly like to acknowledge the contribution of Kieran Artelaris for his hard work in planning the inspection and as principal drafter of this report.

Eamon Ryan
Inspector

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