

MEDIA RELEASE

REPORT NO 136 – 2020 INSPECTION OF MELALEUCA WOMEN'S PRISON

EMBARGOED UNTIL 3:00PM ON TUESDAY 7 SEPTEMBER 2021

Inspector of Custodial Services Eamon Ryan today released his first report on the services at Melaleuca Women's Prison.

At the time of the inspection, the prison had recently been transitioned back to the public sector following nearly three years under private operation. The prison had been renamed and refocused from a remand and transition facility to a pure remand centre.

"We inspected Melaleuca in November 2020, seven months after its transition from private to public operation. The transition occurred in a very short period of time. Comprehensive planning was not complete on transition, so the prison had faced many challenges. By the time of our inspection, the prison was moving forward positively, guided by an experienced Superintendent and a solid leadership team," Mr Ryan said.

Mr Ryan highlighted infrastructure and health services as the two most concerning aspects of service delivery at Melaleuca.

"The prison suffers in nearly every aspect of service delivery from a lack of sufficient and appropriate infrastructure," Mr Ryan said.

"There is no dedicated education centre, very limited employment workshops, few private interview rooms, and no gym or indoor recreation facility. There are only four program rooms that are used by education and program facilitators, and they also double as the library, art space, passive recreation rooms and computer centre."

All aspects of health services were struggling, a concern in a remand centre where prisoners were often arriving in poor physical and mental health directly from the street.

"Prisoner access to health was hampered by an inefficient appointment system and we were most concerned about services for pregnant women. Dental services were also absent," Mr Ryan said. "We have made seven recommendations relating solely to health and mental health services at Melaleuca. The Department has supported all but one of these. We hope to see improvement in health services between now and our next inspection in three years' time."

Mr Ryan noted that the period of transition had also been one of significant cultural change for staff. Those who worked under the private contractor had developed their own culture, philosophy, and ways of operation, and now had to get used to working under the public system. And those officers who transferred from other public prisons had to accommodate working alongside people whose approach may be different to theirs.

“We found that negotiating this cultural shift had been difficult. But we think the effort is starting to pay off, and we believe that Melaleuca’s workforce can reconcile these cultural differences and develop into a strong and focussed team.”

Eamon Ryan
Inspector

For further media information:

The Inspector, Mr Eamon Ryan, will be available for comment from 3:00pm on Tuesday 7 September 2021 and can be contacted on 0421 480 925.