



## MEDIA RELEASE

EMBARGOED UNTIL NOON 3 APRIL 2023

### Prisoner transport much improved since 2008 tragedy – but more to do

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A review by the Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services has found the Department of Justice (the Department) and its contracted service provider, Ventia, generally transport prisoners throughout regional and remote Western Australia safely and efficiently.

The volume of prisoner movements and the vast distances covered in Western Australia create a logistical challenge for the Department and Ventia. Between 2018 and 2021, there were 65,191 movements of people to or from regional prisons using secure vehicles, coaches and flights. These movements include courthouse and prison transfers, scheduled and unscheduled medical appointments, visits to funerals in remote locations, and various other external travel arrangements.

Despite the logistical challenges, Inspector of Custodial Services, Eamon Ryan, was encouraged to find that both the Department and Ventia had maintained a strong focus on safety, welfare and risk management since several important changes were implemented following the death of Mr Ward in 2008.

“More than a decade after the tragic passing of Mr Ward in the back of an unairconditioned prison vehicle, this review has found regional custodial transport policies and practices have maintained a clear focus on safety, prisoner welfare, and mitigating security risks” Mr Ryan said. “We very much welcome that finding.”

Areas of improvement established and maintained since 2008 include the use of coaches and flights for long-distance journeys, performing pre-movement health and security risk assessments, ongoing compliance and contract oversight processes, and implementing a suite of minimum standards for secure escort vehicles including a requirement for air-conditioning, temperature monitoring, CCTV and duress alarms.

While this was encouraging, the review raised concerns around some processes. This included the quality of risk assessments, the effectiveness of mental health transfer plans, and the inconsistent use of restraints on flights. Most of these findings related to practices conducted by the Department.

“At times we found the Department poorly documented decisions, used additional restraints on prisoners without justification, and completed risk assessments with little detail” said Mr Ryan. “These issues were less evident with Ventia’s processes and practices”.

#### Transport welfare fail: Anna’s journey

The review also highlights the experience of a female Aboriginal prisoner named ‘Anna’ who had to endure much of a Geraldton-Perth Department-led transport in urine-soaked clothing after not being provided access to a toilet.

“Anna’s experience highlights how the safety, welfare and dignity of a prisoner can be jeopardised when there is a lack of compliance and poor transparency,” said Mr Ryan. “No person should have to endure the type of treatment experienced by Anna on that journey”.

The review made 10 findings about Anna’s experience, including ineffective pre-movement risk assessments, the use of hand cuffs and leg restraints without appropriate documentation to justify that decision, and escorting staff not appropriately documenting events.

The review also questioned the effectiveness of the Department’s monthly vehicle inspections after a fault in the vehicle’s CCTV and audio recording equipment was only discovered after a request to view the footage.

“I strongly recommended the Department review Anna’s experience and take steps to ensure that no other prisoners are exposed to similar mistreatment. I am encouraged by its acknowledgement of these and other issues raised in the review and the intention to amend policies and practices where appropriate.”

Mr Ryan added: “Transporting prisoners over long distances comes with inherent risks that are only genuinely mitigated when on-the-ground actions match policy and procedure put in place to safeguard against unsafe or inhumane practices for prisoners.

“The case of Mr Ward remains a tragic reminder of the deadly consequences that can result when compliance vigilance slips.”

The Department supported 11 of the 14 recommendations made in the review.

**Eamon Ryan**  
**Inspector**

**For further information:**

The Inspector, Mr Ryan, is available for comment from noon on Monday 3 April 2023 on 0421 480 925.

The full report will be available on the Inspector’s website ([www.oics.wa.gov.au](http://www.oics.wa.gov.au)).

# REGIONAL PRISONER MOVEMENTS

## 2018 - 2021

**65,191**

movements to / from regional prisons

**17,210**

prisoners transferred to / from regional prisons

**2,142**

health emergencies

**9,321**

health appointments

**961**

visits to funerals or ill relatives

**4,859**

prisoners moved by plane

**5,899**

prisoners moved by coach

**4,863**

prisoner movement risk assessments completed

**3,459**

police lock-up clearances

**21**

vehicle/plane faults, accidents or breakdowns

**1**

escape from custody

