

## 2022 INSPECTION OF BROOME REGIONAL PRISON

### BROOME IS NOT OFFERING ANY MEANINGFUL REHABILITATION FOR THE MAJORITY OF PEOPLE SENT THERE

In May 2019 the government announced it had set aside \$1.4M to undertake planning for a new prison in the Shire of Broome. Shortly after this announcement, in July 2019, we undertook our seventh inspection of Broome Regional Prison (Broome) and published Report 126 in March 2020.

The findings of that 2019 inspection were that the prison infrastructure was unsuitable, well past its useful life, and in need of replacement. Although we acknowledged some improvements, including a planned new kitchen and dining room, the overall conclusion was that services and supports for prisoners were lacking and there were few, if any, meaningful opportunities for education, programs or employment. Many prisoners told us in 2019 that they were bored and had little to occupy their time in prison.

Fast forward to 2022 and, as will be seen in this report, not much has changed. Most prisoners in Broome do not have meaningful activities to occupy their time. There are few employment and training opportunities, no criminogenic programs, no education, no structured recreation, and limited opportunities for community work in Broome. In addition, there is no Aboriginal Visitor Service attendance, no Prisoner Support Officer, only one peer support prisoner (although we understand that he is well regarded by his peers).

Somewhat surprisingly, the Department in its response to our draft report and recommendations 10 and 11, noted that there were no rooms available to run structured programs or education. Yet there was an education centre when we inspected in 2019, but since then it had been converted into office space for administration staff – presumably because no programs or education were being run.

On a recent visit to Broome, we heard that the prison had engaged local service providers to provide two voluntary courses covering family and domestic violence and also drug and alcohol addictions. This was a commendable local initiative and an indication of what may be possible until a new prison is completed. As we have said in Report 126, there are opportunities to work with local service providers to provide more rehabilitation and support services until the new prison is opened.

There were some positives, the new kitchen and dining rooms were appreciated by staff and prisoners – despite the leaks and other design flaws we heard about. The quality and standard of the food was rated highly by both staff and prisoners. There was positive feedback from prisoners about the health centre. And we saw a strong leadership team and a dedicated staffing group, who did their best despite regular shortages.

In 2019 we were optimistic in our outlook for the potential that a new prison offered and

what could be achieved in the interim. But we are less so now. The rehabilitation opportunities that a new prison offers remain, but the planning process appears to be taking far too long to identify and gain approval for a new site. Four years after the announcement that planning would commence for a replacement prison, we understand that although a preferred site has been identified, it still requires all the necessary zoning and other approvals. In February 2022 the then Minister for Corrective Services, the Hon Bill Johnston MLA, was reported as saying that construction would not commence until 2027/2028 (ABC Kimberley, 10 February 2022).

We fully appreciate the challenges involved in the site identification and approvals process, as well as the difficulties that will be faced building a prison in the Kimberley. But it appears that it will be well over 10 years from the first announcement until a new prison is likely to open. In the interim, hundreds of prisoners will spend that time in Broome doing very little in the way of meaningful rehabilitation. On so many levels this is a missed opportunity.

Overall, it is difficult not to be pessimistic in our assessment of the situation in Broome for at least the next five to eight years.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We have two Independent Prison Visitors who are community volunteers appointed by the Minister for Corrective Services. They attend Broome on a regular basis providing an opportunity for the men and women placed there to raise issues and feedback that information to our office. I acknowledge the importance of their work and thank them for the contribution they have made to our ongoing monitoring of Broome.

I acknowledge also the support and cooperation we received throughout the inspection from the Superintendent and staff at Broome and from key personnel in the Department. On a personal level I want to particularly acknowledge and thank Superintendent Sinclair for the invaluable assistance she provided to members of our inspection team when one of them tested positive to COVID-19 during the inspection and had to undertake a period of isolation in Broome.

The men and the few women living in Broome who took the time to speak with us and share their perspectives also deserve our acknowledgement and thanks.

Finally, I would like to thank the members of the inspection team for their expertise and hard work throughout the inspection. I would particularly acknowledge and thank Charlie Staples for his hard work in planning this inspection and as principal drafter of this report.

**Eamon Ryan**

Inspector of Custodial Services

26 June 2023

---