



2024 INSPECTION OF KARNET,  
PARDELUP & WOOROLOO  
PRISON FARMS

164

JULY 2025

*Independent oversight  
that contributes to a more  
accountable public sector*



OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR  
OF CUSTODIAL SERVICES

*The Inspector of Custodial Services and staff acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the Traditional Custodians of this country, and their continuing connection to land, waters, and community throughout Australia. We pay our respects to them and their cultures, and to Elders, be they past or present.*

## Artwork Acknowledgement

*Marcia McGuire – Kolbang ‘Going Forward’ (2025)*

Format: Digital illustration (cover uses elements)

The artwork *Kolbang* – meaning ‘going forward’ – depicts the positive impacts the Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services has on the custodial estate in Western Australia.

The artwork embodies traditional knowledge passed on from Marcia McGuire’s families of the Whadjuk, Ballardong, Yued Noongar and Badimia Yamatji Aboriginal People.



## 2024 Inspection of Karnet, Pardelup & Woorloo Prison Farms

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# Table of Contents

Inspector's Overview .....	iii
Executive Summary .....	v
List of Recommendations .....	vi
1 Not always the right person, right place, or right time.....	1
1.1 Population pressures were influencing placement decisions .....	1
1.2 Some groups were disadvantaged by their placement at prison farms .....	3
1.3 Few First Nations people finish their sentences at the prison farms.....	6
2 Rehabilitation opportunities were not maximised.....	8
2.1 Farms offered a busy, constructive day that built resilience and work-readiness.....	8
2.2 Education and training helped build post-release capability despite resourcing limitations.....	9
2.3 Delays in treatment assessments continued to impact people in custody.....	11
2.4 While personal responsibility is encouraged, formalised development of life skills is missing .....	12
3 Preparations for release were impacted by systems issues and resourcing limitations.....	14
3.1 Section 95 approvals take too long but the opportunity to work externally was valued .....	14
3.2 Prisoner Employment Program approval processes impacted its viability .....	16
3.3 Home leave approval processes were also slow .....	20
4 Ongoing supports varied across the three farms .....	23
4.1 Peer support prisoners continued to be an asset in monitoring and managing prisoner welfare ....	23
4.2 Physical health services were managed well despite resourcing limitations .....	24
4.3 Mental health supports were limited at all farms .....	26
4.4 Opportunities to improve upon the range of cultural supports for First Nations prisoners .....	27
4.5 Prisoners facing deportation lacked agency, supports, and information .....	29
5 More strategic support is required from the Department of Justice .....	31
5.1 Prison farms require more funding .....	31
5.2 Strategic support is required for the prison farms to achieve their remit.....	32
Appendix A Bibliography.....	33
Appendix B Acronyms .....	34
Appendix C Department of Justice's Response .....	35
Appendix D Inspection Details.....	44

## Inspector's Overview

### *The full potential of prison farms are not being met due to system-wide pressures*

This inspection covered three separate facilities, Karnet Prison Farm, Wooroloo Prison Farm, and Pardelup Prison Farm. This multi-facility approach, which differs from our standard single site inspection, was chosen because of two key characteristics shared by each facility. All three facilities are minimum security pre-release prisons, and each operates a farm that provides produce to help feed the prison population.

Historically, all three facilities have experienced high and lows, but generally they have been viewed by this Office as providing a positive rehabilitation and reintegration environment for suitable men prior to their release from prison. But they are not immune from the significant challenges facing the entire prison estate. This report outlines the impact many of these challenges are having, including:

- Record population growth resulting in close to maximum capacity occupancy in all three prison farms; with arguments heard that some men were not suitable for the minimum-security environment, and this was having a negative impact on safety and security.
- Outstanding treatment assessments and strained rehabilitation and reintegration services leading to the needs of the population in each facility not being met.
- Demands on infrastructure, resources and staffing had reduced rehabilitative opportunities.

Despite these challenges, we acknowledge that each facility continues to produce positive outcomes for many of the men placed there. But we have again identified – as we have argued in previous inspection reports – the need for better resourcing and a more integrated strategic approach to the operation of the three prison farms.

At the time of writing, we have seen a major step forward in the reform agenda. The Department of Justice, Corrective Services, has just launched the *Corrective Services Strategic Plan 2025-2030*. It is a comprehensive plan that sets future direction in four priority areas, each with specific actions. Relevantly, Priority 2 - *Create environments that facilitate positive change to reduce reoffending* – will have a direct impact on the operations of minimum-security pre-release prisons like Karnet, Wooroloo and Pardelup.

Rehabilitation is one of the core purposes of imprisonment, along with deterrence, punishment, and maintaining public safety. The Department's Strategic Plan aims to improve rehabilitation efforts in prisons and community settings to achieve a positive impact on reoffending rates. This makes sense because most of the people in prison today will one day be released and return to the community. The community is safer if individuals have had meaningful and effective rehabilitation intervention and support while in prison or under community supervision. Delivery of effective rehabilitation activities in prison also improves the likelihood that suitable prisoners are granted early release on parole, which would have an impact on the current record prisoner population.

The next step for the Department will be to develop specific operational plans and business cases to secure the resourcing required to implement the priority actions identified in the Plan. This will take time and not be easy because of significant competition within government for resources. But at least now the Department has a strong and clear strategic plan that sets the foundation for reform.

In the meantime, the three prison farms are still operating under significant stress. In this regard, it was disappointing that the Department did not support Recommendation 6 or Recommendation 7, both of which were aimed at reducing process delays in the assessment and approval of prisoners for external activities and the prisoner employment program. Both of which are highly regarded rehabilitation opportunities central to pre-release preparation. The Department's response appears to accept that there are often lengthy delays in the assessment and approval process, but then makes little commitment to addressing this issue beyond retaining the status quo.

We accept that the Department may not agree with the solutions we proposed in Recommendations 6 and 7, but the core problem of delays in these approvals remain and are unlikely to improve for the foreseeable future. This is inconsistent with Priority 2 of the Strategic Plan.

I understand that system level reforms take time. I also accept that I am impatient for progress and improvement, but no more so than the many staff and prisoners we spoke to in each of the three prison farms.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

We had two Independent Prison Visitors for Wooroloo, two for Karnet and one for Pardelup at the time of our inspection. They are community volunteers appointed by the Minister for Corrective Services, who attended their designated facility on a regular basis observing the operations of each prison and providing an opportunity for the men placed there to raise issues and complaints that informs the work of our office. Throughout the year they have advocated strongly for improvements in conditions for the men held there. I acknowledge the importance of the work undertaken and thank them for their contribution to our ongoing monitoring of the prison farms.

I also acknowledge the support and cooperation we received throughout the inspection from the Superintendent and staff at each of Wooroloo, Karnet, and Pardelup and from key personnel in the Department.

The men living in each of the prison farms 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 in undertaking this inspection. I would also particularly acknowledge and thank Jane Higgins for leading this inspection, Christine Wyatt as principal drafter of this report, and Charlie Staples as the lead inspection planner.

Eamon Ryan  
**Inspector of Custodial Services**

16 July 2025

# Executive Summary

## Key Findings

### Not always the right person, right place, or right time

Over the past two years, rising custody numbers have strained Western Australia's prison system, leading to increased placements at prison farms. Concerns emerged about mismatches between prisoners and the minimum-security environment, affecting perceptions of safety among staff and inmates. Additionally, First Nations people were underrepresented, and older prisoners and foreign nationals faced disadvantages in accessing appropriate support and opportunities.

### Rehabilitation opportunities were not maximised

Prison farms typically serve as the final stage before release, offering rehabilitation through education, training, and practical work experience. However, many in custody were unable to fully benefit from these programs due to limitations in staffing, infrastructure, and equipment. Additionally, delays in treatment assessments across the state further restricted access to rehabilitative opportunities.

### Preparations for release were impacted by systems issues and resourcing limitations

As releasing facilities, the three prison farms are intended to support reintegration by offering opportunities like Section 95 work, paid community employment, and home leave to reconnect with family. While these programs were available, access was limited due to lengthy application and approval processes, staffing shortages, and other resource constraints.

### Ongoing supports varied across the three farms

Support services at the prison farms varied but were consistently strained due to staffing and resource limitations. There were also clear gaps in culturally appropriate support for First Nations people, especially those held off Country, and a need for better access to information and assistance for individuals facing deportation.

### More strategic support is required from the Department of Justice

A strategic, well-resourced approach is essential for prison farms to fulfill their rehabilitation and reintegration roles effectively. The Department must address the barriers identified in this report by ensuring adequate staffing and resources, not only to support rehabilitative efforts but also to maintain the farms' critical role in the prison food supply chain.

## List of Recommendations

Recommendation	Page	DOJ Response
<b>Recommendation 1</b> Create a policy or plan specific to the age-related needs of older prisoners.	4	Supported – Current Practice / Project
<b>Recommendation 2</b> Improve the opportunity for foreign national prisoners to engage in external activities.	5	Supported in Principle
<b>Recommendation 3</b> Examine the reasons why recidivism rates for First Nations and non-First Nations people differ and implement mechanisms to reduce this disparity.	7	Supported – Current Practice / Project
<b>Recommendation 4</b> Examine causes of, and implement mechanisms to improve, First Nations representation at the prison farms.	7	Supported in Principle
<b>Recommendation 5</b> Prioritise the development of life skills through structured and practical learning activities.	13	Supported in Principle
<b>Recommendation 6</b> Consider implementing a global assessment document to assess a prisoner's eligibility for various external activities, which can be updated as the prisoner progresses towards their eligibility dates.	15	Not Supported
<b>Recommendation 7</b> With regards to the Prisoner Employment Program:  a) Allow prisoners to apply for the program earlier than three months prior to their eligibility to commence paid employment.  b) Review the application process to identify process barriers or resourcing constraints contributing to delays in approvals.	18	Not Supported
<b>Recommendation 8</b> Remove the requirement for prisoners participating in the Prisoner Employment Program to pay the Department of Justice a fee for their accommodation.	20	Not Supported
<b>Recommendation 9</b> Train willing participants at all prison farms, in areas such as mental health, suicide prevention, and disability awareness.	24	Supported – Current Practice / Project

<b>Recommendation 10</b> Adequately resource the custodial estate with Prison Support Officers, preventing the diversion of services.	24	Supported in Principle
<b>Recommendation 11</b> Wooroloo Prison Farm should establish a weekend yarning circle at the cultural area for out-of-Country First Nations men.	29	Supported
<b>Recommendation 12</b> Increase the access to information and support for prisoners facing deportation due to visa cancellations.	30	Supported in Principle
<b>Recommendation 13</b> The Department of Justice should request permission from Government to allow the prison farms to retain a portion of their generated revenues for farm reinvestment.	32	Supported – Current Practice / Project



## Background

Western Australia has three minimum-security prison farms which form part of the Department of Justice's (the Department) broader hierarchical custodial system. They are male-only facilities located in the south-west of the state:

- Karnet Prison Farm – situated 78 kilometres south of Perth
- Pardelup Prison Farm – situated 386 kilometres south-west of Perth, approximately 27 kilometres from Mount Barker
- Wooroloo Prison Farm – located 55 kilometres north-east of Perth.

We have traditionally inspected each of the prison farms individually. However, we have often heard the farms described as 'one farm, three sites' and we have consistently found they have similar functions and comparable constraints. As such, this multi-site inspection sought to assess the prison farms conjointly.

### Similar functions

The prison farms typically hold people in custody who are towards the end of their sentences and are preparing for their release back to the community. Such preparation should include mechanisms to address institutionalisation, build personal responsibility, and reconnect with family and community. The prison farms should also help people in custody reduce any learning and skills deficits through a wide variety of options like education (short courses, certificates, and higher education), employment, training, and industry-relevant work experience to maximise people's post-release employment opportunities.

At the same time, Karnet, Pardelup, and Wooroloo are also working farms. They provide a vital link in the Department's food supply chain. Many of the prisoners placed at the farms work in physically demanding roles to produce meat, dairy, eggs, fruit, and vegetables that are distributed for use throughout the prison system statewide. The farm operations are not a large focus of this report. However, we have sought to highlight the valuable rehabilitative and reintegrative opportunities the work provided, despite some of the significant constraints the farms faced.

### Comparable constraints

By their very nature, Karnet, Pardelup, and Wooroloo are all semi-isolated custodial facilities, requiring large hectares of land for farming operations. This can pose challenges for prison operations for example, to attain sufficient staff either locally or for the regular commute, and for occasions where they may need to respond to an emergency. Not being centrally located, can also reduce departmental or head office contact and support services. This is potentially amplified due to the minimum-security status of prison farms, which denote considerably less risk. For those in custody, the semi-isolation can make maintaining family and community connection difficult.

Like all prisons in Western Australia, Karnet, Pardelup, and Wooroloo have also come under pressure to adequately and appropriately accommodate more people in custody. However, the prison farms face distinct challenges managing overcrowding due to their policies and operational structures. For example, people in custody are not secured in cells, and there are few physical barriers, which allow for free movement but make prisoner management more complex.

We have also found the prison farms are constrained by staffing and financial pressures. Farm and industry operations are often hampered by staff shortages or vacancies, which can have significant flow on effects to rehabilitative and reintegrative outcomes for people in custody. For example, when skilled vocational staff are redeployed, industry and operations may cease, reducing employment and educational opportunities.

### Peter's story helps illustrate the benefits and challenges of life at a prison farm

Throughout this inspection we decided to use case studies to help personalise both the good and challenging aspects of being placed at a prison farm in Western Australia. While we heard from many men throughout this process, one person in particular – who we have named Peter – was able to express their journey with impressive insight and clarity. We thank Peter for sharing their story with us and allowing us to use elements to help illustrate some of our key findings.

Peter's story is being used with their permission and a pseudonym has been used to protect their identity.

#### Peter's story - An introduction

I came to prison because I committed a serious crime. This was my first offence, but it was a wake-up call in my life. I thought I had my life under control, I thought I was able to manage myself and my emotions. I didn't realise how far I was in denial and how much I was justifying my behaviour and hurting those that I love.

I have been at Karnet Prison farm for just over 3 years. I deliberately chose to be placed here as it is a minimum facility and offered more opportunities and privileges than Acacia prison. Once I transferred, it took me a couple of weeks to adjust to the relative freedom of Karnet Prison. Just seeing the night's sky was a liberty I had not experienced for a few years. I still appreciate it now. After my period of adjustment, I become comfortable with the easy-going culture and relaxed environment of the farm.

I hope my case study can provide insight into the life of a prisoner and I thank you for your time spent reading this.



# KARNET PRISON FARM

## ROLE OF FACILITY

Karnet is a minimum-security prison for adult males, with a focus on preparing prisoners to re-enter the community. Karnet is a working farm, and a vital link in the Department of Justice's food supply chain. The farm includes an abattoir and dairy, and produces fresh meat, milk, eggs, fruit, and vegetables for the wider prison system. These areas also provide opportunity for prisoner employment and training.

## HISTORY

Karnet was originally commissioned as a prison in 1963, known as the Karnet Rehabilitation Training Centre. At that time, it held around 60 men. It now has a capacity of 366.

OFFICIAL CAPACITY

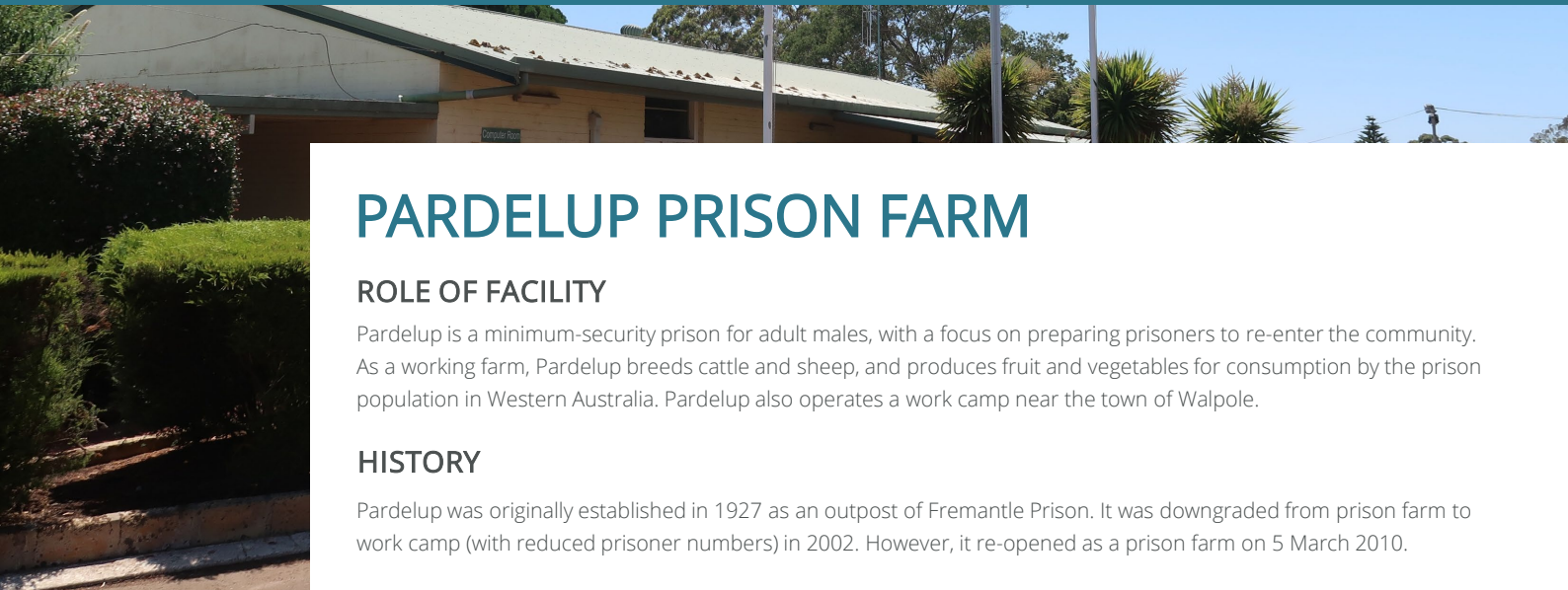
366

PRISONERS AT TIME OF INSPECTION

379

LOCATION

Karnet Prison Farm is located on Whadjuk Noongar Country, 78 kilometres south of Perth.



# PARDELUP PRISON FARM

## ROLE OF FACILITY

Pardelup is a minimum-security prison for adult males, with a focus on preparing prisoners to re-enter the community. As a working farm, Pardelup breeds cattle and sheep, and produces fruit and vegetables for consumption by the prison population in Western Australia. Pardelup also operates a work camp near the town of Walpole.

## HISTORY

Pardelup was originally established in 1927 as an outpost of Fremantle Prison. It was downgraded from prison farm to work camp (with reduced prisoner numbers) in 2002. However, it re-opened as a prison farm on 5 March 2010.

OFFICIAL CAPACITY

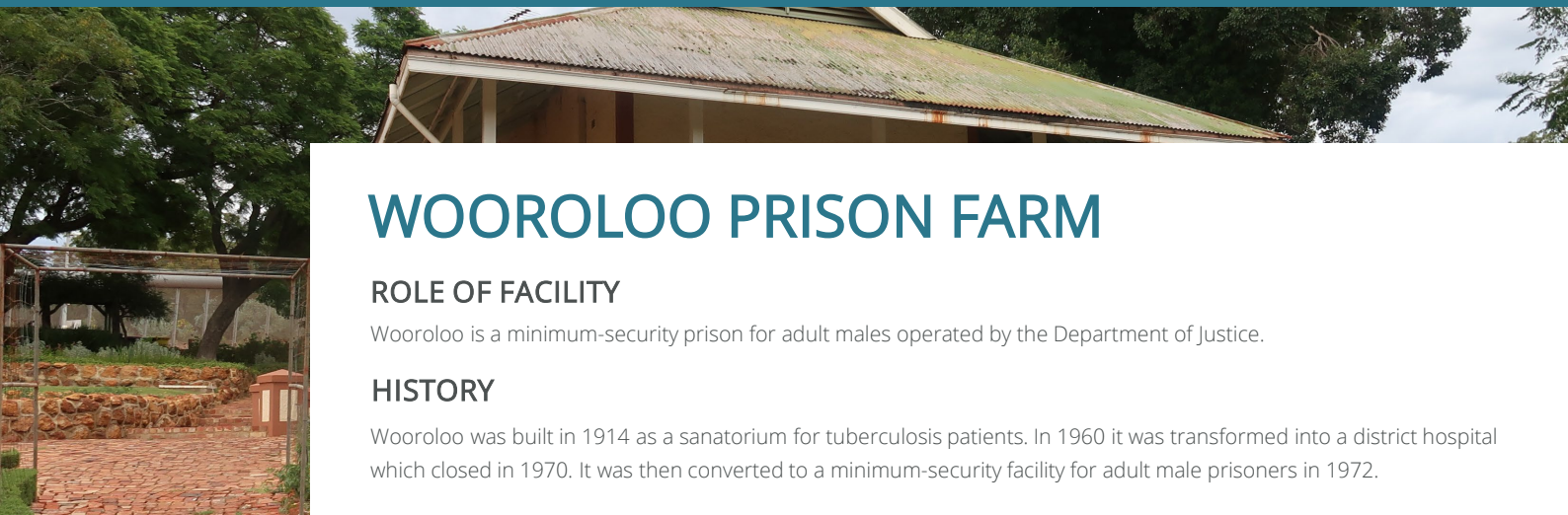
84

PRISONERS AT TIME OF INSPECTION

81

LOCATION

Pardelup Prison Farm is located on Minang Country, in Mount Barker, Western Australia.



# WOOROLOO PRISON FARM

## ROLE OF FACILITY

Wooroloo is a minimum-security prison for adult males operated by the Department of Justice.

## HISTORY

Wooroloo was built in 1914 as a sanatorium for tuberculosis patients. In 1960 it was transformed into a district hospital which closed in 1970. It was then converted to a minimum-security facility for adult male prisoners in 1972.

OFFICIAL CAPACITY

455

PRISONERS AT TIME OF INSPECTION

450

LOCATION

Wooroloo Prison Farm is located on Whadjuk Noongar Country, Wooroloo, Western Australia.

# 1 Not always the right person, right place, or right time

Over the last two years the number of people in custody has surged, placing pressure on the Western Australian custodial estate. Consequently, prison farm numbers have also increased and there were concerns some people placed at the farms were not appropriately matched to the minimum-security environment. This meant staff and prisoners' perceptions of safety had shifted since our last inspections. There were also concerns First Nations people were underrepresented at the prison farms, and other groups, like older prisoners and foreign nationals, were disadvantaged.

## 1.1 Population pressures were influencing placement decisions

The number of people in custody in Western Australia has increased by almost 1,800 people since the beginning of 2023 and has regularly reached record levels over the past year. The number of people at all security levels has grown, with a 21% increase in those rated minimum security (up 374 to 1,781). On 1 January 2025, 1,603 of the 1,781 minimum security prisoners in Western Australia were male (90%), with 915 of those placed at the prison farms. This is almost 250 more people compared to the population on 1 January 2023, when there were 666 men placed at Karnet, Pardelup, and Wooroloo.

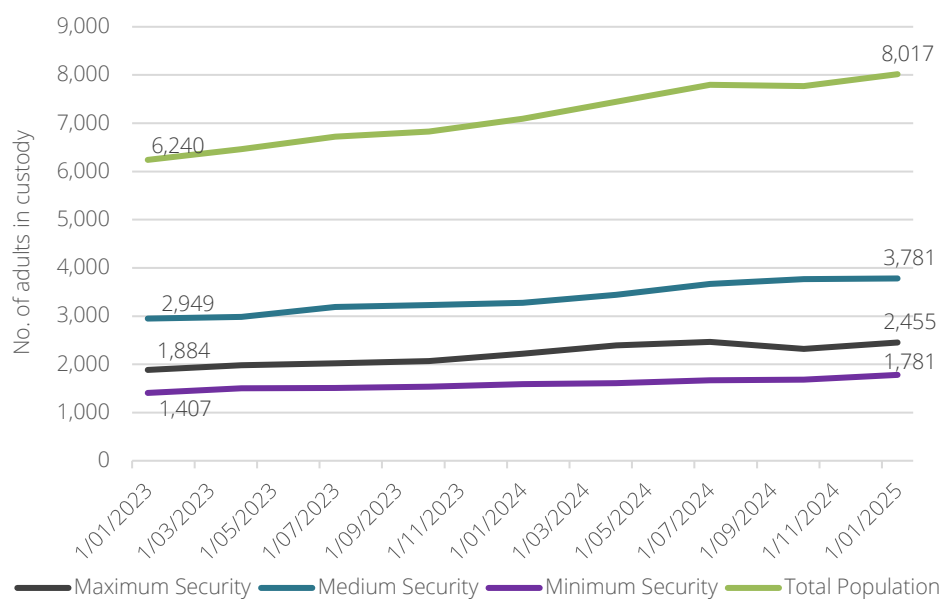


Figure 1: The number of people in custody in Western Australia has grown significantly in the last two years.

## Staff were concerned transfers were not appropriate for minimum security

The pressure for beds across the custodial estate was reportedly changing the prisoner profile at the prison farms. Staff at Karnet and Wooroloo expressed their concerns people were arriving at the farms too early in their sentence without appropriate staging at medium-security facilities. Management at Karnet reported medium-security ratings were being overridden and downgraded to minimum security at increasing frequency. They asserted this was due to all prisons being directed to operate at 105% capacity. We could not verify this claim.

Staff concerns about prisoners transferring to prison farms too early were based on the likelihood of increased drug use. They felt people without sufficient staging did not have enough opportunity to address their addictions and drug use, which increased the likelihood illicit substances would find their way into the minimum-security environment. A prospect that was validated for Karnet which had recently found drugs onsite. There were also concerns people who had not denounced their association with outlaw motorcycle gangs prior to their transfer to the prison farms, were also increasing the likelihood of drug use at the facilities.

Many staff surveyed noted the early transfers were one of the most stressful aspects of their work:

*Being forced to take prisoners who are not suitable for minimum security, i.e. pending charges.*

*[The] change in the type of prisoners being sent here, some are not really ready to be minimum security prisoners.*

*[The] lack of resources to deal with the prisoners who are not ready for minimum security environment.*

Staff survey comments about the most stressful things about the prison they work in.

### Declining perceptions of safety and rising tensions

We found the population pressures in the prison farms were also, in part, contributing to some people's lower perceptions of their safety, staff and prisoners alike. Our pre-inspection survey data confirmed some decline, specifically at Wooroloo, where the proportion of staff respondents who felt mostly unsafe increased from nil last inspection to 17% this inspection. This was also high compared against the state average of 10%.

Table 1: Staff survey results about their feelings of safety were a concern at Wooroloo Prison Farm.

	Karnet Prison Farm	Pardelup Prison Farm	Wooroloo Prison Farm	State Average
I almost never feel safe	0%	2%	0%	2%
I mostly feel unsafe	1%	6%	17%	10%
I mostly feel safe	48%	42%	47%	48%
I almost always feel safe	48%	48%	29%	32%

Similarly, there had been a shift in prisoner perception of safety at Wooroloo – 18% of respondents reported feeling unsafe at the prison compared to nine percent in 2021 (the time of the last inspection).

Staff and people in custody at Wooroloo explained their safety concerns were compounded by frequent staff shortages. This was particularly the case during night shifts, a key factor which contributed to feelings of insecurity because there were few physical barriers and prisoners were not secured in their cells overnight. To alleviate some of this risk, we were advised prison officers in each unit at Wooroloo had been directed to carry restraints.

Overcrowding and resource constraints strain prisoner-staff relationships, heighten tensions, and undermine the overall safety and functionality of the facility.

### No protection status for people at Karnet

During the inspection we also heard one of the reasons some Karnet prisoners felt unsafe was the lack of a protection unit at the facility. Protection prisoners arriving at Karnet from other prisons must live in mainstream units. We found Karnet managed these more vulnerable prisoners reasonably well, and they were not denied the reintegrative and rehabilitative opportunities the prison offered. However, Karnet had sought to mitigate some of the risk to this group by placing many ex-protection prisoners together in the same unit. Nevertheless, their requirement to engage in the structured day, their program placement, and the open campus layout at Karnet could heighten people's perceptions around hazards and risk.

Staff also reported concerns ex-protection prisoners may be at greater risk of assault due to the increasing number of prisoners being transferred to Karnet who were perceived as unsuitable and potentially violent. Historically, Karnet management had been quick to respond to any issues between prisoners. And while the responsibility is on individuals to exhibit pro-social behaviours to maintain their placement in minimum security, there is also a responsibility and reliance on people to report incidents of bullying, stand overs and other behaviours.

## 1.2 Some groups were disadvantaged by their placement at prison farms

The prison farms offered a wide range of services, activities, programs, and initiatives to people who were at the end of their sentence, preparing for their release. However, older, and foreign national prisoners were partially disadvantaged in their placement at the prison farms and could not take advantage of the full spectrum of opportunities.

### Age affirming initiatives for older people in custody were lacking

We define older prisoners as 50 years and over due to the apparent 10-year differential between the overall health of older people in custody compared to the general population (OICS, 2021A). Broken down by facility, about one in three people at Karnet were 50 years or over (33.6%), compared to one in five at Pardelup (21.1%) and about 15% of those at Wooroloo.

Most minimum-security male beds within the system are at the prison farms – working farms – where people are expected to be employed. This can pose significant challenges and disadvantages for older prisoners. For example, some older men at Karnet, particularly those with poor health, told us they struggled to find work as many of the roles were labour intensive. Others noted their fears of being transferred to another prison while they waited for jobs they were capable of completing. At



Karnet and Wooroloo, we heard some older men had mobility limitations and due to the prisons' size and terrain, they had difficulties moving between their units and important services like the health centre and dining room. Their cells also lacked climate control and were reportedly excessively hot in summer, which some men worried exacerbated their health conditions.

**Table 2: A third of the population at Karnet Prison Farm were over 50 years, with one man recorded as 82 years (1 November 2024).**

Age range	Number of People in Custody			
	Karnet Prison Farm	Pardelup Prison Farm	Wooroloo Prison Farm	<i>Total prison farms</i>
20-29 years	38	6	63	<i>107</i>
30-39 years	103	38	177	<i>318</i>
40-49 years	104	31	160	<i>295</i>
50-59 years	69	15	52	<i>136</i>
60-69 years	37	4	15	<i>56</i>
70+ years	18	1	5	<i>24</i>
<b>Total</b>	<b>369</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>472</b>	<b>936</b>
<i>Proportion of the population defined as 'older'</i>	<i>33.6%</i>	<i>21.1%</i>	<i>15.2%</i>	<i>23.2%</i>

Some other older prisoners felt disadvantaged because there was insufficient focus on upskilling or reacquainting them with technology, innovations, and the digital world. Older and long-term prisoners reported this was a significant challenge to prepare them for their return to society. One man explained his surprise to learn while on home leave that society was now 'cashless' and people travelled on electric scooters.

In 2021 we reviewed the Department's plans for its aging prisoner population and recommended a policy or plan to meet the age-related needs of older people in custody (OICS, 2021A). The Department supported this recommendation in principle, but at the time of writing there continues to be little specific policy guidance for this cohort. As such, we reiterate the recommendation here.

### **Recommendation 1**

Create a policy or plan specific to the age-related needs of older prisoners.

## Foreign national prisoners could not access the full spectrum of reintegration opportunities

Similarly, foreign national prisoners were also disadvantaged by their placement at the prison farms. The largest proportion was held at Pardelup with 25 of its 95 people in custody reportedly born overseas.

Table 3: The proportion of foreign national prisoners held at the prison farms was significant, especially at Pardelup (1 November 2024).

Nationality	Karnet Prison Farm	Pardelup Prison Farm	Wooroloo Prison Farm
Australia	88%	74%	90%
All other	12%	26%	10%

Some foreign nationals also faced the possibility of deportation. As such, they were largely considered a flight risk, and departmental policy rendered them ineligible for approved external activities (DOJ, 2024A). This meant they could not benefit from many of the opportunities offered at the prison farms and available to other prisoners under Section 95 of the *Prisons Act 1981*. Section 95 approval covers many activities including work, leisure, and recreational activities that occur outside the prison fence [see Chapter 3].

Other examples of authorised absences that foreign national prisoners at risk of deportation missed out on, included:

- Prisoner Employment Program (PEP) – the opportunity for people to engage in employment related activities in the community such as paid employment, work experience, vocational education courses, and university attendance (DOJ, 2024B).
- Home leave – the opportunity for people to re-establish relationships with their families and communities and offset the effects of institutionalisation and assist reintegration (DOJ, 2024C).

These men were also ineligible for further progression to a work camp where they would have increased access to reintegrative opportunities.

As many of these prisoners will avoid deportation and have their visa reinstated, it is a missed opportunity not to rehabilitate them prior to their release from custody. Many of the men told us they felt these opportunities would also aid their applications to appeal their deportation by giving back to society through work in the community.

### Recommendation 2

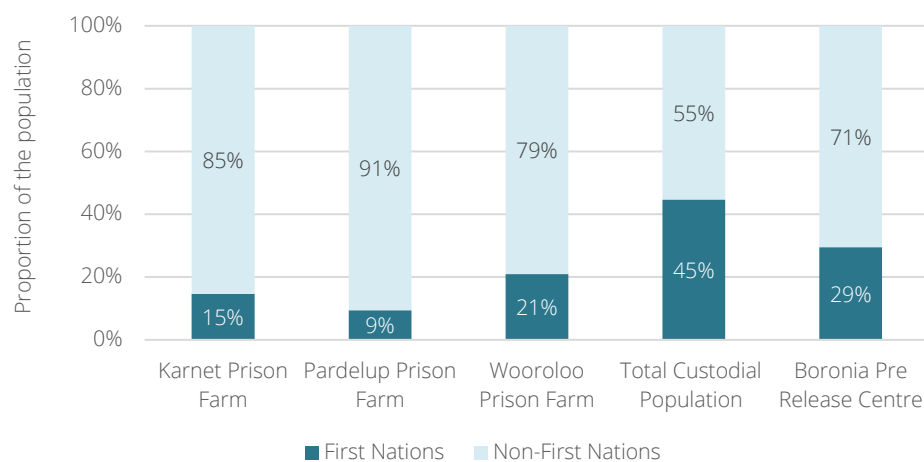
Improve the opportunity for foreign national prisoners to engage in external activities.



### 1.3 Few First Nations people finish their sentences at the prison farms

First Nations peoples were underrepresented at the prison farms. On 1 November 2024, First Nations prisoners made up approximately 21% of the total population at Karnet, Pardelup, and Wooroloo. Broken down by facility, Wooroloo had the greatest proportion (21%), followed by Karnet (15%) and Pardelup (9%).

First Nations representation at prison farms was very low despite their proportion of the total custodial population equating to almost 45% on the same day. And it was lower than the proportion of First Nations women held at Boronia Pre Release Centre (29%), a minimum-security facility for women that plays a role similar to that of the prison farms.



**Figure 2: The proportion of First Nations people at the prison farms was grossly below their proportion of the total population (1 November 2024).**

Pardelup recognised First Nations men were considerably underrepresented at the facility and had sought to promote itself as a worthy choice to First Nations prisoners, particularly those local to the area. They held virtual information sessions with Aboriginal prisoners from Albany Regional Prison, highlighting the opportunities available at Pardelup. The Aboriginal Services Committee had also discussed opportunities to work with assessment teams at other prisons to help attract local Aboriginal men. Despite these efforts, numbers remained low.

We acknowledge there are various factors which potentially contribute to the poor representation of First Nations people at prison farms. Their location solely in south-west Western Australia may not make them attractive locations for out-of-Country Aboriginal men, limiting visits and contact they may receive from friends and family. First Nations people may also be less inclined to go to a prison farm knowing there are fewer Aboriginal people there to draw on for cultural support or connection. Similarly, there were few First Nations staff employed at the prison farms.

There may also be structural barriers affecting First Nations people from achieving the minimum-security rating necessary to get to a prison farm. The recidivism rate for First Nations prisoners (46.7%) who were released in 2022 was considerably higher than for non-First Nations prisoners (33.7%). Examining the reasons why such disparity exists, and whether it can, in part, be explained by the low number of Aboriginal people progressing to the prison farms should be a priority.

Similarly, the Department should consider mechanisms to improve First Nations representation at the prison farms, particularly given the rehabilitation and reintegration opportunities they present compared to other prisons.

**Recommendation 3**

Examine the reasons why recidivism rates for First Nations and non-First Nations people differ and implement mechanisms to reduce this disparity.

**Recommendation 4**

Examine causes of, and implement mechanisms to improve, First Nations representation at the prison farms.

## 2 Rehabilitation opportunities were not maximised

Prison farms are often the final placement before people in custody are released to the community. As such, they offered various opportunities for rehabilitation through education, training, and industry-relevant jobs and work experience. However, for some people in custody these opportunities were unfulfilled due to staffing, infrastructure, and equipment constraints. Statewide delays in treatment assessments also reduced the types of rehabilitative opportunities people at the prison farms could engage in.

### 2.1 Farms offered a busy, constructive day that built resilience and work-readiness

Vocational Support Officers (VSOs) perform a vital role training and upskilling people in custody. They provide prisoners with the opportunity to build general work-readiness, such as teamwork, time management, communication, leadership, and conflict resolution skills, as well as personal responsibility and resilience. However, VSOs at the prison farms also provided important industry-relevant work experience, critical at a time when the wider community is experiencing sustained low unemployment and competition for jobs is high.

As such, we were pleased to find the breadth of employment opportunities offered at the prison farms was far greater compared to those found in medium- and maximum-security facilities. For example, jobs in recreation, the canteen and library mirrored those at other prisons. But the farms also offered work in the abattoir, the dairy, the market gardens and garden production, the poultry sheds, mechanical workshops, in addition to work in the community through Section 95.

#### Employment with industry-relevant work experience

Employment levels at Karnet and Pardelup were very good. Karnet had a consistently low unemployment rate measuring just five percent at the time of the inspection. Management had driven an expectation all prisoners had to join a work party. It meant, in addition to the high participation rate, there was also a high number of workers receiving Level 1 gratuities (23%), the highest achievable within a prison. Approximately 130 men worked beyond Karnet's fence every day, and most prisoners we spoke with or surveyed agreed there was a good level and variety of work available. However, they did report 40 to 50 prisoners could be without work on days where short staffing was high.

At Pardelup, every prisoner was working (except for two in full time education) and half were receiving Level 1 gratuities.

#### There were not enough jobs at Wooroloo leaving Vocational Support Officers unfulfilled

Unlike Karnet and Pardelup, Wooroloo had a high unemployment and underemployment rate. On 1 November 2024, approximately one in every four people at Wooroloo were without work or employed in a role that required minimal effort and skill to complete or provided limited potential for development. People in custody need meaningful work and other opportunities which maintain their health and wellbeing while in prison, but which also offer the genuine prospect of skills development

that can be used when they return to the community. This is particularly important at the prison farms where people are leading up to their release.

There were some active employment areas inside Wooroloo's fence with the kitchen, grounds, and cleaning party employing roughly 26% of people in the prison. Beyond the fence, there was limited employment in the external industries (7%), market garden (3%), and in Section 95 roles (6%). But overall, we heard there were not enough positions to meet the demand for work. This was compounded by a reduction in jobs at the prison after the Department ceased commercial activities at all prison industries in February 2024, pending a review. This resulted in the closure of some of Wooroloo's workplaces and restriction in others.

*There aren't enough jobs in the prison for the increasing population ... yet prisoners receive continual pressure from custodial officers in the units to find non-existent jobs.*

Survey comment from a Wooroloo staff member.

While the poor employment rate undermined the constructive day at Wooroloo, it also meant some VSOs were reportedly feeling unfulfilled in their roles. The lack of work meant fewer opportunities for skills assessments, as well as teaching and training people in custody. VSO frustration was also exacerbated by short staffing within their ranks. At the time of the inspection, nine of the 44 VSO positions at Wooroloo were vacant. Despite these challenges, people in custody who responded to our pre-inspection survey valued the VSOs.

## 2.2 Education and training helped build post-release capability despite resourcing limitations

There was a good variety of education and training options available to people in custody at the prison farms. Short courses such as First Aid, White Card, Work Health and Safety, and Chemical Handling were available. Part- and full-time education options included literacy and numeracy courses, information technology courses, arts studies and certificates, as well as tertiary and other higher education options. TAFE also offered opportunities at each of the farms, but student contact hours had been cut significantly.

### Peter's story - Access to training helps improve reintegration success

During my time in prison I have tried to make the most of the time and opportunities I had available to me. I have learned some manual trades such as leather work and chemical handling. I have also used my professional skills in managing people and leading a team. I have learned a lot working and managing a small team, especially when dealing with people with diverse backgrounds and needs. This has been helpful for me, and I will use this experience when I get out. If anything could be improved, it would be to formalise the skills and training acquired through certification or a traineeship.

## Education centres were constrained by staffing, infrastructure, equipment, and a reduction in student contact hours

Education centres at each of the prison farms were under-resourced in various areas. Both Karnet and Pardelup had vacant prison education coordinator positions, reducing course delivery, and increasing reliance on casual tutor staff. At Pardelup, South Regional TAFE also delivered weekly courses matched to skill shortages in the region. Education provision at Wooroloo was also restricted. It was reportedly operating its education centre with the same staffing allocation it had in 2009, despite a significant population increase since that time.

The centres were also constrained by the limited available infrastructure which had not improved or increased since our last inspections of them. Karnet only had four classrooms, and its workshops were mixed-use rather than dedicated spaces. Similarly, at Wooroloo, its seven classrooms were multipurpose and three were shared with programs staff and external RTOs.

Equipment issues also limited training opportunities. We heard South Regional TAFE had refused to use some equipment and machinery at Pardelup due to its age and condition. There were similar concerns at Wooroloo, where some of the vehicles in the mechanics workshop were too old to be used or repaired, or their age meant they did not comply with contemporary work, health, and safety legislation. Staff advised us budget restrictions prevented the purchase of new equipment.

A reduction in student contact hours also strained service delivery. At Karnet we were advised TAFE student contact hours had been cut across the state as part of broader budget efficiencies. This saw hours reduce from 40,000 to just 11,000, while Pardelup only received 4,300 hours for the 2024/25 financial year. Staff at Wooroloo explained its hours (25,000) remained unchanged, although it had reportedly been at that level since 2011/12. Other prisons often 'donated' their unused student hours to the prison farms, helping increase course availability. The unused hours were largely a product of lockdowns preventing people in custody attending education at other prisons.

## A range of skills training but Wooroloo had long waitlists

We found good collaboration between the education and industries areas at Karnet. Together they were focussed on the needs of the men and, at the time of the inspection, they were delivering 95 traineeships across 14 industry areas. RTO training was available to those who had Section 95 approval, and they could obtain credentials in traffic management, chainsaw handling, and water bombing. Some Section 95 approved prisoners at Karnet had also obtained a Certificate II in Rural Operations. Karnet's education centre also managed enrolment in the Carey Mining Certificate II in Surface Extraction. In 2024, three groups of 10 First Nations men went through the training program; it was highly regarded by participants. Another surface extraction course (*Breaking Through*) and *Tracks to Success* (a rail work course) were also offered at Karnet.

At Pardelup there were 25 active traineeships across areas like horticulture, cleaning operations, kitchen operation, cabinetmaking, and automotive. It was also delivering a raft of new initiatives including a fire awareness program, a sheep shearing training course, and Aboriginal Land Heritage Rights course. Pardelup had also established a partnership with service providers ReBoot and Sodexo to identify industry-relevant training opportunities for prisoners.

In contrast, there was limited access to RTO training at Wooroloo. There were almost 430 people on the waitlist for training courses with 230 of those awaiting the opportunity to get a skid steer ticket. We were pleased to see *Breaking Through* and *Tracks to Success* were offered and linked to post-release employment. However, more needs to occur to ensure those placed at Wooroloo can access the number and breadth of training opportunities available at the other farms, and to improve their successful reintegration to the community.

## More First Nations education programs and organisations were needed

At Wooroloo six of the 29 full-time students were First Nations men. The farm offered Indigenous classrooms for English and maths. It also had a weekly yarning class, and a Noongar language and art class, although this was not accredited. However, throughout the inspection many First Nations men expressed they had expected to engage in a wider range of rehabilitation and reintegration opportunities than was being presented. They wanted more First Nations education programs and organisations to connect with.

During the inspection a stepped program for achieving Section 95 was suggested by First Nations men at Wooroloo to engage more of them in education and training. It was proposed that a gradual progression from industries to approved Section 95 RTO training and work may alleviate prisoners lack of access to employment.

They also suggested the education centre could match its courses better with the business needs of the community. This could occur through increased liaison and engagement with community organisations and businesses, including Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations. We expect such efforts would increase the number of employers willing to hire ex-prisoners and take on prisoners through PEP.

## 2.3 Delays in treatment assessments continued to impact people in custody

At the time of the inspection, the adult custodial estate was experiencing an increased delay in the completion of Treatment Assessment Reports (TARs) due to recent changes in policy. TARs are a key part of an individual's management plan and specify the criminogenic programs people must complete to be eligible for early release or reintegrative opportunities. There were 60 overdue TARs at Karnet, approximately five overdue at Pardelup, and 72 outstanding TARs at Wooroloo. This delay was found to have a range of impacts for prisoners at the farms.

### Delayed treatment assessments affected the rehabilitation potential of prison farms

The absence of a completed treatment assessment directly impacted prisoner welfare, rehabilitation, and reintegration because individuals could not engage in the necessary programs to address their offending. It also meant they were ineligible for opportunities like Section 95 due to not completing their program requirements.

*I have been here for a year, and I have 6 months left and I still haven't been treatment assessed and therefore can't complete any programs and I am not*

*sure what my requirements are for parole. If I don't get assessed soon, I won't be eligible for parole through no fault of my own.*

Karnet survey respondent's comment about his treatment assessment.

The delays in treatment assessments had a direct impact on parole outcomes. At Wooroloo, 162 prisoners (35.6%) with parole terms were past their Earliest Eligibility Date (EED), while 160 prisoners (35.2%) had their parole denied. These figures were close to the state averages of 36.3% and 38.9%, respectively. However, a significant disparity was observed when comparing First Nations prisoners to non-First Nations prisoners. Over 50% of First Nations prisoners at Wooroloo were past their EED or had their parole denied, compared to just over 30% of non-First Nations prisoners in the same categories. Many of these prisoners had been denied parole by the Prisoners Review Board with unmet treatment needs. A similar disparity was observed at both Karnet and Pardelup.

It is clear there are significant flow-on effects if less people are released to parole. It contributes to the increasing number of people in custody but also where those people can be placed and how they are managed.

## 2.4 While personal responsibility is encouraged, formalised development of life skills is missing

The prison farms emphasised personal responsibility. Each had an open campus layout that reflected some sense of freedom and permitted largely free movement across the sites. People at the prison farms were not secured in cell, including overnight, which meant they could leave their accommodation. While this meant wanderers could be found out of bounds, the high expectation on prisoners' personal responsibility prevented this from occurring too frequently.

Open access to onsite recreation throughout the day and evening also encouraged personal responsibility. Prisoners were required to balance their work commitments with their access to recreation. The prison farms had implemented strict rules around the use of the prisoner gyms, including hygiene and cleanliness requirements equal to those found in a community gym.

At Karnet, several health initiatives also encouraged personal responsibility. Those identified as requiring more supervision and monitoring had an opportunity to share their opinions and say what care and supports they might require. Health staff also provided education on issues such as cardiac care, diabetes, asthma, and the importance of medication compliance. Patients told us they valued this knowledge to increase their autonomy over their own health and wellbeing.

Similarly, self-care accommodation options at Karnet and Wooroloo also gave people in custody the opportunity to develop responsibility. Self-care prisoners could cook their own meals using food provided by the prison. And while Pardelup did not have a self-care model, prisoners there could opt to self-cater at their own cost using the outdoor kitchen.

### Peter's story - Developing life skills

I spent two and a half years in a general accommodation unit in a 2-up room. I was comfortable as I was one of the lucky ones to get into a donga which had an ensuite toilet and shower. After this time, I was at the top of the list to move into the self-care unit. I was initially hesitant to move as I was comfortable in the donga, and I was worried about having to deal with the inter-personal politics of sharing a house with 11 (or more) other people. I decided to move anyway, and I was pleasantly surprised. The politics was not a big issue. I also enjoyed being able to cook for myself and this made me feel like I was back on the outside, when I used to cook for myself. I didn't realise how significant this would be as it was not a motivating factor for me to move into self-care.

In self-care, all residents need to contribute to the cleaning and maintenance of the house. Chores are rostered and need to be completed daily. At times these can be onerous, especially when having a busy day and needing to cook for yourself, but this has encouraged me to be more organised and domestically responsible. I will admit I was never too keen on doing household chores on the outside. I left that responsibility up to my wife (I know it is a very outdated model). I can say I won't have issues with this anymore. Prison life has also taught me to be more fastidious with my bed making and room tidiness. When all you have is a bed and a little bit of space, it is worth maintaining this and keeping it in order.

While these incidental learning opportunities underlined individual responsibility, the prison farms placed minimal emphasis on the formal development of life skills. None of the prison farms had a Life Skills VSO, yet prisoners wanted practical learning activities like cooking lessons and budgeting. Those in self-care at Wooroloo also reported few other independent living skills – they did not take turns cooking meals for one another, instead opting to prepare meals individually and according to personal preferences. While this allowed for some autonomy, it did not foster cooperation, relationship building, or the development of broader life skills, such as meal planning, teamwork, or responsibility-sharing.

Given the relative freedoms within the minimum-security prison farm environment, the formal development of life skills through structured and practical learning should be prioritised.

#### **Recommendation 5**

Prioritise the development of life skills through structured and practical learning activities.



### 3 Preparations for release were impacted by systems issues and resourcing limitations

As releasing prisons, the three farms should offer a range of opportunities which support people rejoining society. We were pleased to find reintegrative mechanisms were available, such as external activities like Section 95 work, as well as paid employment in the community and the option to reconnect with family and community through home leave. However, the number of people able to access these opportunities was limited by application processes and approval delays, as well as resourcing constraints like short staffing.

#### 3.1 Section 95 approvals take too long but the opportunity to work externally was valued

Under Section 95 of the *Prisons Act 1981* people in custody are permitted to be absent from a prison to participate in approved services and programs (external activities) for their wellbeing and rehabilitation. This includes work, leisure, and recreational activities which can be supervised and unsupervised (DOJ, 2024A).

Section 95 work is an important and controlled step towards reintegration but is only available to sentenced prisoners who have achieved minimum-security status.

#### Valuable work was available through Section 95

The prison farms offered a wide range of Section 95 work to prisoners which can develop important skills helpful upon release. Men we spoke with during the inspection explained the work was hard, and some was labour-intensive, but it was an important mechanism to gaining work experience in different environments. This was key to building their confidence, pride, and self-worth, particularly on completion of a project and allowing others to see their achievements. Many also considered Section 95 work a form of reparation where they could give back to the community.

On 1 November 2024 there were 14 Section 95 workers at Karnet, eight at Pardelup, and 27 at Wooroloo. Some of the key activities involving those at Wooroloo included:

- The Avondale Project, funded by the National Trust, for the upkeep and upgrades at Discovery Farm. At the time of the inspection, 15 prisoners were receiving accredited training in the renovation of heritage builds and would be listed on a national register for their skill set.
- Seniors' Day events with the Seniors Recreation Council of Western Australia.
- Assisting set up and pack down of the Gidjegannup show, participation in the show and Annual Farm Art Awards.
- Clearing debris and reconstructing the Kookaburra cinema in Mundaring after it was damaged by storms.
- The Wooroloo external visits building, which was almost fully completed by Section 95 workers, and by prisoner workers in the industries workshops. This involved concreting, construction, and fencing.

### Peter's story - The opportunity to give back to the community

I would like to give back to the community whilst in prison. This is not easy to do other than through the S95 work crew. Given that I don't want to change my job, there are limited ways to contribute to the community. It would be good to have opportunities to do this as part of the S95 activities (non-work crew). An example would be an activity where we can help the Buddhist monastery down the road. They could do with help maintaining their gardens and general maintenance. Given that they give their time to visit us weekly, this would be a valuable contribution back to them. It would also help prisoners with S95 approval interact with the community.

### Approval processes for Section 95 were slow

One of the most significant challenges to engaging more people in Section 95 opportunities was the length of time applications took to approve. Men at Karnet told us they believed applications were taking between three and six months to be approved. At Pardelup men reported their approvals had taken eight weeks, but alleged others took much longer. They said the lengthy approval process was a source of frustration, particularly after their applications were delayed due to the statewide backlog in IMPs and treatment assessments. And the lack of any communication once an application was submitted heightened their irritation.

The slow approval process was a well-known problem we have reported on previously (OICS, 2023A; OICS, 2022A; OICS, 2019). To help reduce timelines, a wider or global assessment document which removes repetitive checks, questions, and criteria across the various external activities assessments could be implemented at the initial stages when a prisoner is rated suitable for minimum security and placement at the prison farms. As they progress through custody and near their eligibility dates, a review of the global document would allow for information that may affect the decision about the activity to be updated or included. This could expedite the application and approval process and reduce frustration from staff and prisoners.

#### Recommendation 6

Consider implementing a global assessment document to assess a prisoner's eligibility for various external activities, which can be updated as the prisoner progresses towards their eligibility dates.

### Demand for Section 95 hampered by officer staffing

At all farms we heard the demand for Section 95 work from the prisoner group outstripped capacity. Departmental policy establishes a ratio of one officer to eight Section 95 workers, although this can be increased on exception and with approval (DOJ, 2024A). At the time of the inspection one of the Section 95 officer roles at Pardelup was temporarily vacant leaving just one other officer available to supervise the men. Staff explained that even before becoming vacant, the second officer position was regularly redeployed to cover other staff shortages within the farm, estimated to occur

approximately once a week. They reflected this practice was disappointing for the prisoner workers who wanted to be actively engaged in their projects, but also had an impact on the communities where the work was being done.

### Section 95 opportunities at Wooroloo were overshadowed by other aspects of the prison environment

Section 95 workers at Wooroloo told us they valued the opportunities available at the prison farm. They felt welcomed by the communities they worked in, spoke highly of their supervising Section 95 officers, and emphasised that working in the community was highly rewarding. However, this was overshadowed by some other aspects of life at Wooroloo which detracted from the overall incentive of their placement. This included the quality and quantity of food which was provided while they were working in the community. They received one chicken roll which did not sustain them and were disappointed excess food in the prison was regularly discarded rather than provided to them.

They were also frustrated they commenced Section 95 activities on Level 3 gratuities (\$7.38 per day) despite often performing meaningful and physically demanding tasks for sustained periods. When compared to unit workers, which was often menial in nature, the financial incentives for Section 95 prisoners were minimal. We found 11 of the 27 Section 95 prisoners (41%) were receiving Level 3 gratuities, of which nine were First Nations people.

**Table 4: About 40% of people approved for Section 95 activities at Wooroloo Prison Farm earned just \$7.38 per day for their work.**

	Section 95		Unit Work	
	First Nations	Non-First Nations	First Nations	Non-First Nations
Level 1	1	4	0	3
Level 2	4	7	0	4
Level 3	9	2	6	19
Level 4	N/A	N/A	4	9
Total	14	13	10	35

## 3.2 Prisoner Employment Program approval processes impacted its viability

The Prisoner Employment Program (PEP) is another mechanism available for people in custody to begin recommencing life in the community. Prior to release people in custody can obtain paid employment outside the prison, earning skills and savings while also building confidence around their reintegration. PEP opportunities can also ensure stable secure employment on release, which is a key factor to guarding against future reoffending.

People in custody are only eligible for PEP if they are a minimum-security, sentenced prisoner, who has completed their treatment interventions and are within 12 months of their potential release

date from custody (DOJ, 2024B). However, paid employment should only commence six months prior to release and applications for the program are only considered three months before employment can commence, essentially nine months prior to release (DOJ, 2024B).

## Few people accessed the Prisoner Employment Program and there were lengthy wait times

Very few people were accessing PEP at the time of the inspection. There were three at Karnet, nine at Wooroloo, and none at Pardelup. Figures were slightly better over the previous 12 to 36 months. At Karnet, 13 people had accessed PEP since the beginning of 2022, while at Wooroloo 24 people had been approved in the last 12 months and 76 over the past three years. Another 10 applications had been submitted to the Department's head office awaiting approval.

Fewer people at Pardelup had been approved, just 23 since the beginning of 2022. In part, this could be explained by the high number of people at Pardelup with immigration alerts which reduced the pool of eligible prisoners. At all prison farms there were people who had not completed their IMP treatment programs to make them eligible for PEP, while others continued to wait for their IMP to be drafted, which reduced the pool further.

### Karl's story – Long delays accessing the PEP

Karl was eligible to apply for the PEP on 13 July 2024, for a possible start date with an employer on 13 October 2024. Karl was hoping to gain employment in the same field he previously worked in, helping him to reintegrate back into the community on release.

He submitted his application to participate in the PEP on 30 July 2024. However, his education and vocational training assessment was only completed by Wooroloo staff on 5 September. The assessment found he had all the necessary skills to participate in his chosen field of work and recommended approval.

The PEP application did not progress for almost two months. On 21 October the PEP application was finalised, and the following day the Superintendent supported the application following the case conference. The report noted it was Karl's first term of imprisonment, he had a low risk of re-offending, and had maintained good prison conduct.

It took a further two months for the Director Sentence Management to approve Karl's PEP application on 6 January 2025. By this time, Karl only had four months before his earliest release date to participate in his employment and earn a wage to help him reintegrate back into community life.

The approval process took 160 days to complete.

Approvals for PEP were also not very timely. As participants are only supervised in the community by an employer, the Department undertakes a thorough eligibility assessment of the prisoner, the employer, and associated risks. While we appreciate the need to ensure community safety, the application process as written in policy is convoluted and does not establish target timeframes [see figure 3] (DOJ, 2024B). As a result, the process is susceptible to delays, which causes frustration for prisoners.

To demonstrate these delays, we reviewed all PEP decisions in 2024 (n=42, excludes four duplicates) for Karnet, Wooroloo, and Pardelup, and found:

- on average it took 111 days for prison staff to recommend a prisoner be approved for PEP
- it took a further 32 days for the Department's head office to finalise approval
- overall, applications were taking on average 162 days, or just over five months, to be approved.

This meant the three-month approval process was taking two months longer than prescribed in policy, which reduced prisoner's ability to participate in paid employment.

Employers were equally frustrated, as their approvals to join the program were also lengthy. Together, the approval delays meant some employers withdrew from the program which further limited the options available to those seeking paid employment.

Timely approvals were also hampered by prisoners' access to a vehicle. People in custody could drive to their place of employment if they had a valid, current driver's license. They could use their own vehicle or an employer's vehicle. However, those without access to a vehicle were dependent on other means, such as public transport, which was limited in the semi-isolated locations of the three prison farms, or a driver where prison vehicles were available. At Wooroloo, there was no PEP driver, so the Employment Coordinator drove some of the PEP workers to their jobs. Departmental policy also largely prevented prisoners driving with passengers unless an approved supervisor was present (DOJ, 2024B). Many people in custody were frustrated by this as they were employed at the same location and suggested carpooling was appropriate.

During the inspection some staff suggested a review of PEP and its approval processes was required. They saw the benefit to former prisoners and the impact 'the extra money and early return to the work force from PEP has assist[ed] them with their reintegration'. In response to our previous recommendation, the Department committed to identifying process improvements. But we remain concerned processes are still too long, and the three-month window to apply for the program is too short.

### **Recommendation 7**

With regards to the Prisoner Employment Program:

- a) Allow prisoners to apply for the program earlier than three months prior to their eligibility to commence paid employment.
- b) Review the application process to identify process barriers or resourcing constraints contributing to delays in approvals.

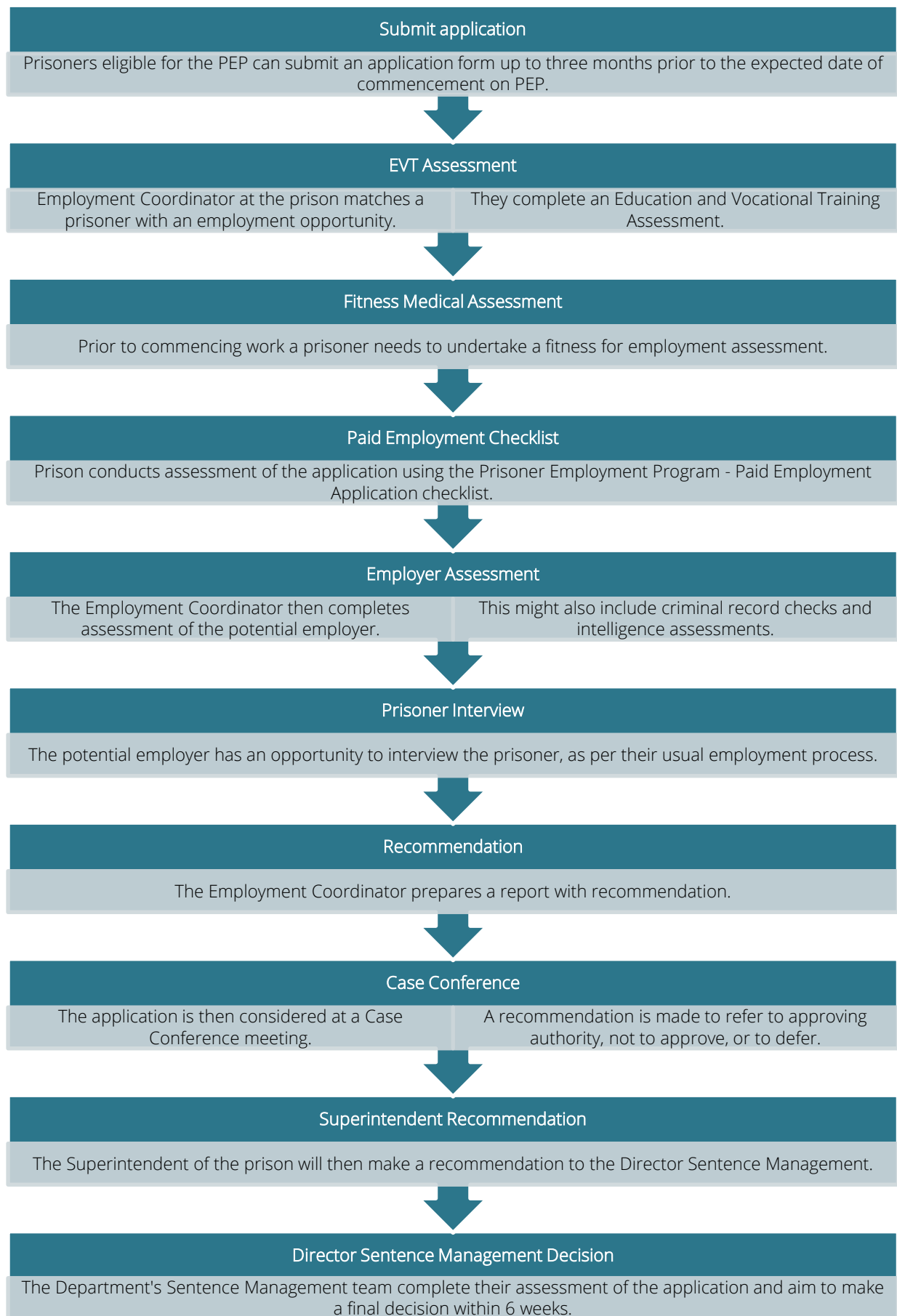


Figure 3: The application process for PEP was complex.

## Board fee payable by those who accessed the Prisoner Employment Program

People accessing paid employment through PEP were charged a nominal 'board' fee. Those who worked more than 20 hours per week were required to pay the Department \$120.00 a week, while those working less than 20 hours paid \$60.00 per week. PEP workers were also required to pay the prison farms for incidental expenses, such as petrol, public transport, meals, work clothing, and equipment necessary for their engagement in the program (DOJ, 2024B). After taking expenses into account, the Department's policy states they should not earn less than Level 1 gratuities.

Paying incidental costs associated with employment was realistic and replicated the need to pay for expenses when working in the community. However, imposing a board fee raises interesting ethical questions regarding the state charging money to incarcerate people it lawfully has a duty of care to. Those accessing PEP must return to the prison farms after work, they do not have the ongoing freedoms those paying a board fee in the community have.

The fee was longstanding and most people accessing PEP were accepting of the common practice. However, historically it was also associated with single-cell privileges. Due to the significant population pressures, many had lost this privilege and were required to share their cells. Some people we spoke with during the inspection were frustrated they continued to pay the charge despite the lost privilege, and that the full fee was still imposed while there was reduced amenity.

### **Recommendation 8**

Remove the requirement for prisoners participating in the Prisoner Employment Program to pay the Department of Justice a fee for their accommodation.

## 3.3 Home leave approval processes were also slow

People in custody can also access home leave as means to re-establish their relationships with their families and communities. Like PEP, home leave is an important mechanism to aid successful reintegration into society. It is an opportunity that is particularly important for longer-term prisoners and those potentially experiencing institutionalisation due to their time in custody. This is because it is a graduated or staged approach to rejoining the community which provides time to adjust to social and familial changes that may have occurred during the person's imprisonment.

Also, like PEP, eligibility to apply for home leave is reserved for sentenced, minimum-security prisoners. They must have served at least 12 months in custody under sentence and be within 12 months of their potential date of release (DOJ, 2024C). They must also have completed their treatment interventions and be able to identify a sponsor for their proposed home leave. Suitability assessments are performed including the prospective sponsor and the proposed address (DOJ, 2024C).

At the time of the inspection:

- 18 people at Karnet were approved for home leave or approximately 5% of the prison farm's population.
- 17 people were approved for home leave at Wooroloo or less than 4% of its population.
- Only two people at Pardelup were accessing home leave, but 16 had been approved since the beginning of 2022 or 11% of the total number of people released from Pardelup in that time.

### Peter's story – Accessing home leave

I have been fortunate to obtain home leave. This was not a trivial matter and I had to win an appeal before finally being granted home leave. As part of my appeal I argued that I needed to spend time connecting with my extended family who are resident overseas. I am happy to say that this is a very important part of my home leave as I can spend a couple of hours video calling with my family. This is helping me reconnect with them as they will be an integral part of my support network when I get out.

During my time in prison I have also been supported by my extended family through regular phone calls. I have also had the support of a good friend who has visited me regularly and maintained regular contact. Without this support I am not sure I would have been able to make the personal progress I have made.

## Approvals slowed due to complex processes and staffing pressures

Like PEP, there is a complex approval process for home leave applications. This includes an assessment of the proposed home leave address and sponsor by the Department's community corrections branch. A prison level assessment of the application follows before a recommendation to the Director Sentence Management is made and they conduct their own assessment. As is the case with PEP, the complexity of the home leave process makes it susceptible to delays, for instance, due to staffing shortages, insufficient backfill of staff on leave, and delays in intelligence assessments or sponsor interviews.

For example, at Wooroloo, we heard the prison level application processes were hampered by staffing pressures. In the 12 months before the inspection, Wooroloo's population grew by 13% but there were no additional resources allocated to manage reintegration activities. The priority focus was IMPs, classification reviews, and parole reports.

At Karnet, prisoners also complained about the delayed approvals. And some advised us they were confused and frustrated by contradictory information and other external activities approvals, as well as bureaucratic processes. For example, one man explained his home leave application had been denied due to security reasons despite his approved Section 95 worker status. He said he was later granted home leave. However, he noted another occasion where a 24-hour home leave application was denied without explanation even though he had two 12-hour leave occasions approved on prior consecutive weekends.



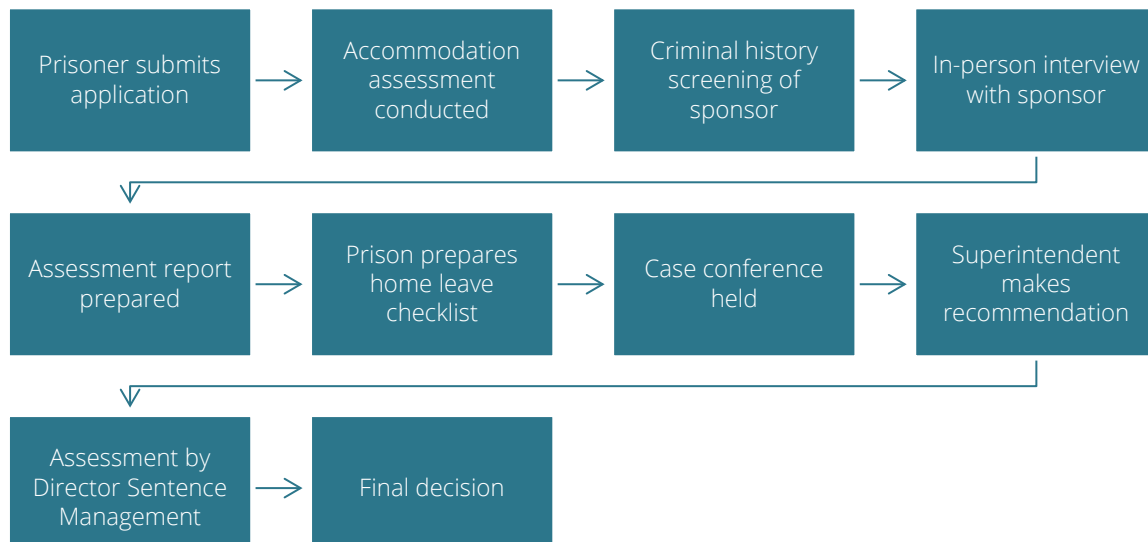


Figure 4: The home leave application process was also complex and susceptible to delays.

Another man explained he was transferred from Karnet to Bunbury Regional Prison to complete a treatment program. While there, he became eligible for home leave and wanted to apply to begin the arrangement in three months. However, because he was at a medium-security prison, he was advised he could not apply but could commence the application which was printed for him. The prisoner completed the application including obtaining his sponsor's signature witnessed by a prison officer at Bunbury. On transfer back to Karnet he tried to submit his application, but it was denied as it was old, not printed at Karnet, and the prison farm did not recognise the witness. He explained the form was a month old and identical to the one issued by Karnet except for a barcode.

Examples like these demonstrate the need for clear messaging around processes. Knowledge and understanding are key components for people in custody which build autonomy and responsibility during their incarceration. Mixed messages and the inaccurate provision of information can make people feel confused, and frustrated, and can escalate tensions between those in custody and staff.

## 4 Ongoing supports varied across the three farms

There were varying levels of support available to people in custody at the prison farms, across a range of services. However, across all sites we found support services were being stretched due to staffing and resourcing challenges.

There were also opportunities to improve the cultural supports offered to First Nations people, particularly those who were being held off Country. Likewise, there was a need to increase access to information and supports for people who were facing deportation.

### 4.1 Peer support prisoners continued to be an asset in monitoring and managing prisoner welfare

The Peer Support Teams (PSTs) at the prison farms were busy and representative of the broader multicultural populations. They contributed to several aspects of the prisoner journey, including:

- Providing support during orientation – orientating the new arrivals and performing welfare checks within the first week to ensure people were settled and had access to funds and medications etc.
- Assisting with daily living concerns – some current concerns were bathroom cleanliness, food variety, access to visits, and gym provisions.
- Communicating prisoners needs to officers.
- Providing release support – helping peers write resumes and parole applications.
- Other assistance where required – preparing peers for court attendances.

#### Peter's story – Volunteering as peer support

As part of my volunteer role in peer support I have been able to aid fellow prisoners with welfare, legal, parole and grief related issues. Having lived through the many dysfunctional areas of the prison system, I am compelled to help others once I am out of here. I intend to make use of my experience once I am out and be involved in men's groups.

The PSTs also offered welfare, social and cultural support. Previously we recommended the Department provide peer support prisoners with mental health training, so they had more skills and boundaries to meet the needs of the at-risk prisoner population (OICS, 2023A; OICS, 2022A). The Department supported these recommendations to some degree, and mental health and suicide prevention training had since been delivered. Karnet peer supporters were also positive about additional training they had received, especially in disability awareness and parole planning.

In contrast, peer support prisoners at Pardelup reported receiving only a brief half-hour session with the Prison Support Officer (PSO) about recognising vulnerability through body language. While this may be valuable, we are eager to see more prisoners exposed to the training and opportunities available to the peer support prisoners at Karnet and Wooroloo. This would be a beneficial part of their preparation for release.

#### **Recommendation 9**

Train willing participants at all prison farms, upskilling them in areas such as mental health, suicide prevention, and disability awareness.

### **Peer support prisoners felt overworked and unsupported, particularly due to their minimal supervision**

Peer support at the prison farms was an active role that was regarded with pride. But it was also demanding and, combined with the increased population, we heard peer support prisoners felt overworked. For example, Wooroloo peer support prisoners said they were often relied upon to de-escalate sources of conflict and emotional outbursts, allegedly because they had better skills or rapport with newer prisoners. However, with only 10 peer support prisoners, this reliance could be overwhelming. Some also felt a small proportion of the officer group lacked respect for the peer support role which led to some frustration.

Peer support prisoners at each of the prison farms also told us they felt unsupported, particularly because the supervision by their respective PSOs was at times limited. Most had monthly meetings with the PSO, but this appeared to be inconsistent at Pardelup. And although the Karnet PSO was allocated five days a week, we were told they were often diverted to Hakea and Casuarina prisons where wellbeing issues were deemed more acute. The appropriateness of diverting support services from minimum-security prisoners should be reconsidered, particularly given the potential for pre-release anxiety.

#### **Recommendation 10**

Adequately resource the custodial estate with Prison Support Officers, preventing the diversion of services.

## **4.2 Physical health services were managed well despite resourcing limitations**

Health centres at the prison farms offered a good level of service to people in custody. Karnet was the busiest of the centres providing seven-day coverage. Wooroloo was less busy with a reportedly low level of medical needs. Pardelup provided a clinical nurse covering the health centre services five days per week. Albany Regional Prison provided onsite support at Pardelup once a month.

Some allied health services were also available, mostly at Karnet. This included podiatry, optometry, physiotherapy, and phlebotomy.

### Health services vacancies were ongoing

Although prison farm health centres were well managed, they were constrained by resourcing limitations. There were vacancies and/or temporary arrangements for clinical staff at Karnet and Wooroloo, and no coverage was provided when the medical practitioner was on leave. Similarly, at the time of the inspection, Pardelup's nurse was away due to unplanned leave and her services were not replaced (although the CNM from Albany did attend the farm to speak with us as part of the inspection process). We have found similar shortages and stretched resourcing in clinical teams elsewhere in the state during recent inspections (OICS, 2025; OICS, 2024A; OICS, 2024C).

Karnet and Wooroloo had tried to mitigate some of the challenges posed by clinical staff shortages by altering the timing and structure of the daily medication rounds to accommodate nurse availability. With the assistance and oversight of the medical practitioner, the health centres had also moved some people onto monthly medication packs. This had the added benefit of increasing prisoner's autonomy over their health care. Monthly medication packs were also being piloted at Karnet.

The shortages likely explained some of the negative reflections people in custody had about health services:

- At Karnet only 30% of respondents thought general health services were good compared to 51% in 2022.
- Similarly, only 22% of Wooroloo's respondents perceived health services favourably, down from 41% last inspection.
- At Pardelup the figure was most stark, down from 86% last inspection to 48% in 2024. This was despite feedback received that the nurse at Pardelup was well liked by people in custody.

Custodial staff shortages also affected the delivery of health services. We were advised that Pardelup tried to guard against closing the health centre when short staffing occurred because it already offered only a limited service compared to the other farms.

### Dental care continued to pose challenges at Karnet and Wooroloo

There was a long waitlist of unmet dental needs for those at Karnet. Last inspection we reported that dental care at that prison was non-existent (OICS, 2023A). Since then, a dental surgery in Cockburn had treated all patients with 'category 1' or acute dental issues such as trauma to the teeth. However, many people were not assessed as experiencing acute dental concerns and therefore remained on the waitlist.

At Wooroloo, dental service provision had been slowly decreasing prior to both the dentist and dental nurse resigning. We were advised a temporary replacement service had been organised. However, recruitment had not secured permanent replacements. This is a disappointing decline in service since our previous inspection (OICS, 2022A).

These challenges were reflected in the low satisfaction with dental services in our pre-inspection survey. At Karnet only six percent of prisoners reported dental services were good or okay. At Wooroloo satisfaction was higher but not ideal (10% good, 19% okay). Dissatisfaction was also reflected by many people we spoke with during our inspection. We saw one man with a loose front tooth and met many more alleging they experienced persistent dental pain and discomfort. They noted the negative impact of limited dental care on their self-esteem, and mental and physical health.

*The dental care is non-existent and [we're] told if we want dental care we have to transfer to another prison, by health staff, even when in extreme pain. Many prisoners are suffering from dental issues.*

Karnet survey respondent's comment about dental care.

We were pleased to find there was no waitlist to see the dentist for those placed at Pardelup. A local dentist in Mount Barker accommodated appointments on an as needs basis.

### Ongoing challenges with external medical escorts

Wooroloo was struggling to escort people in custody to external medical appointments. In 2023/24, the number of cancelled and rescheduled appointments was high (128). A few appointments were rescheduled to accommodate higher medical priorities, but most were cancelled due to a lack of available Wooroloo staff to facilitate the escort.

Wooroloo had sought to alleviate this issue by bringing some services into the facility. At the time of the inspection, visits by Hearing Australia were being organised to provide free hearing tests and, where needed, hearing aids, to First Nations men. This was an excellent initiative that increased people's access to health care while mitigating against cancellations.

Karnet was similarly struggling to ensure people in custody attended their external medical appointments. Previously this was due to insufficient escort staff (OICS, 2023A). However, we were pleased to find up to four external medical escorts per day could now be facilitated. This meant the capacity to facilitate the escort was improved, but there were other challenges which influenced people's access to external health care. These included:

- Hospitals rescheduled appointments, sometimes with no new date in place.
- Admission times did not account for travel time to metropolitan hospitals or staff working hours. Some patients were scheduled for admission at 6.00 am while the day shift only commenced at 7.00am.
- There were no custodial escort vehicles available.
- Another medical appointment was given a higher priority.
- The patient refused to attend.

## 4.3 Mental health supports were limited at all farms

There was an expectation that a person's placement at a prison farm meant they required limited mental health support. Those with complex, established mental health needs were not placed at the

farms from the outset, and those who presented with requiring a higher level of support and monitoring during their placement were transferred to better resourced prisons.

### Mental health supports were inconsistently available

Mental health and wellbeing supports were inconsistently available to those placed at the prison farms. For example:

- There was no mental health nurse at Pardelup or Albany Regional Prison, and there was limited counselling support available through Psychological Health Services (PHS) via tele-health consultations.
- In contrast, Karnet was resourced for one PHS counsellor four days per week and a mental health nurse one day each week.
- Wooroloo had a mental health nurse two days per week and two PHS counsellors covered three days per week collectively.

Resources were also often diverted to other facilities. For example, at Karnet the PHS counsellor was sometimes redirected to other prisons, including for telehealth appointments to northern prisons. Prisoners on waiting lists were subsequently referred to non-clinical or pastoral supports such as the chaplaincy and the PSO.

Wooroloo's previously full-time mental health nurse had been reduced to two days per week. Due to population pressures the nurse was assisting Bandyup Women's Prison on the remaining three days. As such, Wooroloo was offering online mental health appointments to patients, but there was no additional clinical nurse available to sit with the patient during appointments. This meant the duty prison officer stationed in the medical centre had to be vigilant about the patient's mental state, watching through a window in the consult room.

Karnet's service level was also reduced - its mental health nurse had taken two months leave and there was no replacement coverage.

## 4.4 Opportunities to improve upon the range of cultural supports for First Nations prisoners

Although First Nations people in custody at the prison farms were well underrepresented, many reported a good level of cultural support and safety. At Karnet and Pardelup, First Nations prisoners acknowledged the benefits of their minimum-security placements and the respective freedoms. However, they also noted opportunities for further progress which may also increase their representation at the prison farms. In contrast, First Nations' people at Wooroloo were less positive about the cultural support provided to them and they claimed the recently revitalised Aboriginal cultural area felt tokenistic.

### A range of cultural supports were offered to First Nations people at Karnet and Pardelup

At Karnet we found a strong focus on promoting the interests of First Nations prisoners.

- A range of cultural supports and activities were available to encourage recognition and respect for Aboriginal cultures.
- Significant events such as NAIDOC and Reconciliation weeks were observed.
- First Nations prisoners were involved in planning for NAIDOC activities, which included provision of cultural food, an art exhibition, and craft activities.
- Elders visited to talk about historical achievements of First Nations people.
- There were other regular activities celebrating First Nations culture including performances from a live band, smoking ceremonies, language classes, and a yarning circle led by community Elders.
- Men were also involved in the 16 Days in WA campaign, an initiative to raise awareness about gender-based violence.

There were fewer regular activities at Pardelup but people in custody still reported the farm did reasonably well in this space. They were particularly complementary of the access to cultural foods, which included collecting kangaroo tails, vegetables, and ingredients to make damper from the kitchen.

### Wooroloo cultural supports were lacking, and the cultural area felt ‘tokenistic’

Aboriginal prisoners at Wooroloo reported a lack of cultural supports at the farm. They were eager for more First Nations staff, but they also sought more Aboriginal developed and led programs. This included one based on the 12-steps program which was facilitated by Aboriginal people and incorporated more verbal learning in place of written content. Positively, Wooroloo management had submitted the program to the Department and was awaiting approval for its implementation.

There also appeared to be a breakdown in understanding around cultural foods. Every third week Aboriginal prisoners could cook kangaroo tails in the kitchen and bring their meals to the cultural area. The fire pit was not able to be used for this purpose and so the tails were often warmed in the ovens of nearby units. First Nations people told us they felt this failed to understand the significance of a ‘cook up’, which combined cooking with yarning in a community meeting place. We also heard during NAIDOC Week kangaroo dishes were prepared by a non-Aboriginal prisoner, who used Moroccan spices instead of traditional Indigenous spices.

Further, many First Nations prisoners were disillusioned by Wooroloo’s recently revitalised cultural area. Some described it as ‘the spot that was done by white fellas for black fellas’. First Nations involvement in the development of the cultural area was acknowledged, but people were disappointed by the partial representation of culture and the limited access to the site. A firepit and yarning circle were also built, but the fire could only be lit in winter and the area’s power supply was always padlocked, restricting usage.



Photo 1: Feedback from First Nations prisoners about the cultural area was not complementary.

## Out of Country First Nations people needed greater supports

Despite the population increase across the custodial estate, the Department had done well to maintain roughly the same proportion of out-of-Country First Nations men at the prison farms this inspection compared to their previous inspections. Despite this, we found some off-Country prisoners needed more support.

At Karnet we found some regional prisoners had to overcome linguistic challenges and could not always make themselves understood or comprehend staff queries. There was no awareness within the prisoner group an Aboriginal interpreter could be requested and there were no out-of-Country community-based Elders or other cultural visitors available to help them settle. Cultural rules of association were also not observed, and regional men expressed frustration that female staff interviewed them.

Off-Country prisoners at Wooroloo also suggested there was limited understanding of the barriers they experienced. They explained cultural food options were mostly from the Noongar culture. Beyond kangaroo tails, Aboriginal prisoners from remote and regional communities expressed a desire for other traditional foods.

The out-of-Country men also expressed frustration at arranging finances. For those from communities with limited or no access to computers and the internet, they said their families were unable to electronically transfer funds into prisoner accounts.

Where visits could be arranged for family to attend Wooroloo, there were issues with availability of provided transport and the limited allocation of weekly in person or e-visits. A bus was provided for one visit session a week, on a Sunday. However, weekend visits were often booked out by visitors living in Perth. E-visits at Wooroloo were also only available for those with family outside of Perth and restricted to one 20-minute session a week. A weekend yarning circle at the cultural area for men off Country, at a time when others had visits with family, may alleviate some of the stressors and provide good support for those out of Country.

### **Recommendation 11**

Wooroloo Prison Farm should establish a weekend yarning circle at the cultural area for out-of-Country First Nations men.

## 4.5 Prisoners facing deportation lacked agency, supports, and information

Prisoners facing deportation reported they lacked agency, support, and information about their potential deportation. This group have a legal right to appeal the revocation of their visas, but we found they were offered limited support to do so, including access to the internet to prepare for their appeal and a phone to help source legal representation. They had limited awareness about recent changes to migration legislation and how this might impact them. And, they could not identify who to go to for support.



The group also wanted consular support and information from the Department of Home Affairs outlining what to expect in immigration detention. Many said they had had no direct engagement with the Department of Home Affairs. Others said they had spoken with immigration officials earlier in their sentence regarding the likelihood of their deportation but heard nothing since. It was suggested a single point of contact could help answer their queries, navigate processes, and provide information, potentially through an annual or biannual visit to the prison.

We have raised these concerns in the past and the Department's response has generally been it is a Federal Government responsibility. That may well be correct, but the reality is that impacted prisoners are powerless to change this and entirely reliant on the Department to facilitate access to services or information.

Given the concerns that continue to be expressed by people in custody, the Department should engage the Department of Home Affairs to identify mechanisms which will strengthen supports for this group. This could be achieved through a dedicated liaison point, similar to justice liaison officers from the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

#### **Recommendation 12**

Increase the access to information and support for prisoners facing deportation due to visa cancellations.

## 5 More strategic support is required from the Department of Justice

A strategic approach is needed for the prison farms. The Department must support them to achieve their rehabilitation and reintegration responsibilities within the custodial estate and break down the barriers we have identified in this report. This includes adequately resourcing the prison farms to meet these rehabilitative and reintegrative objectives, as well as to sustain the vital function they play in the prison-food supply chain.

### 5.1 Prison farms require more funding

We have argued the prison farms lacked adequate funding to meet their requirements fulfilling both rehabilitative and reintegrative expectations, as well as the necessities of a working farm (OICS, 2023A; OICS, 2022A; OICS, 2022C). At the time of this inspection, we were told the 2024/25 budget for each of the prison farms were seemingly based on third quarter 2023/24 information and data. However, the budgets also required significant cost cutting, in some areas of up to 39%. Each facility advised us this was not practical, nor achievable with the increases to their population numbers. This encouraged prison management to spend whatever was necessary to maintain operations, behaviour that promoted poor financial management and placed individuals at professional risk.

Compounding the budgetary restrictions, the prison farms also did not have equipment replacement schedules for plant, machinery or prison and farm vehicles. Unsurprisingly, we found many were unusable and had fallen into disrepair. Some prison vehicles at Wooroloo were in such poor condition they had recently been taken out of service by WorkSafe WA which administers work, health, and safety legislation in the state. Without replacement vehicles, primary and secondary industry activities were affected, limiting prisoner employment opportunities. Similarly, some people in custody had trained on the outdated equipment and machinery. Consequently, they expected their post-release employability would be reduced due to obsolete skills and training that may not meet industry standards.

At the time of our last inspection of Karnet, we outlined why the Department needed to provide an adequate budget and significant additional investment in farm operations, plant and machinery to ensure vital activities could continue, would be sustainable and could grow with the rising prison population (OICS, 2023A). Ongoing additional capital investment is critical at all three farms.

To do this, we have consistently commented and recommended that the farms ought to be allowed to retain a proportion of their generated revenue for capital reinvestment (OICS, 2023A; OICS, 2022C). In response, the Department has cited provisions of the *Financial Management Act 2006* as a barrier to supporting our recommendations. It noted that only the State Government Treasurer can determine if any agency can retain some of the revenue it generates. However, at the time of writing, and as articulated at that time of our last Karnet inspection, we are unclear whether the Department has ever made such a request. We strongly recommend such a request is made to the Treasurer urgently before the lack of reinvestment causes an unmanageable crisis.

### Recommendation 13

The Department of Justice should request permission from Government to allow the prison farms to retain a portion of their generated revenues for farm reinvestment.

## 5.2 Strategic support is required for the prison farms to achieve their remit

Placement at a prison farm is often the last stage of a person's custodial journey. As such, and as highlighted in this report, significant emphasis should be placed on their rehabilitation and reintegration. This means preparing people to re-enter society with all the tools necessary so they can successfully rejoin their community and not see an obvious pathway to reoffending. However, only a small proportion of people placed at the farms can access the full breadth of rehabilitation and reintegration opportunities. Many can access only a few opportunities, and some are disillusioned by their prison farm placement completely.

Simultaneously, and at their core, the prison farms are working farms vital to the prison-food supply chain for the entire Western Australian prison system. Without food production, the system would be more costly and offer fewer options for employment and skills development.

We think the prison farms can achieve both these remits. However, the Department must provide more strategic support clearly identifying the purpose of the three farms and how they should work together to achieve their goal. We often hear the prison farms described as 'one farm, three sites'. This is seemingly straightforward, but on deeper investigation it is unclear to us how they work in concert together.

We acknowledge the surging statewide prison population has diverted the Department's focus to ensuring people are safely and securely accommodated despite the overcrowding and staffing shortfalls in custodial and non-custodial ranks. At the prison farms, the rising population has meant significant strain, limiting prisoners' access to rehabilitative programs and meaningful activities, including treatment courses, education, Section 95 work and other employment programs. In turn, fewer people are being granted parole, and more refuse to apply presuming they will be denied anyway. Clearly, this contributes to keeping population numbers high.

As such, it is essential the Department delivers strategic support and a well-articulated plan for the prison farms. It must review its policies and approval processes for Section 95, PEP, and home leave (see recommendations 6 and 7). It must examine the experiences and systems for First Nations people, foreign national prisoners, and older people placed at the prison farms to remove systemic disadvantages (see recommendations 1, 2, 3, and 4). And it must adequately resource the prison farms to meet their articulated remit.

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## Appendix B    Acronyms

Term	Expansion of Abbreviation
ARMS	At-risk Management System
ASC	Aboriginal Services Committee
AVS	Aboriginal Visitor Scheme
CNM	Clinical Nurse Manager
DOJ	Department of Justice
EED	Earliest Eligibility Date
IMP	Individual Management Plan
NAIDOC	National Aborigines and Islander Day Observance Committee
OICS	Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services
PEP	Prisoner Employment Program
PHS	Psychological Health Services
PSO	Prison Support Officer
PST	Peer Support Team
RTO	Registered Training Organisation
S.95	Section 95 of the <i>Prisons Act 1981</i>
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TAR	Treatment Assessment Report
VSO	Vocational Support Officer



Government of **Western Australia**  
Department of **Justice**  
Corrective **Services**

# **Response to the Announced Inspection:**

**2024 Inspection of Karnet, Pardelup &  
Wooroloo Prison Farms**

**June 2025**

## Response Overview

On 25 July 2024, the Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services (OICS) announced the combined 2024 Inspection of Karnet, Pardelup and Wooroloo Prison Farms, with onsite visits to all three facilities being undertaken from October 2024 to November 2024.

To assist with the Inspection, the Department of Justice (the Department) provided a range of documentation as well as access to systems, custodial facilities, staff, and prisoners.

On 12 May 2025, the Department received the draft report which raised 13 recommendations for review and comment.

Of the 13 recommendations:

- One is supported.
- Five are supported in principle.
- Four are supported and considered current practice.
- Three are not supported.

Detailed responses to the recommendations can be found below.

## Response to Recommendations

### 1 Create a policy or plan specific to the age-related needs of older prisoners.

<b>Level of Acceptance:</b>	Supported – Current Practice / Project
<b>Responsible Division:</b>	Corrective Services
<b>Responsible Directorate:</b>	Adult Male Prisons

#### Response:

All custodial facilities assess and review the suitability of working roles to ensure they are suitable for aged prisoners. This includes individually assessing all work opportunities to ensure they are not labor intensive, ensuring prisoners are regularly health assessed and housed in appropriate accommodation (e.g. ground level wings, bottom bunk placements etc.), and ensuring their identified transitional needs back into the community are addressed prior to release.

The long-term management of the aged male prisoner population is actively being considered with the construction of the High Care Needs Unit as part of the Casuarina Prison Expansion. Scheduled for completion in January 2027, the unit will accommodate aged and frail cohorts who may require assistance with daily activities, including meals, bathing and toileting. The unit will contain both single and double rooms, in addition to specialist rooms including bariatric and therapy rooms.

As the High Care Needs Unit nears completion, a Standing Order will be developed in consultation with relevant stakeholders including Operational Policy and Justice Health and Wellbeing Services to provide custodial guidance on the management of aged prisoners, operating alongside the existing health services procedure PM42 Procedure – *Management of Older Prisoner*.

### 2 Improve the opportunity for foreign national prisoners to engage in external activities.

<b>Level of Acceptance:</b>	Supported in Principle
<b>Responsible Division:</b>	Corrective Services
<b>Responsible Directorate:</b>	Adult Male Prisons

#### Response:

Corrective Services are exploring options for prisoners with immigration alerts to safely participate in external activities and to be housed in minimum-security facilities.

Once this matter has been explored and a list of recommended policy changes have been identified, these will be submitted to the Commissioner for consideration and approval.



**3 Examine the reasons why recidivism rates for First Nations and non-First Nations people differ and implement mechanisms to reduce this disparity.**

<b>Level of Acceptance:</b>	Supported- Current Practice / Project
<b>Responsible Division:</b>	Strategic Reform
<b>Responsible Directorate:</b>	WAC SAR

**Response:**

The Department of Justice is strongly committed to the National Agreement on Closing the Gap's four Priority Reforms and Justice socio-economic outcomes 10 and 11 and continues to progress a range of related deliverables. The Department, through the Aboriginal Justice Transformation directorate, is an active member of the Aboriginal Affairs Co-ordinating Committee and the Closing the Gap Deputies Group and works collaboratively with agencies across Government and key Aboriginal partners on addressing issues within the criminal justice system and the underlying factors that contribute to the disadvantage faced by many Aboriginal people.

The Department is an active member of the national Justice Policy Partnership (JPP). The JPP leads a national approach to transform law and justice systems through genuine partnerships between all levels of Government and Aboriginal organisations and communities. The JPP meets on a quarterly basis and continues to respond to evidence in developing specific measures to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal adults and youth in incarceration, identify opportunities to work more effectively across commonwealth and state governments to drive the implementation of the National Agreement and to engage with, support and develop Aboriginal community-led, place-based strategies.

The Department's Western Australia Office of Crime Statistics and Research (WAC SAR) continually monitors and analyses data across the criminal justice system and regularly undertakes research into the overrepresentation of First Nations people across the custodial estate to identify trends and potential causes. The differing recidivism rates between First Nations and non-First Nations people are examined as part of this research and the Department will continue to explore solutions which can be implemented to reduce the disparity.

**4 Examine causes of, and implement mechanisms to improve, First Nations representation at the prison farms.**

<b>Level of Acceptance:</b>	Supported in Principle
<b>Responsible Division:</b>	Corrective Services
<b>Responsible Directorate:</b>	Adult Male Prisons

**Response:**

The Department supports the intent of this recommendation and makes every effort to increase the number of First Nations prisoners at the prison farms.

Corrective Services is working with the Department's Aboriginal Justice Transformation directorate to identify opportunities and mechanisms to increase the level of First Nations representation at the prison farms.

In addition, the Assistant Commissioner Custodial Operations has the discretion to override sentence classification decisions to enable First Nation prisoners to be

eligible for prison farm placement, noting these decisions are made on a case-by-case basis and only where there is an acceptable level of risk.

**5 Prioritise the development of life skills through structured and practical learning activities.**

<b>Level of Acceptance:</b>	Supported in Principle
<b>Responsible Division:</b>	Corrective Services
<b>Responsible Directorate:</b>	Adult Male Prisons

**Response:**

A Life Skills Officer has been proposed in the next Staffing Level Agreement for Pardelup, pending negotiation and agreement with the Western Australian Prison Officers' Union.

In respect to Karnet and Wooroloo, both sites have considered the creation of a Life Skills Officer and have determined that this is not supported at this stage as the skills and training provided by Life Skills Officers are provided through the duties of other Vocational Support Officers such as Chef Instructors, Cleaning and Maintenance Officers and Gardens Officers.

**6 Consider implementing a global assessment document to assess a prisoner's eligibility for various external activities, which can be updated as the prisoner progresses towards their eligibility dates.**

<b>Level of Acceptance:</b>	Not Supported
<b>Responsible Division:</b>	Corrective Services
<b>Responsible Directorate:</b>	Adult Male Prison

**Response:**

The Department does not believe it is necessary for the development of a global assessment document for external activities as the external activities checklists serve this purpose.

While it is noted there are repetitive checks and significant screening questions which contribute to the lengthy approval times, these actions are necessary given the security of prisoners and the safety of the community remains paramount when assessing and/or approving a prisoner's participation in external activities. The Department must also ensure that when a prisoner's participation in external activities is approved, the decision is based on the most up-to-date information available, opposed to information collated several weeks or months prior.

The Department continues to focus on reducing the backlog of TARs and IMPs through the allocation of additional resources and amendments to policy requirements.

**7 With regards to the Prisoner Employment Program:**

- a) **Allow prisoners to apply for the program earlier than three months prior to their eligibility to commence paid employment.**
- b) **Review the application process to identify process barriers or resourcing constraints contributing to delays in approvals.**

<b>Level of Acceptance:</b>	Not Supported
<b>Responsible Division:</b>	Corrective Services
<b>Responsible Directorate:</b>	Offender Services

**Response:**

Whilst the Department understands the intention of part (a) of this recommendation, assessing a prisoner for eligibility earlier than three months prior to employment is not practical nor will it have any material impact due to the need to assess a prisoner for Prisoner Employment Program (PEP) eligibility prior to commencement, regardless of whether they have been assessed earlier in their sentence as being suitable for engagement. Behavioral changes or involvement in adverse incidents may result in a prisoner no longer being suitable for PEP, hence the need for a current assessment to occur before commencing employment. In addition, a prospective Employer is unlikely to keep a job open for a prisoner for longer than three months due to business needs.

In relation to part (b), the Department has already identified delays in the preparation of intelligence reports as well as assessment of criminal history for PEP applications as the primary cause of approval delays.

As an interim measure, the Department has approved the use of overtime in an attempt to address the backlog of intelligence report requests. In parallel to this, a functional review of the Intelligence Services Branch has commenced which aims to improve the processes, procedures and resources surrounding intelligence functions, which is anticipated to improve the timeliness of intelligence report preparations in future.

**8 Remove the requirement for prisoners participating in the Prisoner Employment Program to pay the Department of Justice a fee for their accommodation.**

<b>Level of Acceptance:</b>	Not Supported
<b>Responsible Division:</b>	Corrective Services
<b>Responsible Directorate:</b>	Offender Services

**Response:**

The purpose of requiring prisoners participating in PEP to pay board is twofold: to promote financial literacy by helping prisoners to understand budgeting, and to set realistic expectations for managing living expenses upon release. This practice is prescribed in regulation 54L(d) of the *Prison Regulations 1982* (Western Australia) and has been in effect since the inception of PEP in 2008.

The Department will conduct a jurisdictional scan to determine whether similar practices are implemented in other States and Territories and any necessary adjustments will be considered where appropriate.

**9 Train willing participants at all prison farms, upskilling them in areas such as mental health, suicide prevention, and disability awareness.**

<b>Level of Acceptance:</b>	Supported – Current Practice / Project
<b>Responsible Division:</b>	Corrective Services
<b>Responsible Directorate:</b>	Offender Services

**Response:**

Whilst the Department seeks to ensure training opportunities surrounding mental health, suicide prevention and disability awareness is provided to all prisoners statewide, certain training is limited to the metropolitan area and/or prioritised to peer support prisoners in the first instance.

Where there is capacity, training opportunities are offered to other prisoners willing to participate, noting only accredited training courses can be delivered to non-peer support prisoners.

As at May 2025, Prison Support Services (PSS) facilitated the following training and information sessions at the prison farms:

**Karnet**

- Breathing Space training, delivered in February 2025.
- Lifeline training, delivered in March 2025.

**Pardelup**

- Conversations Matter (suicide awareness) information sessions, delivered in January 2025.
- Lifeline training, delivered in February 2025.
- 'Helping someone at risk of suicide' information session, delivered in March 2025.

**Wooroloo**

- Reintegration information session, delivered in collaboration with the Employment Coordinator to all prisoners in February 2025.
- Aboriginal Visitors Scheme (AVS) information session, delivered in collaboration with the AVS in March 2025.
- Lifeline training, delivered in April 2025.
- Disability Awareness training, delivered in May 2025.



**10 Adequately resource the custodial estate with Prison Support Officers, preventing the diversion of services.**

<b>Level of Acceptance:</b>	Supported in Principle
<b>Responsible Division:</b>	Corrective Services
<b>Responsible Directorate:</b>	Offender Services

**Response:**

In response to the unprecedented demand for PSO support, head-office based Prison Support Service staff are facilitating remote support sessions to facilities with no dedicated PSO resources to assist facilities in keeping up with demand.

Expansion of these services and the provision of additional resourcing is a matter for Government.

**11 Wooroloo Prison Farm should establish a weekend yarning circle at the cultural area for out-of-Country First Nations men.**

<b>Level of Acceptance:</b>	Supported
<b>Responsible Division:</b>	Corrective Services
<b>Responsible Directorate:</b>	Adult Male Prisons

**Response:**

An existing weekend yarning circle for off-country prisoners, led by an off-country prisoner, is already established at Wooroloo.

Wooroloo will engage with its off-country men to ascertain the scheduling of the weekend yarning circle in an effort to ensure it occurs at the same time as social visits, thereby providing off-country men with additional supports.

**12 Increase the access to information and support for prisoners facing deportation due to visa cancellations.**

<b>Level of Acceptance:</b>	Supported in Principle
<b>Responsible Division:</b>	Corrective Services
<b>Responsible Directorate:</b>	Adult Male Prisons

**Response:**

The Department will engage with the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) to determine what additional supports can be provided to assist foreign national prisoners facing deportation and will also explore the inclusion of the DHA contact number to the prisoner telephone system to enable prisoners to facilitate their own contact with the DHA.

The Department currently provides foreign national prisoners with support in referring them to services that can assist them with immigration matters, including interpreters, legal representation, consulates, and officer-initiated phone calls to the DHA.

Pending the outcome of the Department's engagement with DHA, the Department will consider what additional options are available to further increase supports for

prisoners facing deportation, acknowledging the emotional impacts on this cohort of prisoners.

**13 The Department of Justice should request permission from Government to allow the prison farms to retain a portion of their generated revenues for farm reinvestment.**

<b>Level of Acceptance:</b>	Supported – Current Practice / Project
<b>Responsible Division:</b>	Corrective Services
<b>Responsible Directorate:</b>	Adult Male Prisons

**Response:**

There are significant costs associated with Prison Industries providing produce and services internally across the Custodial Estate. Due to the increased prisoner population, opportunities to sell produce external to Corrective Services is limited. Revenue generated from external sales is retained by Corrective Services, however the revenue is recurrent funding which cannot be used for capital/asset investment. The Department will work with Treasury to consider opportunities to reinvest revenue back to Prison Farms to enable increased investment in aging equipment and infrastructure.

## Appendix D Inspection Details

Previous inspections		
Karnet Prison Farm	17–22 July 2022	
Pardelup Prison Farm	16–20 January 2022	
Wooroloo Prison Farm	28 March – 2 April 2021	
Activity since previous inspections	Liaison visits	Independent Visitor visits
Karnet Prison Farm	5	16
Pardelup Prison Farm	7	27
Wooroloo Prison Farm	12	28
Surveys	Prisoner survey	Staff survey - online
Karnet Prison Farm	122 responses (33%)	87 responses (54%)
Pardelup Prison Farm	50 responses (61%)	48 responses (98%)
Wooroloo Prison Farm	73 responses (17%)	78 responses (48%)
Inspection team		
Deputy Inspector	Jane Higgins	
Principal Inspections and Research Officer	Lauren Netto	
Principal Inspections and Research Officer	Liz George	
Inspections and Research Officer	Charlie Staples	
Inspections and Research Officer	Kieran Artelaris	
Inspections and Research Officer	Jim Bryden	
Inspections and Research Officer	Cliff Holdom	
Inspections and Research Officer	Ben Shaw	
Research and Review Officer	Kelly Jackson	
A/Research and Review Officer	Anna Morris	
Community Liaison Officer	Joseph Wallam	
Student Intern	Aisha Burns	

Key dates	
Inspection announced	25 July 2024
Start of on-site inspection	18 November 2024
Completion of on-site inspection	29 November 2024
Presentation of preliminary findings	Karnet Prison Farm – 14 January 2025 Pardelup Prison Farm – 17 January 2025 Wooroloo Prison Farm – 16 January 2025
Draft report sent to Department of Justice	12 May 2025
Draft response received from Department of Justice	8 July 2025
Declaration of prepared report	16 July 2025





*Inspection of prisons, court  
custody centres, prescribed lock-  
ups, youth detention centres, and  
review of custodial services in  
Western Australia*

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