

## 2024 INSPECTION OF KARNET, PARDELUP & WOOROLOO PRISON FARMS

### 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.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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

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