





OCTOBER 2025

Independent oversight that contributes to a more accountable public sector

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.



2025 Inspection of Work Camps

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Inspector's Overview

Work Camps offer structured pathways towards release and rehabilitation

Work camps are a vital part of Western Australia's custodial estate. They provide structured, real-world environments where men can build work habits, life skills, and confidence; reconnect with community expectations; and take meaningful steps toward release and reintegration. These functions – rehabilitation, reparation, skills development and community acceptance – have long been central to the work-camp model and remain evident across the system today.

This inspection is the second to examine the five work camps as distinct facilities, building on this Office's earlier review of prisoner flows through the custodial estate (2012) and the first full inspection of work camps conducted in 2015. Our findings are consistent with previous work: the model offers clear reintegration benefits, yet utilisation has not kept pace with its potential. Encouragingly, the number of prisoners placed in work camps has increased since the inspection period (February), signalling renewed momentum that should be consolidated.

There are five work camps located across the state, each attached to a host prison. Superintendents retain overall responsibility, with on-site operations led by senior officers and prison officers. This governance arrangement matters: clarity of roles and support from the host facility directly affect consistency, program delivery and safe access to external activities. Work camps also mirror daily community routines more closely than other custodial settings for adult men, strengthening prisoners' readiness for release.

The model's benefits are tangible. Prisoners consistently told us that work camps help them reconnect with "normal life," build social ties, and prepare for release. Communities benefit from valuable labour – much of it maintaining public spaces that might otherwise be neglected. Notably, four of the five camps operate at lower cost than their host prisons, underscoring the model's potential to be both rehabilitative and cost-effective.

Yet the system remains underutilised and uneven. Since 2020, overall occupancy has never exceeded 75%; some camps (for example, Wyndham and Warburton) have remained below 50% until recently. Contributing factors include remoteness, limited staffing, and complex, duplicative approval processes. Aboriginal men are also substantially under-represented in work camps, in part because of systemic barriers to attaining minimum-security classification (26% of First Nations men versus nearly 74% of non-Aboriginal men). In response to this finding, I note the Department has committed to investigating strategies for improving First Nations representation at work camps, including prioritising eligible First Nations prisoners where possible.

We also observed the effects of staffing shortages on life-skills training and support, and the absence of a clear departmental "champion" to drive consistent practice and remove operational bottlenecks.

Access processes need attention. Placement in a work camp is voluntary, but not all prisoners are fully informed about the opportunities and reintegration benefits on offer – compromising the quality of their decision-making. Lengthy, multi-layered approvals for placement and for external

activities delay participation in programs, including the Prisoner Employment Program and home leave, and formal education offerings remain limited at several sites.

Looking ahead, there is a clear opportunity to strengthen how work camps prepare prisoners to live, work and belong in the community. Central to this are robust Section 95 (S95) opportunities – safe, supervised external work and community engagement that let men practise responsibility, contribute locally, and rebuild trust as part of their rehabilitation journey. When delivered consistently, S95 and other reintegration activities help translate the routines of camp life into the realities of life after release.

These findings also speak to broader themes across the custodial estate: equity and transparency in classification pathways; streamlined, proportionate approval processes for external activities; consistent program delivery regardless of geography; and clear accountability for championing the work-camp model. Addressing these system settings will lift utilisation, improve outcomes, and ensure that more men can access the rehabilitative benefits that work camps are designed to deliver

It is encouraging to note the Department has re-introduced a dedicated Work Camps' Manager role to centralise oversight and coordination. This position, if appropriately empowered, could address many of the issues identified in this report – providing consistent leadership, streamlining processes, ensuring equity of access (including for Aboriginal prisoners), and acting as a departmental champion for work camps. A centralised manager also creates an opportunity to embed work camps more firmly within the Department's broader reintegration strategy, aligning S95 activities and other external programs with system-wide priorities for rehabilitation and release preparation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Finally, I acknowledge the cooperation of Superintendents, officers and staff at each of the five work camps and the Department's key personnel. I thank the men who shared their experiences, the inspection team for their professionalism and diligence in planning this inspection and Lauren Netto for writing this report.

Jane Higgins

Acting Inspector of Custodial Services

3 October 2025

Executive Summary

Key findings

Work camps have not been fully utilised

Work camps in Western Australia have remained underutilised, with some consistently full and others persistently below capacity due to barriers such as remoteness, limited staffing, and complex approval processes. Aboriginal prisoners are notably under-represented, partly due to systemic challenges in attaining minimum-security status, and many prisoners lack awareness of the reintegration benefits these camps offer.

Each work camp offered different opportunities

Each work camp offers distinct rehabilitation, reintegration, and community engagement opportunities aligned with departmental policy. However, differences in supervision models, staffing levels, and community preferences influence how these are delivered. While some camps support unsupervised community work, others require officer oversight, and employment varies from campbased to community-based roles.

Work camps offered reasonable reintegration opportunities

Work camps offer meaningful reintegration opportunities with most camps enabling prisoners – supervised or not – to engage in activities that build life skills, social connections, and a sense of contribution. However, access to formal life skills training and education varies, with only some camps having dedicated staff or facilities. Programs like the Prisoner Employment Program (PEP) and Home Leave also remain underutilised due to complex approval processes and logistical barriers. Despite these challenges, prisoners consistently expressed appreciation for the rehabilitative value of work camps, particularly the chance to reconnect with community life and prepare for release.

Work camps offered benefits for the prisoners, communities and the Department

Work camps deliver significant benefits to prisoners, local communities, and the Department by fostering positive community engagement, offering reparative and reintegration opportunities, and operating more cost-effectively than many host prisons. Despite underutilisation and staffing constraints at some sites, work camps contribute valuable labour to communities, often maintaining public spaces that would otherwise go neglected. They also help prisoners build self-worth, skills, and social networks. However, the absence of a dedicated departmental champion for work camps has led to inconsistent practices and missed opportunities to maximise their potential. Reinstating a Work Camps Manager could enhance coordination, promote equitable access, and support strategic expansion to ease prison overcrowding and improve reintegration outcomes.

List of Recommendations

Recommendation	Page	DOJ Response
Recommendation 1 Improve access to work camps for First Nations prisoners.	3	Supported
Recommendation 2 Remove duplicate approvals for work camp placements.	4	Supported
Recommendation 3 Include a Life Skills Officer position in the staffing model for all the work camps.	14	Supported in Principle
Recommendation 4 Support all works camps to develop, manage and sustain a Community Liaison Group.	18	Supported
Recommendation 5 Explore opportunities to open additional work camps across the custodial estate, including for adult women.	20	Supported in Principle
Recommendation 6 Re-establish a Work Camps' Manager position.	20	Supported – Current Practice/Project

Background

Work camps are minimum-security facilities that provide the most reintegration benefit for adult male prisoners compared to other custodial facilities. They replicate the structure of daily living that reflects, where possible, the broader community. Prisoners have more agency over their own lives and decisions than those in mainstream prisons. They are expected to make decisions and take responsibility for themselves in relation to how they structure and maintain their living environment, work responsibilities, training opportunities and any other activities available to them.

Five work camps, spread across the State

There are five work camps located across Western Australia. These are scattered across the state, some very remote. Each work camp is attached to a host prison. The Superintendent of the host prison has overall management responsibility for the work camp, while on-site operations are managed by senior officers and prison officers.

As shown in Table 1, distances between the work camps and the host prisons can be vast. Wyndham Work Camp in the Kimberley, for example, is 1,050 kilometres north-east of its host prison, Broome Regional Prison. Similarly, Warburton Work Camp is 900 kilometres away from its host prison, Eastern Goldfields Regional Prison.

Table 1: Work camp locations, host prisons and capacity.

Work Camp	Location	Capacity	Host prison
Wyndham Work Camp	3,315 kilometres northeast of Perth	40	Broome Regional Prison
Roebourne Work Camp	1,563 kilometres north of Perth	25	Roebourne Regional Prison
Warburton Work Camp	1,494 kilometres from Perth	14	Eastern Goldfields Regional Prison
Walpole Work Camp	413 kilometres from Perth	12	Pardelup Regional Prison
Dowerin Work Camp	156 kilometres from Perth	20	Wooroloo Prison Farm

Previous inspections and reviews

The Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services (OICS) has produced at least two discreet publications relating to placement of prisoners at work camps. A review, in 2012, about the flow of prisoners through to work camps (OICS, 2012). And in 2015, a report of an announced inspection of work camps in Western Australia (OICS, 2015).

The 2012 review

The 2012 review was not restricted to work camps. Rather it considered how prisoners move through the system to attain minimum-security status which is one of the eligibility criteria for placement at a work camp.

That review concluded that work camps had been under-utilised. It found that prisoners were being held in more secure facilities than their security classification allowed, and this was a barrier for their progress through to minimum-security and work camps. The pool of eligible prisoners was not big enough to keep the work camps fully occupied.

The 2015 inspection

In 2015, a full, announced inspection of the five work camps occurred. These remain operational in 2025. This was also our first inspection of work camps as separate facilities from the host prisons. Previously work camps had been part of the inspections of the host prisons and not a separate inspection focus.

Overall we found that work camps were 'expensive, under-utilised assets' (OICS, 2015, p. v) – the same finding as the 2012 review. Prisoners, in particular Aboriginal men, remained at maximum- and medium-security facilities, struggling to reach minimum-security which would allow them to progress to a work camp.

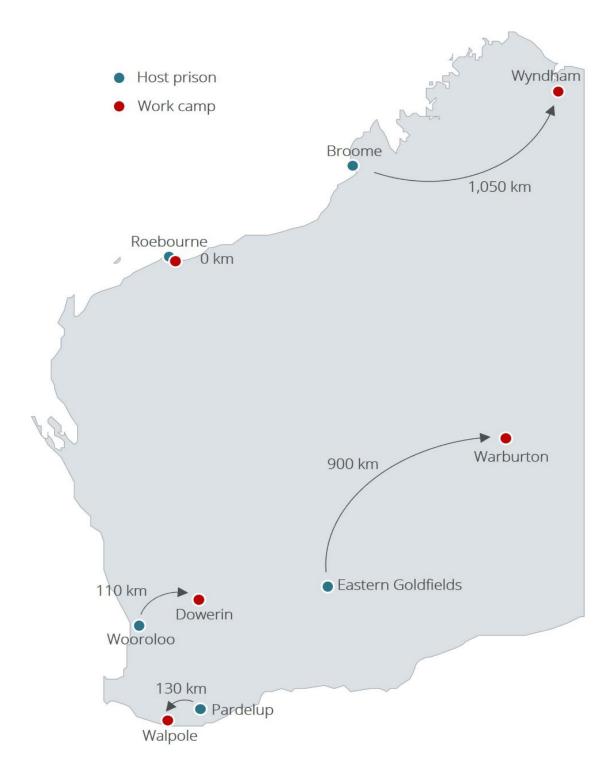


Figure 1: Map indicating placement of work camps across WA and proximity to the host prisons.

WORK CAMPS FACT PAGE



DOWERIN WORK CAMP

Parent facility: Wooroloo Prison Farm

History: Dowerin opened in 2012, replacing previous Wheatbelt-

based work camps at Wyalkatchem and, prior to that, at

Kellerberrin. **Capacity:** 20

Location: Dowerin Work Camp is located on the traditional lands of the Ballardong Noongar people, 156 kilometres east of Perth.



ROEBOURNE WORK CAMP

Parent facility: Roebourne Regional Prison

History: Roebourne Work Camp opened in 2014 replacing a

smaller work camp at Millstream.

Capacity: 25

Location: Roebourne Work Camp is located is located on Ngarluma Country, in Roebourne, Western Australia.



WAI POLF WORK CAMP

Parent facility: Pardelup Prison Farm

History: Walpole was the first work camp in Western Australia, opening in 1998 as a pilot site utilising a disused Mains Roads

camp.

Capacity: 12

Location: Walpole Work Camp is located on the traditional lands of the Murrum Nyoongar people in the south-west of Western

Australia.



WARBURTON WORK CAMP

Parent facility: Eastern Goldfields Regional Prison

History: Warburton Work Camp initially opened in 2011 before being closed in 2015. It was re-opened in 2017 as part of a strategy to improve prisoner rehabilitation and community engagement.

Capacity: 14

Location: Warburton Work Camp is located on the traditional lands of the Ngaanyatjarra people in the Gibson Desert of Western

Australia.



WYNDHAM WORK CAMP

Parent facility: Broome Regional Prison

History: Wyndham Work Camp opened in 2002 as the then sixth work camp in Western Australia and the first in the East Kimberley.

Capacity: 40

Location: Wyndham Work Camp is located on the traditional lands of the Balanggarra people in the Kimberley region of

Western Australia.

1 Work camps have not been fully utilised

Consistent with our previous work, we found work camps were again not being fully utilised. Some work camps were consistently full while others were consistently under capacity. There were barriers in accessing work camps which affected some prisoners more than others. In particular, First Nations prisoners were a cohort that were under-represented. Lengthy and convoluted approval processes also impacted on the utilisation rates of work camps.

1.1 Some were always full, others were rarely full

The current maximum capacity across all work camps is 111. It could arguably be higher due to unused beds at Warburton and Wyndham. Since 2020, work camps collectively have not been above 75% full.

Some, like Walpole and Dowerin, remain full all the time. There is a waiting list of prisoners to go to these camps. Similarly, Roebourne manages to maintain good numbers. The co-location of this work camp with the host prison could account for this. Prisoners in Roebourne Regional Prison assessed as eligible for the work camp, and who want to go, can easily access the work camp which is located adjacent to the main prison. And their transfer does not impact their capacity to receive social visits and maintain connections with friends and family, like it does for the remote work camps, Wyndham and Warburton. However, we heard staff redeployments to the main prison impacted the number of prisoners who can access the work camp.

Wyndham and Warburton have been consistently less than 50%¹ full of their official capacity. Reasons provided to us for this during this inspection have included:

- Remoteness of the work camp
- Isolation from friends and family
- Local community concerns about some prisoners being in their communities
- Insufficient staff to run at full capacity.

We also heard that often prisoners were unaware of the opportunities available at work camps. As placement is voluntary, prisoners are not forced to accept a transfer to a work camp. This was reasonable. But if prisoners do not have all the information about the benefits of a work camp and the reintegration opportunities available through these facilities, their decision to refuse placement at a work camp will not be a fully informed one. The Department previously had a Work Camps' Manager position that, in addition to other duties, helped inform prisoners and promote the opportunities at work camps. Chapter four discusses the potential benefits of reinstating this position.

¹ Since the inspection we recognise the Department has worked to increase occupancy in the work camps, and as of 1 August 2025 Wyndham and Warburton have increased to 73% and 86% utilisation. Roebourne is at 88% full and both Dowerin and Walpole are at full capacity. This follows an unprecedented increase in the adult prisoner population and the Department's efforts to utilise all available beds.

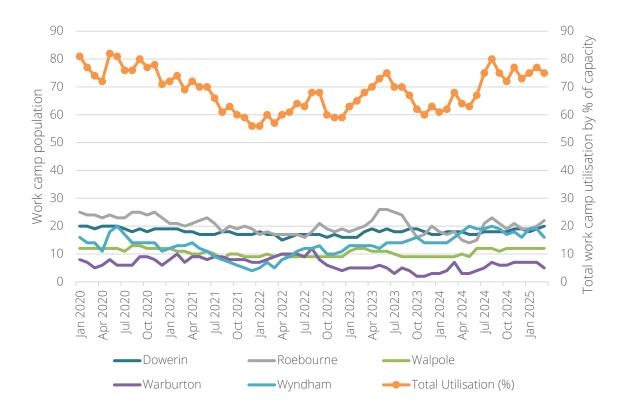


Figure 2: Population by individual work camp and total work camps' utilisation (%) between 2020 and 2025.

1.2 First Nations men were under-represented at some work camps

Aboriginal prisoners represent 44% of the male prisoner population in Western Australia. Yet First Nations representation was disproportionately low at Walpole, Dowerin and Warburton work camps.

The host prison (and primary feeder prison) for Warburton is Eastern Goldfields Regional Prison, which has a predominantly Aboriginal population (approximately 75%). Yet, at the time of the inspection, only one out of the five men at Warburton work camp was Aboriginal.

Roebourne work camp had the highest proportion of First Nations men at 87%, followed by Wyndham where 80% were Aboriginal. This generally reflects the high Aboriginal populations at their respective host prisons, Roebourne Regional Prison (90%) and Broome Regional Prison (91%).

There was only one First Nations man at both Walpole and Dowerin work camps. Walpole's population was 12 (Aboriginal representation 8%), while there were 20 men at Dowerin (Aboriginal representation 5%).

Fewer Aboriginal men attain minimum-security status

The minimum requirement for placement at a work camp is attaining minimum-security status. Our 2012 review into the flow of prisoners through the system, specifically to minimum-security and

beyond, concluded that the rating tool that assesses eligibility for a prisoner to be awarded minimum-security disadvantaged First Nations prisoners (OICS, 2012).

A few years before our review, the then Department of Corrective Services had modified its assessment and classification system to ensure that prisoners were appropriately, and not over, classified, which kept them held at more secure prisons. This review found that whilst this had been true for non-Aboriginal prisoners, there had been no increase in the number of Aboriginal prisoners flowing through to minimum-security classification and placement. This was despite an increase in the overall Aboriginal prisoner population across the state (OICS, 2012, p. 2).

During this inspection we found Aboriginal men remained disproportionately at higher security classification levels. Of the 44% of First Nations men in custody between January and March 2025, only 26% had a minimum-security classification. Most were being held at medium-security (54%) and maximum-security (42%). In comparison, nearly three quarters of the adult male minimum-security population identified as non-Aboriginal, despite only representing 56% of the total population.

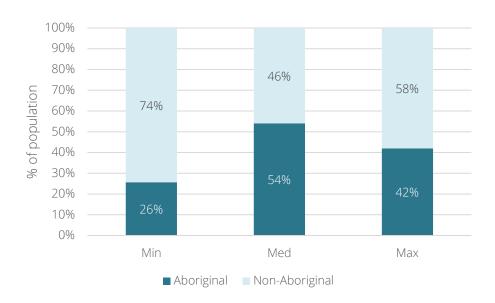


Figure 3: First Nations men in custody continue to be held at higher security levels than non-Aboriginal men.

The Department's policy relating to work camps specifies that 'work camps may be promoted for prisoners, particularly Aboriginal prisoners, as an alternative form of custody to placement within a prison' (DOJ, 2024, p. 3). Our inspection could not confirm Aboriginal prisoners had equitable access to work camps.

Recommendation 1

Improve access to work camps for First Nations prisoners.

1.3 Complicated approval processes impact the flow of prisoners to work camps

Consistent feedback from Superintendents and other senior operational managers was that application and approval processes for work camp placement are time-consuming and repetitive. Suitability for work camp placement is assessed by completing a 'Suitability for External Activities or Work Camp' checklist on the Department's offender database. This is typically carried out by an assessment writer or Case Management Coordinator. Many facilities have been experiencing custodial staff shortages, resulting in redeployment of assessment writers and delays in the completion of these checklists.

Completed checklists are submitted to an Assistant Superintendent who, if it is recommended for approval, forwards it to the Superintendent for final approval. In some cases, further approval is then needed from the Assistant Commissioner Custodial Operations for adult male prisons.

Administrative workload has been increasing at all levels, exacerbated by rapidly growing prisoner numbers across the system. This means responses from Assistant Superintendent level and above are not always timely.

Once suitability has been approved, a separate 'Suitability for External Activities or Work Camp' must be completed for a prisoner to participate in external activities under Section 95 of the *Prisons Act* 1981. Most facilities require a prisoner to be approved for and participate in external activities before being assessed for work camp placement. Either way, this effectively means the checklist is completed twice for every work camp prisoner.

The Department's policy does state that these assessments can be done as a single assessment (DOJ, 2024). This is at the discretion of the Superintendent who may consider the prisoner's work camp placement pending approval of the external activities assessment.

We acknowledge this rigour is important as work camps are located within communities. Prisoners living there need to meet strict eligibility criteria and conform to the zero-tolerance approach as directed in the policy to safeguard community safety and trust. Some of these processes though were cumbersome and appeared to be delaying prisoners' opportunities to access meaningful reintegration opportunities.

Recommendation 2

Remove duplicate approvals for work camp placements.

2 Each work camp offered different opportunities

This inspection found a range of operational models across the five work camps. There were different prisoner supervision requirements both within and across the sites. Employment opportunities varied from mostly community-based work to camp-based employment. Some work camps were more engaged with the local community than others.

2.1 Work camps offer good rehabilitation and reintegration opportunities

Our inspection identified a range of opportunities provided at all the work camps:

- Rehabilitation
- Reintegration
- Reparation
- Establishing a work ethic
- Skill development
- Acceptance back into the community

Each work camp offers these outcomes in slightly different ways depending on their location and the availability of services and opportunities. We found that these objectives were largely being met across all the work camps.

Department policy outlines the framework and expectations for work camps (DOJ, 2024). The opportunities we identified during this inspection supported those contained in the policy, namely that each work camp will:

- provide prisoners with the opportunity to undertake a range of valuable work projects in local communities
- engage prisoners in a range of recreational/external activities that enhance community life and maintain community assets, and
- provide opportunities for community involvement, to undertake training, develop work and life skills.

2.2 Supervision requirements differ across the sites

The Department's policy states that work camps must provide prisoners opportunities to work in the local communities, either under a work camp officer's supervision or that of the worksite's supervisor/manager. Some work camp prisoners were approved to work outside the camp, in the community on their own, unsupervised by an officer. Others had to be supervised when engaging in activities outside the facility.

Table 2: Number of supervised and unsupervised prisoners in each work camp as of March 2025.

Work Camp	Prisoners - supervised	Prisoners - unsupervised	Population – March 2025
Wyndham	3	12	15
Roebourne	23	0	23
Warburton	5	0	5
Walpole	0	12	12
Dowerin	1	19	20

The reasons for some work camps accommodating all supervised, unsupervised or a mix of both depended on a few factors:

- Staffing levels a well-staffed work camp could manage a mix of supervised and unsupervised prisoners. Those with a smaller staffing group could not necessarily facilitate this.
- Work camp accommodation those that were self-care where prisoners were responsible
 for preparing their own meals and other life necessities could have an unsupervised cohort
 that all left the camp to work in the community each day; no one had to stay behind to
 prepare meals and take care of the camp while the others were out working.
- Community preference some smaller communities may prefer that prisoners are not left unsupervised in their small town.

A prisoner assessed as needing to be supervised can have this status changed to unsupervised during his placement at a work camp. He would need to complete at least 10 outings under the supervision of an officer as part of the assessment to change this status. This could include trips to the local town, participate in community work, community-based recreation.

2.3 Prisoners engaged in various jobs and activities

Walpole Work Camp

At Walpole all prisoners approved for external activities have unsupervised status. There is only one officer residing at the work camp at any one time and they cannot supervise 12 prisoners who may be working at different locations. So all prisoners work by themselves at their work locations without direct supervision. This had positive rehabilitation, reintegration and reparation benefits to Walpole, which is the local community in which they work.

Unlike other facilities, Walpole accommodation was all self-care. Prisoners there managed their own lives, prepared their own meals, kept their living environment respectable and had to manage the allocation of their time appropriately, balancing work, recreation, socialising and so on. No different to the average person in the community.

To facilitate this way of life, prisoners at Walpole transported themselves to and from their workplaces. This was possible because of the proximity of the work camp to the local town where they worked. Some prisoners had cars while others used bicycles. The officer would provide transport when distance and poor weather necessitated this.



Photo 1: Prisoners at Walpole transported themselves to their workplaces.

Ongoing work options which have been officially approved for the work camp prisoners were:

- General maintenance and miscellaneous duties around Walpole. Work sites included:
 - the State Emergency Services depot
 - the industrial estate
 - the country club
 - the sport and recreation centre
 - local churches
 - Walpole and Denmark police stations
 - Local visitor centres
 - The Bibbulmun Track and Munda Biddi Trail.
- Assisting with set up and pack up for community events within 100 km of the work camp.
- General work including construction, trail marking, and clearing of the historical Stock Droving Route.

Dowerin Work Camp

At the time of the inspection there was only one prisoner at Dowerin who had to be supervised when attending external activities. There were four prisoners who remained at the work camp each day preparing meals, maintaining the camp and cleaning. Dowerin was not a self-care facility like Walpole, so prisoners working externally had their meals prepared for them and their facilities cleaned and maintained by the camp workers.

Between five and six prisoners worked in 'static' jobs in the community for the local Shire. These could work unsupervised and were dropped off by an officer at their workplace each day. Jobs included general maintenance, construction and gardening projects across various local sites, including hospitals and other health facilities, police stations, local exhibits and grounds. They also assisted in clean-up activities after natural disasters.



Photo 2: Communal outdoor space at Dowerin.



Photo 3: Prisoners worked in the kitchen preparing meals for staff and other work camp prisoners.

Roebourne Work Camp

All prisoners at the Roebourne Work Camp were supervised. The population was 23 at the time we inspected, with a capacity of 25. The work camp had good facilities to provide meaningful work inside the camp. These included a metal workshop, a wood workshop, and a kitchen. There was also a classroom that had not been used for some time. But with fewer prisoners being accommodated in the main prison (due to cells being offline while air conditioning is installed) a Prison Education Coordinator from the main prison had been sent to the work camp to provide education to work camp prisoners. There was good engagement by the prisoners with up to 10 participating. The focus was prisoners with low literacy and engaging this group in education through art.



Photo 4: Roebourne work camp had a fence around it separating it from the main prison.

The co-location of the work camp with the prison is unique to Roebourne. Staffing at the camp consisted of a Senior Officer, a Work Camp Officer, two Section 95 Officers and one Life Skills Officer. The Life Skills Officer position was a positive addition to the team, providing prisoners opportunities to develop sound life skills key to their successful reintegration. Staffing shortages in the main prison though put pressure on the work camp staff and the Life Skills Officer was often redeployed to fill gaps in the main prison.

The Section 95 officers took prisoners to various sites around the area where they worked mainly mowing lawns and undertaking general maintenance. In the past prisoners from the work camp had worked on a large project converting an old hotel into a centre to support and promote employment opportunities, cultural connections, and general information about the Pilbara – the Ganalili Centre.

Prisoners not on the section 95 teams remained at the camp working in the kitchen, gardens, and different projects in the workshops.

The workshops were well-equipped, and machinery was in good condition. Prisoners worked on projects for local schools, such as making cubby houses and picnic furniture.





Photos 5 - 6: Examples of work produced by prisoners in the work camp for external agencies.

Warburton Work Camp

When we visited Warburton Work Camp there were only five prisoners and all five had to be supervised, carrying out work in the community under officer escort. Work typically involved general maintenance, mowing and clean-up at the town oval, local police station, the community swimming pool, and local kindergarten.

Prisoners were also making concrete slabs for grave sites that had been damaged by animals. Some prisoners were required to work at the camp – cooking, cleaning, gardening and doing general maintenance.

Officers mentioned that the local community can be quite dynamic – calm one day and unsettled the next. Sometimes this impacted prisoners' access to external activities in the community. They felt they maintained a good relationship with the local Shire.



Photo 7: A fit-for-purpose work camp but never full.

Wyndham Work Camp

Most of the prisoners at Wyndham Work Camp can work unsupervised. Only three out of the 15 were required to be supervised.

At the time of the inspection much of the community-based work was maintaining local parks and green spaces particularly by lawn mowing. This was necessary because it was the end of the wet season in the north of WA and these spaces needed constant attention to avoid becoming overgrown and unsightly. There was some feedback from prisoners that they did not consider this meaningful work.

There were Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with the local Shire and with the Elders in the area. These provided opportunities at times for work camp prisoners to assist the Shire with road repairs, building shade houses and bird watching hides for people who track birds at risk of becoming extinct. The MoU with the Elders includes doing work to revegetate areas that had been invaded by non-native species.



Photo 8: Mowing was a common external activity in the local community.

Five prisoners who had been released from Wyndham had secured employment in traffic management within the area, based on the experience they had gained working alongside Main Roads' contractors while they were in the work camp.

One prisoner was allocated the job of looking after chickens that had been sent to the camp for testing for mosquito-borne diseases. The prisoner worked alongside animal welfare experts, including a veterinarian, who assisted with the testing and care of the chickens.

3 Work camps offered reasonable reintegration opportunities

Work camp prisoners had more access to reintegration opportunities than at other custodial facilities. Even those who needed to be supervised could still participate in activities in the local community. This was crucial to improving their chances of successful reintegration into their home communities once released, particularly for those men who had served long sentences. We found that men at all five work camps were provided with these opportunities, but some more than others.

3.1 Flexible eligibility rules increase the reintegration benefits of work camps

Prisoners must have less than two years left on their sentence to be placed in a work camp (DOJ, 2024). However, there is a degree of flexibility. Prisoners with more than two years remaining can still apply, and approval can be granted by the Assistant Commissioner Custodial Operations (ACCO). Additionally, prisoners with sentences of six months or less can be approved by the Superintendent.

Those with longer sentences who are approved have more time to take part in reintegration programs. Even prisoners with shorter sentences benefit more from work camps than they would in a regular prison.

Life-sentenced prisoners may also be eligible, but only as part of an approved resocialisation program. At the time of the inspection, there were no life-sentenced prisoners at any of the work camps.

3.2 Prisoners could participate in community-based recreation

Capacity for prisoners to engage in recreation activities in the community varied across the sites, though all had some level of access, even those who had to be supervised when leaving the work camp.

Because prisoners at Walpole and Dowerin were unsupervised, they could go off site for individual, group or team recreation. At Walpole men could cycle to the ocean to swim or fish. At Dowerin activities included tennis, golf and walking along a walk track outside the work camp fence. They could also use the community pool to go swimming, usually after hours when it was closed to the public.

The men at Dowerin could also play in a community-based football team. They trained with the team twice a week and played in the games on a Saturday. Because they had unsupervised status they would get dropped off and picked up by officers but otherwise left there unsupervised. This was a valuable reintegration opportunity for these men.

Despite all the men at Warburton Work Camp being supervised, they still recreated in the community. Officers would take them to the community pool, gym and oval at certain times. There were no community-based organised sport like football or basketball teams in Warburton.

The primary community recreation activities the Roebourne work camp prisoners engaged in were fishing in the mornings, and swimming in the afternoons. Prison management said they had done a lot of work to risk assess the sites where these activities took place as well as to ensure the men involved were proficient enough in swimming.

Similarly at Wyndham, the prisoners could go fishing. Some went fresh-water fishing, others fished at the ocean, depending on their cultural traditions.

Allowing prisoners to recreate in the community supports their rehabilitation and reintegration by helping them to develop social and communication skills and reconnect with community norms. This exposure can help ease the transition to community on their release.

All five work camps also had basic gym facilities, with functional indoor exercise apparatus and some passive recreation spaces. The equipment at some of the work camps was worn but prisoners had managed to keep it serviceable.

3.3 Few formal opportunities to improve life skills

Only two of the five work camps had dedicated Life Skills Officer positions – Wyndham and Roebourne. The position at Wyndham had recently been filled.

The position at Roebourne was often redeployed to cover staff shortages in the main prison. This left prisoners at the work camp without a dedicated resource to support them in developing and improving basic life skills essential for successful reintegration. The Life Skills Officer provided particular guidance for those prisoners working in the kitchen preparing meals.

We do acknowledge though that all the work camp officers provide this support to the men in some way, whether it be while working with them in the community or in the camp workshops and gardens. And, following prompting by inspection team members, one Senior Officer informed us that he had commenced taking some prisoners into town to do some shopping. This was a good outcome and a positive reintegration opportunity for the men.

The men at Warburton and Dowerin were also able to go shopping in person at the local store once a week. Prisoners at Walpole could order items from shops in town, but the officers would collect their orders for them. Prisoners at Wyndham could attend the Wyndham supermarket to purchase food and tobacco.

Walpole was the only completely self-care facility. The men were provided with food which they prepared for themselves. All the other work camps had dedicated prisoners working in the kitchens preparing meals for all of the work camp residents. Both of these models would benefit from some dedicated support to develop and improve these basic life skills which are important for when they are released and need to look after themselves and/or their families.

Recommendation 3

Include a Life Skills Officer position in the staffing model for all work camps.

3.4 Work camps provide good reintegration potential for prisoners

Reintegration opportunities present in many forms for work camp prisoners. The prisoners we spoke with during this inspection all appreciated the opportunities provided by being placed in a work camp. While some were frustrated about the lengthy approval processes for some reintegration options, most benefitted personally and socially from their placement. They felt good about the work they did and had opportunities to forge strong working relationships with community agencies.

We're out here helping the community

Quote from a work camp prisoner

They also valued the potential to improve their job skills and the reparative aspect of their work in the local communities. The realisation that they are part of a community and can contribute meaningfully was a significant reintegration benefit for the men.

'John' (a pseudonym) told us his story about the benefits of living in a work camp, emphasising that rehabilitation is certainly possible with the right conditions.

'John's' journey

John waited about 10 months before getting his minimum-security status. Once he got this he was quickly moved to the work camp at Roebourne. John said he has had a really positive experience in the work camp. He enjoys the life there and the officers are good. John worked in the metal shop and appreciated this opportunity to improve his skills. John said he got to use good equipment, comparable to what he will be working with when he gains employment on the outside.

John had also benefitted from education courses like forklift, working at heights and excavator training.

John was due to commence on PEP and said he would be able to complete the full six months on PEP before his release. His application was still pending though. He had also applied for home leave. His application took four months before being approved, but he was going home on weekends.

He enjoyed the weekend recreation activities, fishing, and swimming. And coming back to the camp where the rooms are comfortable and air-conditioned.

PEP and home leave were available but lengthy approval processes limited access

Prisoners at work camps may be eligible to apply for reintegration programs like the Prisoner Employment Program (PEP) and home leave, which help them reconnect with the community before

release. These programs are designed to support a smoother transition back into society by offering work experience and time with family. However, we found very few prisoners were able to access these opportunities.

As noted in previous reports, approval processes for these opportunities are complicated and slow (OICS, 2025; OICS, 2025a). For example, PEP applications can only be submitted three months before a prisoner is allowed to start work, which is already limited to the last six months of their sentence. These tight timelines often encounter delays, meaning some prisoners miss out entirely. Employers also lose interest when approvals take too long, reducing the number of available jobs.

Transport is another barrier. Prisoners must arrange their own travel to and from work, which isn't always possible. In one case, two prisoners were approved for PEP, but only one had a car and licence. They weren't allowed to travel together, so only one could take the job. This kind of restriction limits access even when prisoners are eligible and willing.

Home leave faces similar problems. The process involves checking the home address and approving a sponsor, which can take a long time. Prisoners in remote camps like Wyndham and Warburton often can't participate at all because they don't have family nearby to support a home visit.

As a result, only a few work camps - mainly Walpole and Dowerin - have prisoners using these programs, and even there, the numbers are very low. Without changes to make the process simpler and more flexible, these valuable reintegration tools will continue to be underused.

3.5 Education and training opportunities varied across the sites

At Walpole and Dowerin there were few formal education or training options. These camps were always full, prisoners were mostly unsupervised and worked full-time doing meaningful work in the community. Where training in the use of a specific tool or piece of equipment was required for these work projects, this was provided by the workplace or a work camp officer. These camps did not have a dedicated classroom to facilitate ongoing education.

Roebourne's work camp did have a dedicated education space located within the camp. The proximity of the site to the main prison allowed education staff from the main prison to attend the work camp a few days each week. And engagement from the prisoners was strong with up to 12 men participating in literacy courses.

The men at Wyndham could participate in a Certificate 2 in agriculture. They could select individual courses included in this Certificate (like skid steer and traffic management) which are helpful entry-level qualifications for employment in the local area.

Education was not available at Warburton.

4 Work camps offered benefits for the prisoners, communities and the Department

The work camps' model provided benefits for prisoners, the community, and the Department. We found positive engagement between the work camps and the local communities they serve. The work prisoners did in these communities had strong reparative value. This provided a social benefit to the community and personal benefits for the prisoners. Working in the local communities allowed for more reintegration opportunities for the men. On a personal level they could improve self-esteem and belief in their own self-worth. It also provided opportunities to make contacts and network with community agencies.

4.1 Work camps contribute meaningfully to local communities

We consistently heard that relationships between work camps and their surrounding communities were positive, constructive and rewarding. Officers from the most remote work camps, Wyndham and Warburton, reported positive working relationships with local Elders:

They love the work camp and what we do for the community

Quote from officer at Wyndham

Walpole and Dowerin meet regularly with community representatives to ensure their relationships with the local communities remain solid and the work they are doing in the community remains relevant.

Chapter 3 details the different roles each work camp plays in their communities. All the work that the prisoners do is valuable for their communities. We did hear some opposition to this opinion from some officers who thought the work should be more meaningful, rather than just mowing lawns and tidying up public spaces. But most of the local Shires did not have the resources to do this work themselves. Some struggled to recruit and retain Shire workers. So, if the work camp prisoners were not doing this work, it would not get done and the local public spaces like parks, ovals and swimming pools, would remain unkempt.

Not all work camps had Community Liaison Groups

The Department requires that work camps facilitate a Community Liaison Group (CLG) and clearly sets out terms of reference for how these should operate in policy (DOJ, 2024). These terms define CLG membership, frequency of meetings, the roles and responsibilities of Department staff in facilitating these. Membership should include representatives from the local Shire and relevant government departments likely to benefit from work camp labour.

Dowerin and Walpole work camps had active CLGs that met quarterly, as per departmental policy. These were active groups, well-supported by work camp staff, management from the host prison and community representatives. These meetings provided a forum for community agencies to

provide advice on community projects and a community perspective on work camp-related matters. They can also propose new projects for consideration for the work camps.

Roebourne and Warburton did not have active CLGs. Though, both reported good relationships with the local community, including Shire representatives and Elders.

We heard that Wyndham had facilitated an effective CLG in the past. This had fallen over for various reasons. The host prison, Broome Regional Prison (BRP), has experienced some instability in its senior management team and the Superintendent position had not been substantively filled until recently. There was an appetite to reinvigorate an effective CLG for Wyndham given the Superintendent at BRP has been substantively appointed.

Recommendation 4

Support all works camps to develop, manage and sustain a Community Liaison Group.

4.2 Unused work camp beds could ease crowding

Chapter one describes the under-utilisation of work camps. Since 2020, work camps have found it difficult to be above 75% full. Conversely, the prisoner population across all the other custodial facilities is increasing. In some prisons, double-bunked cells have become triple-bunked cells with the third 'bunk' being a mattress on the floor. During the period of this inspection, there were over 300 prisoners across the estate sleeping on mattresses on the floor.

At the time of this inspection we found that there were up to 50 unused beds across the work camps. That is if Warburton and Wyndham work camps are brought back to full capacity. This would of course require increased staffing at these sites.

Wyndham has capacity for 40 prisoners. But to manage this number they would need to increase the staff on site. The capacity is currently capped at 21 which aligns with the staffing model in place. Warburton opened with 24 beds, but that was reduced to 14 in June 2018 due to the camp never reaching anywhere near this capacity. Staffing at Warburton currently could not support a population of 24.

We acknowledge that eligibility for work camp placement requires strict criteria. This should not be a barrier for prisoners to be provided with the opportunities for reintegration offered at the work camps.

4.3 Work camps were often more cost-effective than host prisons

Most work camps operated more inexpensively than prisons. As shown in Table 3, four out of the five work camps had a lower Cost Per Prisoner Per Day (CPPPD) than its host prison. Dowerin, Roebourne and Walpole were also more cost effective than the overall CPPPD for all prisons across the estate over the 2022/23 and 2023/24 financial years.

The outlier was Warburton which had significantly higher operating and prisoner management costs than its host prison, Eastern Goldfields Regional Prison. This was primarily due to its remote location and underutilisation.

Table 3: Cost Per Prisoner Per Day (CPPPD) – host prison and work camp comparisons for 2022/23 and 2023/24 Financial Years (FY).

Cost Per Prisoner Per Day (CPPPD)	FY 2022 - 2023	FY 2023 - 2024
Overall CPPPD (for comparison)	\$407	\$386
Broome Regional Prison (host)	\$773	\$681
Wyndham Work Camp	\$622	\$541
Wooroloo Prison Farm (host)	\$364	\$338
Dowerin Work Camp	\$310	\$291
Pardelup Prison Farm (host)	\$494	\$578
Walpole Work Camp	\$330	\$350
Roebourne Regional Prison (host)	\$436	\$409
Roebourne Work Camp	\$349	\$383
Eastern Goldfields Regional Prison (host)	\$900	\$796
Warburton Work Camp	\$1,132	\$1,732

As noted in our previous inspection, consistently high occupancy rates were critical to maintaining low operating costs (OICS, 2015). Warburton has always struggled to maintain capacity. Built originally with a capacity for 24, this was reduced to 14 in 2018. And even this number has been difficult to maintain. When we inspected all the work camps there were only five prisoners in Warburton. The fewer prisoners the higher the operating costs.

Utilising work camps to their maximum potential could have a cost-benefit to the Department. For example:

- Works camps require fewer staff due to the lower risk rating of the prisoners.
- As small low-risk facilities, the infrastructure needs are minimised.

 By focusing on rehabilitation and reintegration, work camps help reduce recidivism and the likelihood of prisoners returning to custody.

There is much to be gained from a possible expansion of work camps to maximise the benefits, at both a system level and for individual prisoners.

Recommendation 5

Explore opportunities to open additional work camps across the custodial estate, including for adult women.

4.4 No work camps' champion

There was no individual in the Department responsible for 'championing' the benefits and positives of work camp life. This could account for the inconsistent approaches we found throughout this inspection at each site. A position of Work Camps' Manager had existed in the past, but this had not been in place for many years.

A position responsible for overseeing and advocating at a system level for the work camps could provide the following benefits:

- Identify prisoners across the state eligible for work camp placement
- Educate these prisoners of benefits of work camps
- Maintain full, or close to, capacity in the camps
- Ensure a more consistent approach across the work camps
- Drive meaningful work, community involvement and vocational training
- Provide a point of support and contact for all work camp staff and host prisons
- Assist work camp staff with allocation and management of resources, including budgets
- Identify potential cost-saving benefits of the work camps for the Department
- Advocate for work camps across the department.

Reinstatement of a work camps manager position would provide an opportunity to promote work camps throughout the system, provide direction and support, and drive an appropriate level of consistency while still ensuring sufficient flexibility for each site to self-manage. The approach should encourage innovation rather than stifle it.

Recommendation 6

Re-establish a Work Camps' Manager position.

Appendix A Bibliography

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Appendix B Acronyms

Term	Expansion of Abbreviation	
CLG	Community Liaison Group	
CPPPD	Cost Per Prisoner Per Day	
DOJ	Department of Justice	
MoU	Memoranda of Understanding	
OICS	Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services	
PEP	Prisoner Employment Program	

Appendix C Department of Justice's Response





Response to the Announced Inspection:

2025 Inspection of Work Camps

October 2025

Response Overview

On 20 December 2024, the Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services (OICS) announced the combined 2025 Inspection of Dowerin, Roebourne Town, Walpole, Warburton, and Wyndham Work Camps (the Work Camps), which took place from March to May 2025.

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 4 August 2025, the Department received the draft report which raised six recommendations for review and comment.

Of the six recommendations:

- Three are supported
- Two are supported in principle
- One is supported and considered current practice.

Detailed responses to the recommendations can be found below.

The Department also wishes to address the findings in the report regarding the underutilisation of prisoners at Work Camps being an ongoing issue, having been raised in previous inspections in 2012, 2015 and again in this latest inspection in 2025.

The report states "Since 2020, work camps collectively have not been above 75% full". The Department is pleased to advise that significant progress has been made to ensure Work Camps are operating at or near capacity, supporting the effective management of increased prisoner population across the estate.

In addition, the Manager Work Camp position has been reestablished and prioritised for filling to enable ongoing support to Superintendents and ensure Work Camps are continuing to operate at capacity moving forward.

As at 22 August 2025, Work Camps capacities were as follows:

- Dowerin Work Camp 100%
- Roebourne Town Work Camp 88%
- Walpole Work Camp 100%
- Warburton Work Camp 86%
- Wyndham 75%

This data represents the work which has been done to allow for more prisoners to be eligible for Work Camps placements through dedicated resources including additional staffing where required to allow more bed capacity at these sites.

In July 2025, Corrective Services launched its Strategic Plan 2025-2030 which provides a clear understanding of what Corrective Services is striving to achieve and sets clear priorities to align efforts towards Safer Corrections, Smarter Corrections and Healthier Corrections.

Response to Recommendations

1 Improve access to work camps for First Nation prisoners.

Level of Acceptance: Supported

Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Adult Male Prisons

Response:

Corrective Services has renewed its focus on improving outcomes for First Nations people which is a priority under the Corrective Services Strategic Plan 2025-2030.

Corrective Services is investigating strategies for improving First Nations representation at work camps. An initial strategy being explored is the priority placement of eligible First Nations prisoners at work camps where possible, before non-First Nations prisoners to ensure as many prisoners are on country and when safe to do so. Whilst there are benefits to this strategy, there are also increases in risk which need to be mitigated around housing of First Nations prisoners in a work camp when family resides nearby. Unfortunately, this has recently been identified as a higher risk around escapes, attempted escape or access to contraband due to the increased temptation work camps in proximity to families provides.

Where unacceptable security risks are identified following a Superintendent's approval to reduce a prisoner's security classification to minimum, the Assistant Commissioner Custodial Operations has the discretion to override these decisions.

These sentence classification changes have been incorporated into Commissioner's Operating Policy and Procedures (COPP) 8.6 Works Camps and 8.7 External Activities, in addition to the work camps / external activities checklist on the Total Offender Management Solution (TOMS) system.

The Department has also re-established the Manager Work Camps position which is responsible for engaging with custodial facilities to oversee, promote and streamline Work Camp placement, including the identification and implementation of strategies to increase First Nations placements.

2 Remove duplicate approvals for work camp placements.

Level of Acceptance: Supported

Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Adult Male Prisons

Response:

The Department is currently exploring a technical solution to amend the *Suitability for External Activities or Work Camps* checklist within TOMS so that an assessment of a prisoner's suitability for work camps placement and participation in external activities can be performed under a single checklist and approval.

Once the technical solution is identified, this initiative will be progressed to streamline the process.

3 Include a Life Skills Officer position in the staffing model for all the work camps.

Level of Acceptance: Supported in Principle Responsible Division: Corrective Services Responsible Directorate: Adult Male Prisons

Response:

The revised Staffing Level Agreements (SLAs) developed for each custodial facility as part of the Safer Staffing Review have included a life skills officer position within each work camp staffing model.

The SLAs are now subject to review and approval, and subsequent negotiation with the Western Australia Prison Officers' Union (WAPOU) for endorsement. Following WAPOU agreement and endorsement, the SLAs will be submitted to Government for funding consideration.

4 Support all work camps to develop, manage and sustain a Community Liaison Group.

Level of Acceptance: Supported

Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Adult Male Prisons

Response:

All Community Liaison Groups (CLG) will be assessed by the Manager Work Camps as a priority to determine how they can be better supported at both a local and strategic level, and to assist those without a CLG to commence plans to establish a committee.

In addition, the Manager Work Camps will be responsible for ensuring each work camp has appropriate governance arrangements in place for their respective CLGs, including establishing adequate recordkeeping practices for meetings, ensuring community work project decisions are fair and transparent, and that ongoing performance monitoring arrangements are in place to ensure that the work camps are continuing to deliver positive outcomes to the local communities.

5 Explore opportunities to open additional work camps across the custodial estate, including for adult women.

Level of Acceptance: Supported in Principle Responsible Division: Corrective Services Responsible Directorate: Adult Male Prisons

Response:

Whilst the Department supports the principle of opening additional work camps across the custodial estate for male prisoners, the opening of work camps specifically for women is not supported.

The criminogenic profile of incarcerated women is profoundly different to those of men, with the work camp philosophy having been designed for the male custodial population. Significant modifications to the work camps philosophy would be required

if they were to be extended to the female custodial population, and with no supporting evidence on the efficacy of work camps for incarcerated women the Department does not support the establishment of work camps for this cohort.

Boronia Pre-Release Centre for Women provides an alternative rehabilitative model that has been designed specifically for women, and which supports emerging evidence that gender-responsive community-based programs are effective in addressing the criminogenic needs of incarcerated women and improves reintegration outcomes, including reducing recidivism rates.

In respect to the male estate, while increasing the number of work camps is desirable, any additional work camps would be subject to Government funding and a suitable assessment of location, likely cohort of eligible prisoners and the needs of the overall custodial estate. It is anticipated the enhancements to the security classification tools will improve the number of prisoners eligible for work camp placement.

Despite the existing placement challenges, the Department will continue to explore opportunities to either expand or increase the number of current work camp facilities where feasible.

6 Re-establish a Work Camp's Manager position.

Level of Acceptance: Supported – Current Practice / Project

Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Adult Male Prison

Response:

The Department has commenced the permanent re-establishment of the Manager Work Camps position.

The position has been filled on an acting basis for six months, commencing 25 August 2025, while the job description form is finalised, and a permanent recruitment process can be undertaken.

Following the acting period, the position will be advertised and filled substantively as a permanent position.

Appendix D Inspection Details

Previous inspection		
1 November 2012 – 21 February 2013		
Activity since previous inspection		
Liaison visits	46	
Inspection team		
Inspector	Eamon Ryan	
A/Director Operations	Ryan Quinn	
Principal Inspections and Research Officer	Lauren Netto	
Inspections and Research Officer	Jim Bryden	
Inspections and Research Officer	Charlie Staples	
Inspections and Research Officer	Kieran Artelaris	

Key dates	
Inspection announced	20 December 2024
Start of online and on-site inspection activities	17 March 2025
Completion of online and on-site inspection activities	9 April 2025
Presentation of preliminary findings	12 May 2025
Draft report sent to Department of Justice	4 August 2025
Draft response received from Department of Justice	2 October 2025
Declaration of prepared report	3 October 2025



