

2025 INSPECTION OF BROOME REGIONAL PRISON

BROOME REGIONAL PRISON IS UNFIT FOR PURPOSE

On any day the population of Broome Regional Prison (Broome) consists primarily of men and a very small number of women. Approximately 95% of which are First Nations people from the Kimberley region.

Men held on remand are accommodated in the Maximum-Security Section, which is overcrowded, degraded and unhygienic, with cockroach infestations, broken fittings, and men sleeping on mattresses on the floor, all of which contributed to the poor living conditions. Conditions for women were marginally better, but at the time of our inspection they had to share their unit with men because of population demands. This does not meet any of the minimum standards universally expected for prisons and set out in various international and national instruments (ONODC, 2015) (Corrective Services Administrators' Council, 2018)

Conditions in the minimum-security unit for men were slightly better, with more space and freedom of movement, but the unit was still untidy and there was a very limited daily regime for most of the prisoners held there.

Most services for prisoners were inadequate, including health and mental health. But our report also details some exceptions to this, for example: the improved section 95 community work program; some voluntary vocational courses; weekly visits by community elders; and the development of stronger community engagement and relationships.

Overall, the problem is that Broome is entirely unsuitable and unfit for purpose. But this is nothing new, in fact this Office has been saying so since our first inspection of the prison back in 2001 (OICS, 2002) and in every report on the prison since then.

Over the intervening 25 years there have been many government announcements about the future of the prison, including one in 2012 that the prison would be closed, a decision that was subsequently reversed in 2015. More recently in November 2017 the then Minister for Corrective Services was quoted in the ABC News - following the release of our 2017 inspection report (OICS, 2017) - as saying that in the long-term Broome needed to be replaced. Around the same time, funding was announced for a \$2.7M upgrade, referred to by the then Minister as a 'stop-gap' solution.

In the May 2019 budget, the government announced it had allocated \$1.4M to begin planning for a new facility to replace Broome, which would be built outside of town at a site yet to be determined.

Now over 5 years later, a site has not been confirmed, no construction work has commenced, and the uncertainty surrounding the prison remains. In the meantime, there have been hundreds of men and women pass through the prison enduring sub-standard conditions and limited rehabilitation opportunities.

At this stage, the only certainty for Broome seems to be that this intolerable situation will remain for the foreseeable future. The people who will suffer the most will be the men and women sent there, and the staff who work there. But ultimately the local community will be worse off because men and women will be released from the prison no better than when they were first sent there.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We have one Independent Prison Visitor for Broome. She is a community volunteer appointed by the Minister for Corrective Services, who attends the prison on a regular basis observing the operations of the prison and providing an opportunity for the men and women placed there to raise issues and complaints that informs the work of our office. I acknowledge the importance of the work undertaken and thank her for her contribution to our ongoing monitoring of Broome.

I acknowledge the support and cooperation we received throughout the inspection from the Superintendent and staff at Broome and from key personnel in the Department.

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

Finally, I would like to thank the members of the inspection team for their expertise and hard work throughout the inspection. I would also particularly acknowledge and thank Liz George and Ben Shaw, for their work in planning this inspection and Ben as principal drafter of this report.

Eamon Ryan

Inspector of Custodial Services

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