

MEDIA RELEASE **EMBARGOED UNTIL 12NOON FRIDAY 7TH OCTOBER 2011**

Report No. 73 – Announced Inspection of Bandyup Women's Prison

In releasing his most recent inspection report on Bandyup Women's Prison, the Inspector of Custodial Services, Neil Morgan, voiced disappointment at the decline in attention to services to women prisoners.

'Bandyup is Western Australia's most complex prison', Mr Morgan said.

'It must cater for women from all parts of the state, both sentenced and remand, and prisoners of every security classification. The women held at Bandyup also have very significant family commitments. Some are pregnant or have recently given birth and almost all of them have high mental and physical health needs.'

The inspection found that staff and local management at Bandyup are generally doing their best but that infrastructure deficits, combined with a general lack of planning and investment for women prisoners, have widened the gap between promises in official policy documents and practice on the ground. It found that although the prison has a new gatehouse and a new self care unit, much of the infrastructure is ailing and fails to meet need in critical areas such as mental health and maintaining family connection.

Mr Morgan said: 'Unit One, the lowest level of accommodation, is a particularly 'hard' place in terms of its impoverished infrastructure, the obvious levels of mental illness and the palpable anxiety and despair. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that to some extent it doubles as a secure unit for people with a mental illness as well as a prison. But it is the very antithesis of a therapeutic environment. The pressures on both staff and prisoners are high, and we found that due to its limited capacity to use other measures to keep women in distress safe, Bandyup uses its restraints bed far more often than comparable male prisons.'

The report also notes that the state's secure forensic mental health unit, the Frankland Centre, opened in 1993 with 30 beds for men and women: 'It is striking that the state's prison population has more than doubled since then, and mental health issues are increasingly recognised, but Frankland's capacity remains unchanged. This is clearly something requiring whole of government attention and action for both men and women.'

More generally, Mr Morgan criticised the lack of planning and funding for women prisoners in the system as a whole.

'Women have constituted an increasing proportion of a growing prison population over many years and their numbers rose quickly from 2008 to 2011. However, despite a massive investment in extra units for male prisoners over this period, none of the extra beds were planned for the women. At one stage in mid-2010, there were 90 women sleeping on floors in Bandyup in cramped single cells. The Department's decision to divert some demountable units to Bandyup when it became clear they were no longer needed at one of the male prisons is testament to the lack of planning.'

The inspection found that Aboriginal women were even further marginalised. In terms of accommodation, they are concentrated in the most impoverished areas of the prison. In terms of

services, much remains to be done to develop more culturally appropriate programs, better health screening and service access, and improved community contact. 'And unfortunately, these are not just Bandyup issues: they are issues across the regional prisons too' Mr Morgan said.

Other specific findings at Bandyup included:

- Unlike the male prisons, there is no Department-sponsored transport to the prison for visitors and a poor visits centre. This thwarts women's attempts to build and maintain positive relationships with their children, family, and community;
- Women with legal issues, including a large number being held on remand, have little access to legal resources (and far less than their counterparts in male prisons);
- Health services have insufficient capacity to meet need and demand;
- Women were not able to purchase items that met their needs as women and mothers;
- Women convicted of violent or sexual offences lack access to programs to address their offending behaviour. This disadvantages them compared with men in parole applications and impacts on community protection.

Mr Morgan concluded: 'It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Bandyup is just having to 'make do' when compared with male prisons. We found too many areas where the facilities and services for the women prisoners fall well short of equal treatment with male prisons. This not only limits Bandyup's capacity to achieve results for its prisoners but also exposes the Department to potential discrimination challenges under the *Equal Opportunity Act*. A renewed focus, action and investment are urgently needed to address current deficits and to ensure greater equality.'

Neil Morgan

7 October 2011

Neil Morgan will be available for comment from 12 noon on Friday 7th October and can be contacted on 9212 6200 or 0427 426 471.

The full Report will be available on the Inspector's website (www.oics.wa.gov.au)