

# The Inspector's Overview

KARNET: 50 YEARS ON

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## 2010–2013: A TIME OF GROWTH

This is the report of an announced inspection of Karnet Prison Farm (Karnet) conducted in January 2013. Karnet has a long and interesting history and originally opened in 1963 as a small facility catering for around 60 convicted alcoholics. It celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in April 2013. While this signifies a landmark moment in the life of the prison, it is also an indication of the age of some of its infrastructure. Even at the time of this Office's first inspection of Karnet in 2001 we had identified that the majority of its buildings were approaching the end of their life span, and although there are some new buildings, the situation is largely unchanged.

Karnet has gradually increased its numbers since 1963 and at the time of the October 2007 Report (when it housed 174 prisoners) we recommended that it should be further expanded to house 240 prisoners. This expansion was to involve the construction of a new unit and additional investment in infrastructure and human resources. Although this recommendation was not supported by the Department of Corrective of Services (the Department), by the time of our last inspection in 2010, Karnet's numbers had swelled to 256, a 40% increase from 2007. Unfortunately this increase had not been achieved through the installation of new accommodation, but rather through the addition of extra beds to existing cells which were originally intended for single occupancy.

In the three years since the 2010 inspection Karnet gained a further 88 beds, bringing the total number of beds to 326. This increase was made possible by the addition of 24 beds to an existing unit in 2011, and the building of a new 64 bed unit in 2012.

Over the years Karnet has developed a reputation for good management of prisoners and a relaxed but productive rehabilitative culture. In addition it has made a massive contribution to the prison system through its efficient farm operations, and through the meat, processed meat, milk, eggs, and various fruit and vegetable crops it produces. This production plays an important role in offsetting the costs of imprisonment borne by the Western Australian community. Karnet, of all the state's prisons, has also been one of the best, if not the best, in terms of its community acceptance, support and links.

A particularly positive finding from this inspection was the substantive appointment of Karnet's then acting superintendent to the position in 2012, and the establishment of a strong and stable senior management team to support him. The subsequent release of a strategic vision for Karnet had also established a clear plan for Karnet's future and for the well-being of its prisoners. The central aim of the plan is for Karnet to become the centre of excellence in pre-release management, by preparing prisoners for reintegration by way of employment, education and training, together with specialist re-entry support. In light of this, Karnet continued to maintain a range of working relationships with community based agencies that provided valuable in-reach support services. Furthermore a significant proportion of Karnet's prisoners had embraced the multitude of opportunities available to them, including those offered by way of employment, training, and recreation.

It was also pleasing to find that the vast majority of Karnet's staff maintain positive and respectful relationships with the prisoners. This was clearly evident in the pre-inspection surveys of both staff and prisoners, and was further observed during the on-site phase of the inspection. In particular Karnet's Vocational and Support Officers represent an enormous asset. They make an invaluable contribution to the prison's operation, serving as role models to the prisoners they work with. As a functioning prison farm it was also pleasing to observe that both Karnet's farm and dairy were found to be well managed, with animal welfare being a clear priority.

## CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

### Changes and Improvement

During the inspection concerns were expressed to us regarding two changes that had been recently been introduced at Karnet. These changes involved the development of the new Drug Management Unit, and the way visitors were processed during visits sessions. In both cases the changes had been implemented to address concerns identified by the prison with previous practices. However, given that both were new initiatives, and given that concerns that had been drawn to our attention we felt that each should be the subject of an evaluation, to be completed by early 2014. Given the Department has a stated commitment to continually improving the provision of its services, a commitment which can only be achieved by assessing and evaluating the effect of changes, it seemed strange that it did not support these recommendations.

### The Abattoir

Slaughtering approximately 48 cattle and 100 sheep each week, Karnet's abattoir is an important supplier of fresh meat and small goods to the state's prison system, offsetting the significant costs of imprisonment to the community. However, the abattoir and boning room facilities were extremely dilapidated, failing to meet the structural requirements of relevant industry standards in a number of areas. At the time of the inspection, Karnet was awaiting the outcome of a business case submitted for a proposed new abattoir. While this business case remained undetermined, Karnet was reluctant to spend the amount of money required for the maintenance of the existing facility.

However, Karnet can no longer permit the structural defects to go unaddressed. The two audits conducted by the Department of Health (14 February and 21 August 2012) prior to the inspection had been categorised as 'unsuccessful', with structural defects raised as contributing factors in both reports. Recommendation 15 of this report (for the Department to replace the abattoir) was therefore made with the intention of supporting the Department's case for additional funding to replace the existing facility.

### Environmental

Karnet produces a range of smallgoods (including polony, mortadella, salami, red sausages and cabana) for distribution throughout the Western Australian prison system. During the inspection a significant risk to prisoners' health was identified by the Department's lack of food allergen management. Manufactured dry ingredients were used in the production of a number of smallgoods, and many of these contained hidden allergens such as peanuts, fish, and tree nuts, that prisons, and prisoners, had not been informed about. It was felt that this risk could be easily addressed if Karnet provided a copy of the ingredients, or a statement detailing what potential allergens may be in which products, to all prisons receiving the goods.

The Department did not support this recommendation, arguing that: "Under health regulations there is no requirement for Karnet to individually label products with contents as all products are for internal usage." While technically correct, the Department is providing smallgoods to 14 prison and detention centres, and over 5,000 prisoners throughout the state. There is therefore both a moral obligation and a duty of care to inform prisons about the contents of the food they receive as they may place a prisoner's health at risk.

### CONCLUSION

Previous reports by this Office have consistently identified Karnet as both a good performer and a place with greater potential. However, it is a potential Karnet now appears to be achieving. Following an 87% increase in prisoner numbers, as well as the recent upgrades in infrastructure (including both power and water) to sustain these numbers, Karnet appears to have a more certain future than was the case six years ago. Given its track record, and the vision of the new management team, and despite the problems of aging infrastructure, it is expected that Karnet will continue to build on its positive and unique place in the State's prison system.

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