

The Inspector's Overview

GREENOUGH REGIONAL PRISON: A SOLID PERFORMER FACES SOME CHALLENGES

This report of an announced inspection of Greenough Regional Prison ('Greenough') conducted in October 2012 constitutes the fourth time this Office has reported to Parliament on the prison.ⁱ The overall conclusion of this Report is broadly consistent with the findings of earlier inspections: the prison generally goes about its business in an efficient way, free of major controversies and major incidents. However, it is in the midst of some very significant changes, including infrastructure upgrades, management changes and the influx of a larger number of female prisoners. These developments pose some very real challenges and some potential risks.

OVERALL FINDINGS

(a) Infrastructure

Greenough prison opened in 1984 but looks much older than its 28 years. Its physical condition has deteriorated due to the ravages of the weather (including strong winds carrying a high salt content); an excessive reliance on transportable buildings, many of which are now more than 15 years old; and a reactive maintenance program which has not kept pace.ⁱⁱ These issues are compounded by the fact that the prison must accommodate many more prisoners than it was designed for, with around 40 per cent of prisoners sharing cells designed and intended for one.ⁱⁱⁱ

Fortunately, some significant infrastructure repairs and upgrades are in train, with the perimeter fence and the roof being current priorities. However, funding has only been confirmed for the fence and the first stage of the roof replacement. The whole site needs significant ongoing investment.

(b) Staff and management

As in 2009, members of staff generally have a 'can-do' attitude. They go about their work in a professional and cohesive way and it was positive to find that their perceptions of safety are better than the state average and have improved since 2009.

However, there has been a concerning decline in general staff morale and staff/management relations.^{iv} In part this undoubtedly reflects the general pressures and uncertainties which the prison has faced. It also reflects the departure of most of the long-serving management team and the influx of new managers, some of whom have different approaches from their predecessors, and most of whom have only held acting positions. The lack of stability has proved very unsettling at the prison. Whilst there are some specific reasons why the situation has developed, it generates risks and must be resolved.

i OICS, *Report of an Announced Inspection of Greenough Regional Prison*, Report No. 21 (May 2003); *Report of an Announced Inspection of Greenough Regional Prison*, Report No. 44 (May 2007); *Report of an Announced Inspection of Greenough Regional Prison*, Report No. 66 (June 2010).

ii See paragraphs 2.20–2.30.

iii See paragraphs 4.14 – 4.19.

iv See Chapter Three.

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(c) Prisoner facilities and services

Conditions at Greenough are extremely mixed. Some areas are adequate but others are poor. The double bunking arrangements, criticised in previous reports, remain very problematic. Most of the cells are very cramped, with a degrading lack of privacy, and in many the arrangements for accessing top bunks pose risk of serious injury.^v

Areas identified for improvement throughout this report include food (quality and quantity), employment opportunities and arrangements for visits. Education services struggle against inadequate facilities and there are significant gaps in the delivery of programs to address offending behaviour. Opportunities for recreation are mixed, with female prisoners being seriously disadvantaged. The opportunities and incentives offered to minimum security male prisoners also need to be expanded.

On a positive note, Aboriginal-focused activities and services have improved markedly and there were some strong and effective links with community based organisations and service providers. Health services are operating well and are much improved from 2009, and there are good processes in place to assist prisoners' return to the community.

FEMALE PRISONERS: THE GENERAL SITUATION

Over the last four years I have consistently drawn attention to the state's inadequate level of investment in female prisons, especially compared with male prisons. The number of women in prison has been rising at a markedly faster rate than the number of men and yet virtually all of the investment in new units has targeted male prisoners.^{vi} The only new accommodation designed and intended for female prisoners is located at the West Kimberley Regional Prison in Derby. This opened in late 2012 and currently houses around 24 women, predominantly from the Kimberley region.^{vii} Apart from this, the female prisoners have essentially been allocated parts of the estate that were no longer needed for male prisoners.^{viii}

Bandyup Women's Prison is the state's primary women's prison, holding over 60 per cent of the female prisoner population. As a result of inadequate investment in the women's estate, it is the state's most problematic prison in terms of overcrowding, inadequate

v See paragraphs 4.14-4.19. This issue has been raised on numerous occasions by this Office and there have been a number of falls at Greenough, including at least one that resulted in hospitalisation. The Department remains at significant legal risk: OICS, *Report of an Announced Inspection of Greenough Regional Prison*, Report No. 66 (June 2010) iii- iv; OICS, *Annual Report 2010-2011*, 4.

vi In addition to the new West Kimberley Regional Prison, new units for men have been added to Casuarina Prison, Hakea Prison, Albany Prison, Wooroloo Prison Farm and Karnet Prison Farm; Pardelup has been converted from a work camp to a prison; new work camps for men have been opened at Wyndham, Warburton and Dowering; Acacia Prison is undergoing a substantial expansion; and a new facility (Wandoo) has opened for males aged 18 to 24.

vii Broome Regional Prison now houses only a handful of female prisoners who have court appearances in Broome.

viii See below regarding developments at Greenough itself. In 2011, a number of transportable units, originally intended and purchased for a totally different environment (the minimum security male Karnet Prison Farm) were diverted to Bandyup where they sit uneasily within the layout and needs of the prison.

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resources and impoverished facilities.^{ix} A decent capacity for Bandyup as currently configured would be around 180-200. During 2012 it commonly housed 280 to 290 prisoners, and numbers sometimes topped 300.

The other female prisoners are held in Boronia Pre-release Centre for Women (80 highly selected minimum security prisoners in probably the best conditions of any prison in the state) and some of the regional prisons (Eastern Goldfields, Roebourne, Greenough, Broome and West Kimberley).

In response to rising numbers of female prisoners and the increasingly intolerable situation at Bandyup, the Department of Corrective Services decided in 2012 to increase Greenough's female population from 25 to 69, giving a net increase of 44 beds. This has been achieved by converting one of the previous male units, Unit 4, to a female unit. At the time of this inspection, Unit 4 was not yet operational and the women remained in Unit 5.

FEMALE PRISONERS AT GREENOUGH

Unit 5 is claustrophobic, oppressive and run down and has never offered an adequate regime for female prisoners.^x Unfortunately, the situation in October 2012 had deteriorated from 2009. Twenty three female prisoners were living in Unit 5 and despite the efforts of some staff and external service providers, most of them had little to keep them positively occupied. As a group, they remained seriously disadvantaged compared with male prisoners.

The Department has put a positive light on its decision to house more women at Greenough, describing Unit 4 as an appropriate option and indicating that it believes that Greenough would be a good location for purpose built female units in the future.

Unit 4 is clearly far better physically than Unit 5, and the presence of a larger number of female should allow the prison to offer more services, including programs, education and recreation. However, there are some very significant outstanding issues and questions.

(a) Capacity

Use of Unit 4 is at best a band aid, not a long term solution. Greenough itself has gained just 44 female beds. In addition, the Department has now decided to use the former women's unit at Roebourne for male prisoners so that women will be held at Roebourne only on a short term basis. This means that the net gain from Greenough's expansion is less than 35 beds. This does not address Bandyup's current problems, let alone future increases in female prisoner numbers. Longer term targeted investment in the right locations is essential.

ix OICS, *Report of an Announced Inspection of Bandyup Women's Prison*, Report No. 73 (August 2011). Following the release of this report, the Standing Committee on Public Administration undertook its own inspection. The Committee was equally critical of both the conditions at Bandyup and the failures in planning or funding for an area of obvious need: *Report 15 Standing Committee on Public Administration Omnibus Report – Activity during 38th Parliament* (November 2012).

x OICS, *Report of an Announced Inspection of Greenough Regional Prison*, Report No. 66 (June 2010).

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(b) Location

There are relatively few women in prison from Geraldton and the mid-west region, and the decision to locate more women at Greenough was essentially driven by the need for beds not by regional need/demand.

The decision to expand Greenough and to close the Roebourne women's unit will increase the number of women held a long way from home, contrary to generally accepted principles. At the time of the inspection only 17 per cent of the 23 women held at Greenough were from Perth and the south west. By 19 February 2013, this had increased to around 45 per cent of 55 women. As Greenough builds up to 69 women, the proportion of 'displaced' women will increase. This has caused, and will continue to cause distress to many of the transferred women.

Future decisions about the location of prison beds for women must take full account of location and also factors such as security ratings.^{xi}

(c) A female prison inside a male prison: culture, regime and resources

The number of women to be held at Greenough (69) will be close to the number housed in the state's smallest prisons, Pardelup and Boronia.^{xii} Both Pardelup and Boronia prisons have their own Superintendents and management teams and both have strong guiding philosophies. These are two of the reasons behind their positive achievements.

By contrast, Unit 4 at Greenough is located inside a male prison which has had a very masculine culture for a long time. And it will not have anything like the same dedicated resources as a prison such as Boronia. Consequently, although the Department has strongly committed to making Unit 4 a place which is genuinely women-focused, time alone will tell whether it can fulfil this vision, or whether the women at Greenough will remain an uncomfortable adjunct in a male domain.

One of the specific challenges which Unit 4 will need to address is the fact that it houses women of all security ratings inside a medium/maximum security prison. On 19 February 2013, 30 per cent of the women were minimum security but it is difficult, if not impossible, to operate a proper minimum security regime from within a medium security prison, especially with the gender overlay.^{xiii}

Given that Unit 4 was not operational at the time of this inspection, and given these concerns, I will be conducting a specific inspection of the position of women at Greenough within the next six to nine months.

Neil Morgan
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xi See below.

xii Boronia Pre-release Centre for Women was designed for 70 and currently houses 80 highly selected minimum security women. Pardelup Prison Farm houses 85 – 90 selected minimum security males.

xiii Five of the women rated minimum security on 19 February had been approved to undertake activities outside the prison under section 95 of the Prisons Act but none had actually done so in the preceding two weeks. Generally women are disadvantaged in terms of access to section 95: see OICS, *The Flow of Prisoners to Minimum Security, Section 95 and Work Camps* (December 2012).