



**MEDIA RELEASE – EMBARGOED UNTIL 12 NOON ON TUESDAY 16<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2012**

**Report No. 80 - Announced Inspection of Wooroloo Prison**

The Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services has released the report of an announced inspection of Wooroloo Prison conducted in March 2012. The prison site has a fascinating history. After beginning life as a sanatorium in the early Twentieth Century, it became a small unfenced prison in the 1970's. Until ten years ago, it housed around 160 prisoners but over the past decade it has transformed into a much larger facility with an official capacity of 360. Although it remains a minimum security facility, it is also now surrounded by a substantial perimeter fence.

In launching the report, the Inspector Neil Morgan said:

'The renovation work undertaken on the older buildings is impressive and befits the heritage listing of the site. It has resulted in some of the best work spaces for officers and accommodation for prisoners in the whole state. There has also been a reasonable level of investment in other infrastructure.

However, Wooroloo's transition from a small 'open' prison to a large fenced prison has been far from easy. It has suffered from something of an identity crisis, some complex staff dynamics and high management turnover. We clearly identified these issues in 2009, so it was disappointing to find little progress. However, there were tentative signs of improvement from mid-2011 and the Department of Corrective Services' responses to the recommendations in this report do reflect an acceptance of the challenges and a commitment to change.'

In terms of prisoner services Wooroloo, like all prisons, faces budgetary constraints which are most unlikely to ease over the coming years. In essence, this report shows that it does a good job within those constraints. Health services are good. Education and training opportunities are also good, though there are waiting lists for some courses. Unfortunately, however, too many prisoners are either unemployed or under-employed. This does not accord with Wooroloo's intended role and philosophy, and must be a key focus of both the prison and the department over the coming years.

Wooroloo plays a major role as a 're-entry' facility. It generally does a good job in terms of practical skill development and community outreach. The arrangements for visits and recreation, including organised external games, are also real highlights.

However, the Inspector again voiced his concern at the low number of Aboriginal prisoners accessing the state's best-equipped re-entry prisons. Professor Morgan said:

'The most recent Australian Bureau of Statistics snapshot of the nation's prisons confirms that WA has by far the highest per capita incarceration rate of Aboriginal people in the country. And the Department's statistics show the total number of Aboriginal prisoners to be at unprecedented levels. It is also universally acknowledged that Aboriginal people, as a cohort, have very high re-entry needs.

In our recent report of an announced inspection of Boronia Pre-release Centre for Women, I drew attention to the small and declining number of Aboriginal women accessing its excellent facilities and well-resourced re-entry services, and to the lack of central acknowledgment and planning around this issue. Unfortunately, the same picture emerged at Wooroloo. In 2009, Wooroloo held around 260 prisoners, 60 of whom (23 per cent) were Aboriginal. During 2011 and 2012 Wooroloo's population has been around 360 but generally only 40 to 50 Aboriginal prisoners (11 to 14 per cent) have been there.

Imprisonment is an expensive business. If the state is to maximise the opportunities for reducing rates of return to prison amongst core target groups, there needs to be better understanding of these trends and a sharper strategic focus on the needs of this group.'

Neil Morgan

15<sup>th</sup> October 2012

For more detail, see the Inspector's Overview to the Report (copy attached).

Neil Morgan will be available for comment from 12 noon on Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> October and can be contacted on 0427 426 471.

The full report will be available on the Inspector's website ([www.oics.wa.gov.au](http://www.oics.wa.gov.au))