

MEDIA RELEASE EMBARGOED UNTIL 12 NOON ON 20TH JANUARY 2012

Report No. 75 – Announced Inspection of Bunbury Regional Prison

The Inspector of Custodial Services has found that Bunbury Regional Prison is generally performing well but that it has been in a period of transition and faces a number of significant challenges. The report notes that Bunbury has been one of the State's better performing prisons over the past decade, and finds that there remain very many positive aspects to its operations. These include opportunities for prisoners to engage in employment, education and programs to address their offending behaviour, as well as an increasing range of activities to assist them integrate back into society upon release.

However, a number of factors are affecting Bunbury's performance and culture. The Inspector, Neil Morgan, commented:

"The most significant of these is overcrowding. According to the nationally accepted measures, which compare actual prisoner numbers with a prison's official design capacity, Bunbury has an occupancy rate of around 145 per cent. This has been achieved primarily by adding extra beds to small cells which were never intended for double occupancy.

Quite apart from the issue of physically cramped conditions, it is important to understand the 'knock on' effects of overcrowding throughout any prison. Prisons are not static warehouses but dynamic living environments where good relationships, positive activities, and opportunities for prisoners to earn incentives are essential. Unfortunately, we found evidence of increasing tension amongst prisoners, including more assaults by prisoners on fellow prisoners, and a decline in the pro-social relationships between prisoners and staff.

We also found staff to be generally less positive about their jobs and to be increasingly sceptical of their capacity to make a positive difference with prisoners. Many of these issues reflect the fact that, due to high occupancy rates, Bunbury is no longer able to provide the strong, reward-based, accommodation system which was its bedrock for many years."

Another area of concern at Bunbury Prison is its high level of Workers' Compensation claims.

One of the most important and positive developments at Bunbury has been the opening, in November 2008, of the Pre-release Unit (PRU). The Inspector concluded that in both concept and design, the PRU is excellent, that it has notched up a number of successes,

but that it has yet to reach full potential. This is partly due, again, to the fact that it has been required to operate well over its design capacity almost since it opened. The report also recommends further training for staff for working in a pre-release environment and in a number of other areas.

"In summary," said Professor Morgan, "it is a tribute to Bunbury staff and management that they have managed around the challenges they have faced with a pragmatic, 'can do' attitude. However, there are risks if the areas of concern identified in this report are not addressed. Given Bunbury's solid performance record over many years, this can be achieved and it is pleasing to note that the Department of Corrective Services has accepted and has started to address many of the recommendations."

Neil Morgan

19th January 2012

Neil Morgan will be available for comment from 12 noon on Friday 20th January and can be contacted on 0427 426 471.

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