

**MEDIA RELEASE – EMBARGOED UNTIL 12 NOON ON THURSDAY 11<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2014**

**Report No. 89 – Roebourne Regional Prison**

Concerns about prisoner access to adequate rehabilitation services at the remote Roebourne Regional Prison were highlighted today in a report released by the Inspector of Custodial Services. Inspector Neil Morgan said:

“Roebourne’s recidivism rate of 44.1 per cent was already significantly worse than the average for Western Australian prisons. We were therefore alarmed to find that offender program provision at the prison had collapsed and that opportunities for training and preparation for employment had fallen.”

The Report has therefore recommended to the Department of Corrective Services, that:

*The reasons for poor recidivism outcomes at Roebourne Regional Prison should be reviewed, with input from relevant stakeholders. A rehabilitation strategy for Roebourne Regional Prison should be developed.*

The report also found that women prisoners had been further disadvantaged in a system that has not treated them equitably:

“We were surprised and disappointed at the decision to close the women’s unit at Roebourne in 2013. It made no sense at a time of rapidly rising numbers of women prisoners and led to the displacement of women from the Pilbara to facilities far away from home.

Over the past decade, the management and quality of care of women housed at Roebourne has been of serious concern to this Office, particularly in regards to the condition of their accommodation and in the unequal access they had to education, employment, programs and other services. Although the situation had improved during our last inspection in 2010, the decision to close the main women’s yard, leaving only a residual capacity for women on remand, has seen the regime deteriorate for the handful of women who are still there.”

The Inspector warned that the severe levels of overcrowding at Bandyup Women’s Prison may shortly require the re-opening of the former women’s unit at Roebourne but said:

“Any such action must be supported by a significant increase in the support and physical facilities for women prisoners at Roebourne to at least match what is provided for male prisoners.”

The inspection also identified ongoing problems with much of the prison’s physical infrastructure.

“In 2010 I reported that no amount of maintenance could overcome Roebourne Prison’s fundamental design problems, and a more sustained preventative maintenance program was needed to see the prison through the next few years. Unfortunately no such program eventuated. Indeed in some cases the maintenance that occurred had created fresh problems. For example ageing wooden cyclone protection shutters had been replaced with steel shutters, but many of the new shutters were already visibly warping, and both staff and prisoners complained of the risk of injury.”

The Inspector also remained concerned about the lack of climate control for most prisoners.

“Roebourne is the hottest prison in Australia,” the Inspector pointed out. “And while I acknowledge that the Department has supported in principle my recommendation to provide measures to help mitigate the impact of the climate it has given no specific commitment or timeframe to do so.”

The Department urgently needs to assess its custodial accommodation requirements in the Pilbara and to invest forthwith in significant works to extend the life of the prison or to replace it altogether. Nevertheless, the Inspector identified a noticeable improvement in a number of areas which would improve the effectiveness of the prison.

“We identified a definite improvement in the culture among staff. The management team was more united and communicating better with staff, although there was room for further improvement. The level of conflict and bullying among staff had also eased to some degree. In addition the education and vocational training unit had created a young and capable team with the potential to deliver a much more effective program in 2014.

“There was also a sense of hope surrounding the development of a new town work camp and the opportunities it would provide the prison for regeneration. The prison and the Department have done well to develop a vision for the new camp, to provide prisoners with improved skills to enhance their rehabilitation. It is also hoped that the new staffing structure will permit the prison to enhance training for prisoners unable to join the work camp.”

However, given the concerns identified by the inspection, and the challenges the prison is facing with the opening of the new Town Work Camp and the possible re-opening of the women's unit, the Inspector indicated that he intended to conduct a follow-up inspection before mid-2015.

Neil Morgan

Inspector

10 April 2014

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

#### **About Roebourne Prison (the Prison)**

Roebourne Regional Prison was opened as a minimum security facility in 1984, and upgraded to a medium-security prison in 1995. The prison is the receipt facility for people sentenced, remanded, or returned to prison in the Pilbara region. With a current design capacity of 149 the prison held 170 prisoners at the time of the inspection, of whom approximately 87 per cent identified as Aboriginal.

#### **About the Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services (the Office)**

The role of the Office is to bring independent external scrutiny to the standards and operational practices relating to custodial services within Western Australia. The Office is required under its legislation to undertake an inspection of each prison every three years. Commencing operations in June 2000 the Inspector reports directly to Parliament.

#### **For Further Media Information**

The Deputy Inspector, Mr Andrew Harvey, will be available for comment from 12 noon on Thursday 11 April and can be contacted on 6551 4217 or 0477 307 559

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