

**MEDIA RELEASE – EMBARGOED UNTIL 12 NOON ON THURSDAY 9<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2014**

**Report No.91 – Female Prisons in Western Australia and the Greenough Women’s Precinct**

A recent history of neglect has left women prisoners in Western Australia accommodated in inappropriate accommodation, in inappropriate locations, and with inadequate resources, according to the latest report released today by the Inspector of Custodial Services.

The report examines the recent history of women’s imprisonment in WA and the expanded accommodation for female prisoners at Greenough Regional Prison which opened in 2012.

It is highly critical of the failure of the Department of Corrective Services to address both the rapid increase in female prisoner numbers (40 per cent in five years) and the complexity of the mix and needs of the group. The Inspector, Neil Morgan, said:

‘Women’s imprisonment is in crisis, and I do not use the word lightly. What makes it worse is that the crisis was predictable and avoidable. The number of women in prison has been rising faster than the number of men for many years and by the mid-2000’s it was obvious that investment was needed.

It is inexplicable and inexcusable that when over \$640 million was allocated to additional prison accommodation in 2009, virtually nothing was given to women.

Bandyup Women’s Prison in Perth has borne the brunt: it is the most complex, overcrowded and stressed prison in the state. It also has by far the highest rate of assaults by prisoners on staff of any prison and is performing poorly in terms of protecting the community by reducing recidivism.’

While the expanded women’s unit at Greenough has greatly improved the services available at that prison, Professor Morgan said:

‘It’s a Band-Aid in the wrong place: too small to meet demand, too far from home for the prisoners, and still a female island in a male domain. It would be the wrong choice for any major further expansion of the female prison estate.

However, because of the lack of investment in accommodation and services for female prisoners over the past six years, the Department now faces some extremely difficult decisions. Unless it can identify some other solution that can be actioned quickly, it will have to allocate other parts of the male system for women.’

The report shows the serious problems that can arise from co-locating men and women in facilities that were not built for purpose, and without proper planning and resources. Female prisoners at Greenough are held in a different compound, and the physical environment has improved for them. However, the prison was not able to control verbal and visual contact between males and females. Regular communication was occurring and it was often demeaning, unhealthy and inappropriate. Some staff blamed the women, despite the fact it was clearly a two-way process. Women were also marginalised where central prison services had to be shared, with many opting not to use the health centre rather than having to risk contact with male prisoners.

Professor Morgan said the dire state of women's imprisonment was illustrated by the fact that the Department may well move women into Units 11 and 12 at another male prison, Hakea:

'It is a severe indictment of past priority setting and planning that the preferred option appears to be to accommodate women, many of whom have suffered violence or abuse at the hands of men, in a maximum security male prison. Indeed, when responding to our report just three months ago, the Department appeared to have ruled out the Hakea option.

It should never have reached the stage where the Hakea option was even being considered but something must be done to alleviate the pressure of numbers and the unacceptable situation at Bandyup. Unfortunately, the new Commissioner has inherited a severe problem and has few options open to him. The only option is to convert part of the male prison system to women.

I have major concerns about any move to Hakea. If it is not done properly it will be an unmitigated failure. If Units 11 and 12 at Hakea are to be used, this must be on the basis that the area is adequately separated from the male prison in terms of visual and aural privacy, and that it is converted to an entirely self-contained and independently managed prison. It must have its own name, its own entrance, its own facilities for medical services, education, and other services, and dedicated cells to manage women who are distressed or at risk. It will also need its own management team and separate staffing from the male prison.'

In relation to the women's unit at Greenough, the Inspection found that the infrastructure was a marked improvement and services and opportunities for rehabilitation had improved in several areas. The most marked areas of improvement were:

- Women, now being 25 per cent of the population not 10 per cent, had a stronger place in the prison;
- Increased focus on women's issues by the local management team;
- Improved education and employment opportunities;
- Improvements to women's support services; and
- Introduction of an Integrated Offender Management Committee to look holistically at the needs of individual prisoners.

Areas requiring improvement included:

- Health services;
- Arrangements for visits and family contact (especially for women who are a long way from home); and
- Programs to address offending behaviour.

Neil Morgan

**Inspector**

8<sup>th</sup> October 2014

For more detail, please see the Inspector's Overview to the Report and Key Findings (attached).

**For Further Media Information**

The Inspector, Professor Neil Morgan, will be available for comment from 12 noon on Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> October and can be contacted on 6551 4201 or 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))