

**MEDIA RELEASE – EMBARGOED UNTIL 12 NOON ON TUESDAY 7<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2015**

**Escapes and Attempted Escapes from Corrections in Western Australia**

Escapes from custody are rare, opportunistic and short lived. This is the key finding from the latest review by the Inspector of Custodial Services, Neil Morgan.

Mr Morgan said the Hollywood stereotype of an escape and the reality of escapes are polar opposites, stating that the ‘reality is far more mundane and good luck plays a greater role than good planning’. Speaking of the spate of escapes in 2013 and 2014, Mr Morgan said:

‘These escapes were extremely concerning and there can be no room for complacency. Safe and secure custody is a precondition for any good custodial system. However there were immediate responses to these incidents and, taking a longer term view, both the Department of Corrective Services and its contractors deserve credit for having achieved a low number of escapes.’

The Inspector’s report examines escapes from maximum, medium and minimum security facilities and also those that have occurred when prisoners have been moved outside facilities.

‘Escapes from maximum and medium security prisons are very rare. The most frequent escapes involve opportunistic actions by low risk offenders who have been placed for rehabilitative reasons in work camps and minimum security settings. Escapes are also more likely when people grasp spur of the moment opportunities during escorted movements outside a secure facility.’

The custodial environment is not static and does not consist only of high security places. Every day, at least 265 offenders are moving to court, to medical appointments or to other facilities. A further 1000 prisoners are in minimum security prisons or work camps and many of these people are undertaking positive reparation work in the community. Thus, on any given day, more than a quarter of people in custody are in situations where the opportunity for escape is elevated. Yet despite this, only 70 people have actually escaped since 2008. Mr Morgan said:

‘The most significant finding of this report is that most prisoners do the right thing; they never escape or try to escape, even when they have the opportunity to do so.’

In theory it would be possible to harden all prisons to virtually eliminate escapes. However, this is unnecessary, given the low rate of escapes, and would elevate other risks, such as violence, riots or disorder. It would also reduce the capacity of the system to achieve its goal of improving community safety (and reducing costs) by reducing recidivism.

In short, it is important not to allow a handful of escapes to lead to the system becoming so risk averse that it compromises its ability to achieve the critical outcome of preparing people for release.'

However, whilst acknowledging the need to tighten policies and procedures in the aftermath of the 2013-2014 escapes, Mr Morgan said that some of the changes have generated anomalies, costs and operational complexity:

'The tightening of policies and procedures led to the imposition of blanket rules to avoid risk rather than a strategy of risk management. For example, prisoners who are being trusted to leave prison on a daily basis to undertake work in the community, and who have ample opportunity for escape, have been required to have a two-officer escort, in restraints, if they need to go to hospital. This does not make sense to me in terms of community risk or maximising the use of scarce resources.

I have raised this issue with the Department and there are signs that it will adopt a more appropriate risk management approach. I also acknowledge that to achieve this, the Department must be confident of its intelligence base. Again this is an area where they have been investing heavily.

This is important: at their core, correctional services are about people management and risk management. On the one hand, the public is obviously entitled to expect that people in custody will remain in custody. On the other hand, intelligent strategies to protect the public in the long term require the Department to prepare people for going back to the community and reduce their risk of committing further crime. The low number of escapes indicate that the Department has generally been very successful in getting this balance right.

Neil Morgan  
**Inspector**

2<sup>nd</sup> April 2015

**For further Media Information:**

**Please see the Inspector's Overview and Key Findings (attached).**

**The Inspector, Professor Neil Morgan, will be available for comment from 12 noon on Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> April 2015 and can be contacted on 0427 426 471.**

**The full report will be available on the Inspector's website:  
<http://www.oics.wa.gov.au/publications/review/>.**