

OICS MEDIA RELEASE

On Economic Regulation Authority Inquiry into the Efficiency and Performance of Western Australian Prisons – Final Report

The Inspector of Custodial Services, Professor Neil Morgan, has welcomed the release today of the Economic Regulation Authority's report on the *Efficiency and Performance of Western Australia Prisons*:

"Viewed in dollar terms alone, prisons are enormously expensive. On average, it costs over \$1.2 million to keep just ten adults in prison for a year, and this does not include other justice system costs, such as the police, the courts and prisoner transport. Nor does it include the knock-on costs to the taxpayer if breadwinners are imprisoned and families become welfare-dependent.

If you factor in the individual and social impacts of loss of freedom, dislocation and disruption, the total cost is immeasurable. While imprisonment will always be expensive, it is in everyone's interests to examine ways to do the job as efficiently and effectively as possible."

Professor Morgan said he strongly agreed with the ERA that issues of efficiency and effectiveness extend well beyond the up-front cost of incarceration:

"The ultimate objective of corrections should be to enhance community safety. This does not just mean ensuring that dangerous prisoners do not escape; it means finding better ways to reduce re-offending by ex-prisoners, 40% of whom currently return to prison within two years. The state will achieve nothing in terms of community safety or total costs if up-front savings result in cut-backs to programs that are proven to reduce the risk of offending.

But, unfortunately, we know too little about what works for whom and why in terms of reducing offending. As the ERA has said, the Department of Corrective Services must improve its data gathering capacity and the quality of its analysis if decisions are to be truly evidence-based. The Department is working on this but there is still a long way to go."

Professor Morgan agreed with ERA that the performance benchmarks for publicly operated prisons have been poorly articulated and managed by comparison with what is expected of private sector operators:

"For many years, Richard Harding, my predecessor as Inspector, and I have advocated that the expectations of public sector prisons should be better defined, monitored, and evaluated. And improved benchmarking systems must take account of the very different functions of different prisons. The privately operated Acacia Prison – a medium security prison for sentenced males - has a lower cost per day than other prisons, but it also enjoys

some benefits in terms of location, size and function. Regional prisons will always be more costly per head, female prisoners pose additional challenges and costs, and short periods served on remand or for fine default are especially expensive.”

The Inspector noted with interest the ERA’s discussion of a ‘commissioning’ model which would include ‘contestability’ between public and private sector providers. He said that he welcomed informed debate on the optimal forms of service delivery, but that a commissioning model would require significantly better data than exists at present.

Neil Morgan
Inspector