

Inspector's Overview

PARDELUP PRISON FARM: SAFE, HARD-WORKING AND PRODUCTIVE,
WITH STRONG SERVICE DELIVERY AND LOW RECIDIVISM

INTRODUCTION

It is unusual in today's environment of crowded prisons for an inspection to find a prison that is actively and successfully implementing the Department of Corrective Services' mission of a safer community through a holistic focus on rehabilitation as well as the security and safety of prisoners, and the safety of staff. It is even more unusual to find a prison where staff are working in a genuinely professional, collegiate, and contented working environment. However, that is what we found when we inspected Pardelup Prison Farm ('Pardelup') in October 2015.

It is disappointing, though, that when such a prison is found the Department does not make a more concerted effort to identify how it is achieving what it does, or to replicate its success into other prisons. This is not say that Pardelup is perfect; no prison can be perfect simply because it relies on human beings to provide its services. However, Pardelup's problems were generally a result of decisions made at head office. For example, escapes from other prisons had created a culture of risk avoidance rather than risk management, and had resulted in unnecessary restrictions to Pardelup prisoners accessing community work programs and paid employment off site.

BACKGROUND

Pardelup, located 27 kilometres from Mount Barker, has a fascinating 89 year history. It commenced operations in 1927 as an adjunct to Fremantle Prison, and in both national and international terms its philosophy and infrastructure when opened were ground-breaking: an open, fence-free rural location with a focus on positive farm-based work.

Up until 2002, Pardelup operated as a prison, holding a maximum of around 80 prisoners. In 2002, during a short-lived drop in prisoner numbers, the decision was taken to downgrade it to a small work camp. Its maximum capacity was only 20 prisoners and actual numbers were often lower. Given that prisoner numbers were always destined to move back up, this was a short-sighted decision. It also resulted in a deteriorating state asset and serious under-utilisation of a site with real potential.

In 2009, the government decided to invest in building up Pardelup's prisoner numbers and in appropriate refurbishments. In March 2010, Pardelup formally regained its status as a prison. Presently it has a capacity of 84 prisoners, as well as being responsible for the Walpole work camp which has a capacity of 12 prisoners.

WHAT WE FOUND

Pardelup is unique amongst the state's prisons: it has no perimeter security fence, and is the only prison operating exclusively with single cells. It is also a very large and open site where prisoners necessarily have access to tools, chemicals, and other materials. However, it has proved to be a secure and safe facility. Procedural and relational security processes were appropriate for a remote minimum-security prison. Careful prisoner selection, a zero tolerance approach to bullying and misbehaviour, positive staff/prisoner relations, and the incentive of having single-cell accommodation in a pleasant setting have also been key ingredients of this success.

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We found that Pardelup had continued to make improvements to its infrastructure since the last inspection, had maintained tight budget control, and had continued the competent operation of prison industries. Significantly this meant that every Pardelup prisoner had meaningful employment, again a very unusual but very positive indicator.

Successive Superintendents had built on the strengths and successes of their predecessors, delivering stable management, entrepreneurial vision, and a non-sexist working environment. The inspection found respectful interaction between management, custodial officers, vocational support officers, and prisoners. Staff satisfaction was high, evidenced by extremely low personal leave and workers' compensation applications. Prisoners and staff alike expressed a preference for Pardelup over any other Western Australian prison.

Pardelup delivered market garden and orchard produce across the custodial estate, and livestock husbandry earned significant profit. As an adjunct to the 2015 inspection, an independent assessment of the Pardelup agribusinesses found them on par with regional best practice, but the prison suffered from an inability to reinvest in agricultural machinery, equipment, and fixed assets (see below).

The Pardelup Education Centre had intelligently adapted its schedules and courses to dovetail the learning needs of prisoners with the demands of a prison with full employment. The recent appointment of a Recreation Officer had seen a revitalisation of recreational activities, particularly team sports off site.

The health centre was keeping pace with both regular and emergency healthcare needs of semiskilled prisoners working in medium-risk industries. The small through-care team had been able to comply with increasingly detailed assessment processes, and continued to provide comprehensive pre-release packages for prisoners. However, the loss of the nurse practitioner and removal of the employment coordinator positions had eroded capacity for health and through-care service delivery.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

It is pleasing that the Department supported 10, and only failed to support three of our 13 recommendations. However, while I understand the basis of the Department's reasoning, it appears short-sighted that it has failed to support Recommendation 2 that:

Pardelup should be permitted to retain a proportion of its farm revenues for reinvestment in that business.

The Department in its response has stated that:

Farm revenues are able to be retained by the Department in accordance with a determination by the Treasurer, pursuant to section 23 of the *Financial Management Act* 2006. The Department uses these revenues to help fund its highest priority services and activities.

We do not disagree with the proposition that the Department is 'able' to retain farm revenues, or with the view that revenues should be directed to high priority services and activities. Nor did we argue that Pardelup should be permitted to retain *all* of its farm

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revenues for reinvestment. But, as the Economic Regulation Authority pointed out in its 2015 *Inquiry into the Efficiency and Performance of Western Australian Prisons*, the ability to incentivise performance is an important one, and incentives can be both financial and non-financial (ERA 2015, 159). It would be reasonable to expect that if the farm was allowed to retain a proportion of income above a certain floor, and to make intelligent investments, it would be able to generate even greater revenues. The Department could then use a proportion of these increased revenues to help fund those services and activities it has identified as a priority.

I am also disappointed that while the Department gave ‘in principle’ acceptance to Recommendation 12, that it ‘develop strategies to identify and attract suitable Aboriginal prisoners to Pardelup Prison Farm’, it has not committed to action. The Department simply argues that ‘the location of Pardelup can present issues with isolation from family members and as such requires a commitment from prisoners to want to be placed at that facility’ and that Aboriginal prisoners do not meet the prison’s criteria in relation to self-care and the skills the prison requires.

However this isolation is not something unique for Aboriginal prisoners and it is not uncommon for the Department to be holding Aboriginal people in prisons that are far out of their country. Aboriginal people make up almost 40 per cent of the state’s prison population, but since 2010, Pardelup has never held more than 14 Aboriginal men (16% of its population). Before it was downgraded to a work camp in 2002, it routinely housed a larger number. And most Aboriginal prisoners at Pardelup are very positive about the experience and the opportunities it offers. Furthermore, the clear evidence from prisons such as West Kimberley is that when the Department invests adequately in skilling up and supporting its Aboriginal prisoners, they are willing and able to work, and quite capable of looking after themselves (OICS 2015a).

It is clear to me that the Department needs to identify and implement specific proactive initiatives if it is to meet the general goals it has espoused in its recently launched *Reconciliation Action Plan* or ‘RAP’ (DCS 2015c). The RAP states that the Department will ‘develop strategies to reduce recidivism by Aboriginal people by reducing ... offending by 6% year on year.’ Unfortunately, Departmental history is littered with glossy paper documents making similar in principle commitments but lacking concrete follow-up.

I also note that in 2012, in response to our concerns about low Aboriginal numbers at pre-release facilities, the Department’s previous administration commissioned a review to examine the reasons for low representation and to develop ‘strategies and opportunities to increase the number of Aboriginal prisoners entering these facilities.’ (OICS 2012a, 78). That review has been not made public and little or nothing has changed in terms of Aboriginal people’s access to high quality pre-release facilities.

In short, what is needed is action at each and every level, and detail about initiatives, not more paper bullet points in well-intentioned policy documents. Pardelup has greater potential to contribute to rehabilitation and public safety than is currently being realised.

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SUMMARY

As we commented after our last inspection: Pardelup provides a refreshing example of the benefits of simple things like fresh air, single cells, positive work opportunities, and respectful relationships. It is important that it retains its values and momentum. Staff, management and prisoners are to be congratulated on their achievements to date. It is now for the Department to ensure that it maximises its potential to reduce offending by all groups of prisoners.

Neil Morgan
Inspector
20 April 2016