

Inspector's Overview

PLANS FOR A NEW PRISON IN BROOME ARE WELCOME, BUT THE EXISTING PRISON NEEDS TO MAINTAIN ACCEPTABLE CONDITIONS AND SERVICES

This was our seventh inspection of Broome Regional Prison (Broome) and this report sets out our findings and recommendations. There have been some noticeable improvements in several aspects of the prison and its operations since our last inspection. However, everyone we spoke to agreed that the infrastructure was unsuitable, well past its useful life, and in need of replacement.

The state government announced in May 2019 that it had set aside \$1.4 million to plan for a replacement prison in Broome. This inspection was undertaken within this context, noting that the planning, design and construction of a new prison would take several years.

This poses some challenging questions. What happens to the current prison in the intervening years and what services will it offer to the men and women who are sent there? What will be the role, purpose, and operating philosophy of the new prison? These questions are more closely linked than they may at first appear.

BROOME IN THE INTERVENING YEARS

We saw evidence of many changes in Broome during this inspection. Some improvements were cosmetic, by way of general maintenance and refurbishment to the maximum-security unit. Others were more structural like the installation of the temporary kitchen and the modular construction of a new kitchen and dining hall, which we understand is due to be in place in early 2020. A new fence has also been installed around the basketball court. This will enable women and prisoners in the maximum-security unit increased access to outdoor recreation.

There is an improved level of stability in the leadership team, which is having a positive impact in re-establishing many governance and compliance processes around the prison's operation.

But there is work still to be done. We have identified in this report many opportunities for improvement in areas such as services and programs for prisoners, employment options, and other essential supports.

Staff and prisoners we spoke to were generally positive about being at Broome, notwithstanding the limitations of the infrastructure and the absence of many core services for prisoners. The exception would be those men who were housed in the maximum-security unit. Many prisoners told us they were bored and had little to occupy their time in prison. This was not surprising given the lack of education, programs, and limited employment opportunities.

The findings and recommendations in this report are focussed on achieving progress in these areas. The Department has supported, or supported in principle, five of the seven final recommendations.

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PLANNING FOR A NEW PRISON

The planning for a new prison in Broome will inevitably have to consider questions around what its role, direction and operating philosophy might be. Will it be a short term holding and remand facility or will it also hold medium and longer term sentenced prisoners. Will it house women and young detainees? What services will it offer and how will it fit within the broader prison system?

The answers to these and perhaps other questions may well inform what ought to be done in Broome in the intervening years.

During our inspection, we met with several key external stakeholders, including representatives of local government, state government agencies, and community groups. We heard a high level of optimism for the potential that a prison in Broome offers. There was considerable support expressed for opportunities to partner with the prison in offering employment and training opportunities, community work, and in-reach support services.

It appears that with some innovation and initiative, together with support from the Department, there are many opportunities to engage with the local community to provide meaningful activities for the men and women who are sent to Broome. Such partnerships, if guided by a solid understanding of what a future prison in Broome might look like, would create a solid foundation for the future and offer rehabilitation opportunities for the prisoners in the intervening years.

I would encourage the Department and prison leadership to embrace the opportunities identified in this report to lay solid foundations for Broome into the future.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the cooperation and support we received throughout this inspection from the Superintendent and staff at Broome, and key personnel in the Department.

It is also important for me to acknowledge the significant contribution of our inspection team and particularly Jim Bryden for his hard work in planning the inspection and Christine Wyatt as principal drafter of this report.

Eamon Ryan
Inspector

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