

# Inspector's Overview

## GOOD MANAGEMENT AND STRONG LEADERSHIP STEERS BUNBURY THROUGH A LARGE EXPANSION

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Since our last inspection three years ago, Bunbury Regional Prison has successfully navigated a significant period of change and disruption. During this period there has been a major construction project completed within the secure perimeter, without any significant incidents. This culminated in the opening in late 2019 of the new Unit 6 accommodation block, an expanded kitchen, new dining facilities in Unit 2, an additional classroom in the education centre, and some related infrastructure upgrades. In addition, Unit 5 was reopened as a pre-release unit accommodating 37 minimum-security prisoners. This expansion resulted in Bunbury being allocated an additional 160 prisoners to be housed in Unit 6. To handle the increased population, Bunbury was also allocated well over 70 new staff, primarily custodial staff but there were also some non-custodial staff.

The expansion of the capacity in Bunbury relieved significant population pressure on the whole prison estate and allowed men from the region to be placed closer to home. This type of capacity expansion is something we have advocated for over many years.

The construction and transition processes were not without problems during both the construction phase and following the expansion of the prison population. But overall, the project was well managed and well led, particularly within the prison where the Superintendent and her leadership team adopted a 'can do attitude' to great effect.

This report highlights several areas that require attention and generally the Department has responded positively to all but one of our 11 recommendations. Only Recommendation 3 was not supported. Of the remaining 10 recommendations, eight were supported and two were supported in principle. Our role does not stop once a recommendation is accepted and we look forward to monitoring closely the implementation of those 10 recommendations.

Our reports often focus on services for, and treatment of, Aboriginal prisoners and this report is no different. Although we have only made one recommendation that specifically relates to services for Aboriginal prisoners (see Recommendation 2) much of the commentary and narrative throughout the report relates to, or impacts on, Aboriginal prisoners. The high incarceration rates of Aboriginal people effectively means that Aboriginal prisoners are impacted by most, if not all, of the recommendations we make.

In Bunbury around 20 per cent of the prison population identify as Aboriginal, yet only two per cent of the staffing group do so. Further, in Chapter Four we identified that Aboriginal prisoners are often not proportionately represented in various areas of prison life, such as: preferred places of employment and/or accommodation; gratuity levels; and restricted or basic supervision regimes. This is something that we raised with the Superintendent and she was focussed on addressing these issues. An opportunity exists perhaps for Bunbury to take the lead and undertake a more detailed consideration of the drivers behind this issue.

This disproportionate representation is something we have seen elsewhere during our inspection work. It may be too simplistic to always assume it is due solely to a lack of opportunity. We will endeavour to do more work on this question more broadly over

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the course of our ongoing inspection of prisons in WA.

During this inspection we met with a group of foreign national prisoners, which was a representative sample of the 52 foreign national prisoners living in Bunbury. Many told us they were facing deportation at the end of their sentence; some said they welcomed it and others feared it. Overall, the group appeared to feel lost amid an uncertain bureaucracy, many did not know what would happen to them and had limited contact with Federal authorities. Accordingly, we were a little disappointed that Recommendation 3 was rejected by the Department. Nevertheless, given the presence of many foreign nationals in prisons throughout WA, we are still of the view that the Department ought to liaise with the relevant Federal government agency in order to put together a consistent and reliable information package for foreign national prisoners facing deportation.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Bunbury has had, until recent retirements, two very experienced Independent Prison Visitors who are community volunteers appointed by the Minister for Corrective Services. They attend the prison on a regular basis providing an opportunity for the prisoners to raise issues and feedback that information to our office. I acknowledge the importance of their work and thank them for the contribution they have made to our ongoing monitoring of Bunbury. We are currently in the process of appointing two new volunteers to this important role.

It is important to also acknowledge the support and cooperation we received throughout the inspection from the Superintendent and staff at Bunbury and from key personnel in the Department. The men who took the time to speak with us and share their perspective also deserve our acknowledgment and thanks.

We had an expert education consultant involved in this inspection, Ms Janet Connor from the Department of Education. I am very grateful for Ms Connor's expertise and significant contribution to our inspection and to this report.

Finally, I would like to thank the members of the inspection team for their expertise and hard work throughout the inspection. I would particularly acknowledge and thank Lauren Netto for her hard work in planning this inspection and as principal drafter of this report.

**Eamon Ryan**  
**Inspector**

3 February 2021