

Inspector's overview

Pardelup continues to offer constructive and rewarding rehabilitation

Pardelup Prison Farm (Pardelup) is a minimum-security working prison farm located between Mount Barker and Denmark in the great southern region of Western Australia. The focus is to prepare prisoners for release back into the community through engagement in a variety of rehabilitation activities, including training and employment in the orchards, market gardens, prison industries and the farm.

The outcome of this inspection was once again largely positive. We saw many examples of effective rehabilitation and reintegration services being offered to men approaching their release date. There were, however, some areas in need of improvement and these are detailed in our report and supported by the six recommendations we made.

Prison farms present several quite unique challenges in addition to those faced by mainstream prison facilities and Pardelup is no different in this regard. First and foremost, prison farms are still custodial facilities where prisoners are required to be held securely and safely until they reach their release date. But this requirement cannot ignore the fact that they also operate a working farm, with animals, crops and gardens needing attention seven days per week. For these reasons, our first two recommendations addressed some of the identified risks facing the operations of the farm and gardens.

The first recommendation related to the prison being able to retain a proportion of the revenue it generates for the purpose of reinvestment in farm operations. The Department's response stated that the position had not changed, and that the retention of revenue is subject to a determination of the Treasurer. The reference to the situation not changing probably reflects the fact that we have made this recommendation in each of the three inspections of Pardelup (2016, 2019 and 2022).

It is not possible to determine from their response if the Department fundamentally disagrees with the argument in support of the recommendation or simply accepts the status quo. Although we try to avoid being too prescriptive in what we recommend, one option that might be worth considering would be to seek approval for a small proportion of the revenue generated by each of the three prison farms to be held in a capital investment fund from which each facility could bid for equipment replacement and/or capital expansion of farming operations.

Our second recommendation was to increase staffing resources to cover the seven days per week farming operations and provide adequate leave coverage. This recommendation was not supported by the Department and the response noted that weekend work allocation prioritised animal welfare and essential activities. We understand that the situation has worsened recently because one of the farm staff had left and the other was on leave. We understand that supervision of the farm operations was being covered by other staff. All this lends support to our recommendation and it is hoped that recent developments prompt a rethink of this recommendation.

On the positive side, it was pleasing to see improvements that have been made to stabilise farming and market garden operations, including better water security and additional silos for storage of surplus stock feed.

The Department's response to recommendation four noted that the local standing order had been amended in June 2022. The amended local order now allows prisoners to access recreation facilities when they are unable to work, due to the closure of their workplace, and if they were not required elsewhere. This was a positive development that will address the most common complaint we heard from prisoners during the inspection.

Pardelup continues to maintain very strong community links and high levels of engagement. We received positive feedback from community reference group members and representative organisations about how highly they valued the contribution made to their communities by prisoners based in Pardelup and at the Walpole Work Camp. Despite some limitations on the number of prisoners able to undertake work outside the prison due to staff unavailability and COVID restrictions, this was generally a positive rehabilitation activity that provided men with skills, experience and confidence that they will need when they are eventually released.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We have three Independent Prison Visitors who are community volunteers appointed by the Minister for Corrective Services. They attend Pardelup on a regular basis providing an opportunity for the men 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 Pardelup.

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

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 Kieran Artelaris for his hard work in planning this inspection and as principal drafter of this report.

Eamon Ryan
Inspector of Custodial Services

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