

MEDIA RELEASE

REPORT NO 145 – INSPECTION OF ROEBOURNE REGIONAL PRISON

EMBARGOED UNTIL 12:00PM ON THURSDAY 22 DECEMBER 2022

Roebourne staffing issues holding back a (soon to be cooler) well-functioning facility

The latest inspection of Roebourne Regional Prison reveals a mostly well-functioning facility constrained by ongoing staff shortages and the lack of air conditioning.

OICS welcomes the November 2022 Western Australian State Government commitment to remedy one of the main issues highlighted in this inspection and many previous inspections at Roebourne – the lack of effective climate control in the main prisoner accommodation units.

But the fact this work is unlikely to be completed until mid-2024 means the concerns raised in this inspection and others will continue this summer and next for most of Roebourne's 200-or-so prisoners.

'That Roebourne's air-conditioning problem will be resolved in the next couple of years is great news,' said the Inspector of Custodial Services, Eamon Ryan. He added:

We just hope the area's extreme heat that can push the mercury above 50° doesn't provoke a serious incident before installation is complete. OICS has been recommending this upgrade since 2003 and it has never been just about comfort – cell temperatures that sit above 35° before midnight over long summer months quickly become a health threat, especially for older prisoners or those on medication. Hopefully the installation can be completed sooner rather than later.

Many things done well

Climate control concerns aside, there were many positives about the way the prison has evolved and functions as a regional custodial facility. The inspection found that refurbishments of the women's cells, maximum security yard and improvements in the social visits centre were helping a near 40-year-old facility remain fit-for-purpose.

By and large, relations between prisoners and staff are positive. 'Various external agencies are providing popular programs and services to prisoners, like the KJ Rangers program for Martu prisoners. The Town Work Camp continues to deliver real benefits for the prison and the community. Roebourne can be commended for this work,' Mr Ryan said.

Staffing issues remain a challenge

Like many Western Australian custodial facilities, Roebourne has suffered from long-term staffing issues which have affected the prison's operation. Unknown or unexpected absences have risen to 17 per cent of all leave, which creates many challenges in providing a normal daily regime for both male and female prisoners.

The Inspector added: 'While Roebourne is not alone in facing staffing shortages and the consequences that can range from restricted recreation, education and training, to curbed visits and less time out of their units, the impact is acute in a regional facility that has no local source of substitute staffing.'

For further media information:

The Inspector, Mr Eamon Ryan, will be available for comment from 12:00pm on Thursday, 22 December 2022 and can be contacted on 0421 480 925.

The full report will be available on the Inspector's website (www.oics.wa.gov.au).