



Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Justice**
Corrective Services

Response to OICS Draft Report:

2023 Inspection of Karnet Prison Farm

July 2023

Version 1.1

Response Overview

Introduction

On 25 March 2022, the Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services (OICS) announced the 2022 Inspection of Karnet Prison Farm (Karnet). The inspection was scheduled to occur between 17 and 22 July 2022.

To assist with the inspection, the Department of Justice (the Department) facilitated the provision of a wide range of documentation, including policies, procedures, statistics, as well as access to systems, custodial facilities, staff and prisoners upon request from OICS for the purpose of the inspection.

On 30 May 2023, the Department received the draft inspection report for review and comment.

The Department has reviewed the draft report and provides further context, comments, and responses to the six recommendations made following the inspection.

Appendix A contains comments linked to sections in the draft report for the Inspector's consideration when finalising the report.

Department Comments

Karnet continues to demonstrate its value and importance within the prison estate by preparing prisoners to re-enter the community through the provision of a range of opportunities for employment and training. Additionally, Karnet prides itself on being the vital link in the Department's food supply chain producing fresh meat, milk, eggs, fruit and vegetables for the wider prison estate.

The Department notes the inspection took place when many prisoners and staff had or were recovering from COVID-19 and extends its appreciation for the way OICS was able to work within the restrictions and limitations to undertake the inspection.

The COVID-19 pandemic not only impacted operations and service delivery at Karnet, but custodial facilities statewide. Restrictions implemented within our high-risk custodial settings were mandatory and necessary.

While the impact of COVID and the associated facility restrictions cannot be overstated, Karnet's ability to maintain much of its operations and service delivery in 2022 is a testament to the dedication of senior management and staff at the facility, and also its hardworking cohort of prisoners. Karnet's Superintendent has been instrumental in establishing a number of partnership agreements and projects that serve to increase employment, training and education opportunities for its prisoners, who are typically at the end of their sentences. This helps develop transferable job skills in preparation for reintegration into the community. The Superintendent was recognised in the 2023 Australia Day Honours List for outstanding commitment to improving the lives of those in his care, being awarded an Australian Corrections Medal.

It is not surprising therefore to note the positive findings in relation to the various activities, meaningful work options, and other initiatives made available at Karnet. These include numerous recreation options, extended recreation hours, bushwalking for Section 95 approved prisoners, library access, structured sport, and quiz and bingo nights to name a few.

Karnet's Section 95 program performs strongly in the delivery of work and training opportunities to prisoners via on-site and community work projects. The issues surrounding the Section 95 eligibility and application process are noted, and the Department is continuously exploring options to enable greater prisoner participation in the program, without compromising the safety and security of the community through the screening process. Activities are tailored for the prisoner taking into consideration their participation in home leave, full time involvement in the Prisoner Employment Program (PEP), or full time meaningful vocational work towards trade certificates within the prison.

It is acknowledged that staff redeployment impacts the delivery of the Section 95 program. While this is unfortunate, at times it is necessary to provide the adequate staffing levels within the facility to critical services that will ensure minimal impact on operations and the safety of both staff and prisoners.

Most recently a team of Section 95 approved prisoners commenced landscaping, fencing and other external work at two Department owned houses next to Hakea Prison as part of a refurbishment project to convert the houses into office accommodation. The two offices will serve as hubs for staff to write up case reports and deliver timely specialist services to prisoners in prisons located in the south metropolitan corridor.

The recycling initiatives launched at Karnet promote a culture of sustainability and resourcefulness. As noted by OICS, Karnet has been innovative in its recycling practices, expanding to include not only standard recyclable materials such as bottles, cans and cardboard, but also items such as toothbrushes, razors, clothing, and biological farm waste for soil revitalisation and composting. Karnet's efforts in sourcing replacements for single use plastics should also be commended for enabling the facility to meet the requirements of the Western Australia's Plan for Plastics. These efforts demonstrate a commitment from both staff and prisoners for ensuring the facility is recycling wherever it is able, which is not only beneficial to the facility, but also to the community and the environment.

The Department acknowledges the farms within the custodial estate, including Karnet, require investment to upgrade infrastructure and modernise machinery and equipment to improve production and its farming operations. As acknowledged by OICS, agricultural machines and equipment are expensive. The Department also notes the recurring recommendation from OICS regarding the reinvestment of generated revenue back into the farm. Whilst it supports the intent of the recommendation, the Department is bound by the *Financial Management Act 2006* whereby only the State Government Treasurer may determine whether an agency retains any revenue it generates.

The Department continues to progressively invest significant funds in its farms. More recent investments at Karnet included upgrading the infrastructure and machinery in the dairy and the abattoir. The abattoir, dairy and egg production operations at Karnet provide prisoners with additional and unique work and training opportunities not available at other prisons throughout the custodial estate.

Additionally, Karnet works with several business and community organisations such as Alcoa, the Shire of Serpentine Jarrahdale and Carey Bindjareb as well as the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions to explore further ways to enhance farm operations and provide further work and training opportunities for prisoners.

Karnet has flourished over the years under the leadership of an experienced Superintendent and from time to time, as with any organisation, will have senior leadership positions filled on an acting basis. Staff are given the opportunity to learn new skills and act in leadership roles which is an important aspect of their career development and succession planning. Furthermore, the Department makes every attempt to ensure that those appointed to act in senior leadership positions are provided with appropriate mentoring and support to undertake the role and deliver the expected outcomes.

The Department acknowledges Aboriginal employees bring an invaluable perspective and insight through lived experiences and help shape and ensure services are culturally safe and appropriate.

The Department's Aboriginal Employee Talent Pool focuses on the development and advancement of the existing Aboriginal workforce. Employees who register will be assisted by the Diversity, Inclusion and Aboriginal Workforce Development team to develop their careers with the Department.

The Aboriginal Career Opportunities Register will assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander jobseekers to choose a career with the Department. People who register will be provided culturally appropriate application support and advice as well as guidance throughout recruitment processes. They will be informed of job vacancies and referred to available positions as they arise.

Business areas are reminded of Commissioner's Instruction 39: Interim Arrangements to Fill Public Sector Vacancies. Interim arrangements support direct appointments through individual assessment of merit to meet the Department's aspirational Aboriginal employment target of 7.25 per cent.

The Department notes the findings and the six recommendations made in the 2022 Inspection of Karnet. One recommendation is supported, two are supported in principle due to potential practical impediments, two are noted due to the recommendations impacted by decisions that are beyond the Department's control and one is not supported.

Response to Recommendations

1 Karnet, like other prison farms, should be permitted to retain a portion of generated revenue for a farm reinvestment.

Level of Acceptance: Noted
Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Adult Male Prisons

Response:

The Department supports the intent of this recommendation, however, is bound by the *Financial Management Act 2006* whereby only the State Government Treasurer may determine whether an agency retains any revenue it generates.

2 Karnet should review the storage arrangements and implement changes to ensure secure storage of valuable property.

Level of Acceptance: Supported in Principle
Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Adult Male Prisons

Response:

Karnet will review its prisoner property storage and will consider the installation of additional secure cabinets to enable storage of large, bulky and valuable items.

3 Provide mental health training to all peer support prisoners.

Level of Acceptance: Supported
Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Offender Services

Response:

The Suicide Prevention Governance Unit (SPGU) was established in February 2023 which oversees the delivery of suicide prevention training to staff and peer support prisoners.

The Department has been delivering the 'Talking About Suicide' training program since early 2022 at both metropolitan and regional custodial facilities. As of June 2023, over 300 staff and peer support prisoners had received the training, with further sessions scheduled for 2023.

The SPGU is working in collaboration with the Mental Health Commission (MHC) to develop a Gatekeeper training program tailored specifically for delivery in a custodial setting.

4 Resource Karnet to facilitate all escorts.

Level of Acceptance: Not Supported
Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Adult Male Prisons

Response:

Karnet facilitates all external appointments for reintegration purposes. Medical appointments are determined on a needs basis. External health appointments are triaged by Health staff who determine the priority with escorts facilitated accordingly.

5 Provide regular, reliable and appropriate dental services for prisoners at Karnet.

Level of Acceptance: Noted
Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Offender Services

Response:

Dental care to prisoners is provided by the Department of Health's Dental Health Services, which advises the provision is in line with community standards.

6 Increase mental health services at Karnet.

Level of Acceptance: Supported in Principle
Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Offender Services

Response:

Prisoners at Karnet have on-site support from a Prison Support Officer, Prison Counsellor (PHS) and primary health services. Where specific mental health needs are identified, referrals can be made to the mental health nurse who may in turn make a referral to the monthly in-reach Consultant Psychiatry provided by State Forensics Mental Health Services.

Prisoners with higher priority mental health issues and care needs are generally not transferred to Karnet. As of April 2023, there were no prisoners at Karnet with a Priority 1 or Priority 2 rated mental illness. Most of these prisoners are seen monthly or reviewed more closely if a prisoner's mental health deteriorates.

Triage interviews are usually weekly with new admissions. The needs identified in the report (e.g., general stress and anxiety, reconnecting with family and friends, finding work and suitable housing). do not require involvement of specialist clinical mental health staff.