

2022 INSPECTION OF CASUARINA PRISON

CASUARINA PRISON, HOW BIG IS TOO BIG?

The changes we have seen in Casuarina Prison over the past few years have much broader implications beyond building new units and expanding bed capacity. It poses an obvious question: *How big is too big?*

The overall bed capacity has grown to 1,386 (or 1,514 if you include Unit 18, which is currently being used as a temporary youth detention facility). With further planned expansion the total capacity will be close to 1800, making it the largest prison in Australia.

But Casuarina is so much more than a large prison. It currently has a number of specialised units including: the Special Handling Unit, the Special Protection Unit, the Crisis Care Unit, the State Infirmary, and the Mallee Rehabilitation Centre. And, as part of the current expansion, a High Security Unit and two new accommodation units together with support buildings are under construction. Further expansion planned but not yet commenced, include: a Forensic Mental Health Unit, an expanded Infirmary, a High Dependency Unit.

We welcome the addition, or expansion, of these specialised units as the services and care they will provide are desperately needed. But the expansion comes with significant risks and there is a responsibility to consider and address them now.

We flagged several of these risks in the report from our last inspection of Casuarina in September 2019 (OICS Report 129, 2020). We highlighted many similar issues to those contained in this report, including the ability to provide a meaningful and constructive daily regime, high rates of unemployment and underemployment, and the impacts of daily staff shortages. We concluded our overview of the 2019 inspection with the following observation:

Perhaps the single most important challenge for Casuarina into the future will be its ability to provide a meaningful and constructive daily regime for the large and complex population it will be expected to manage.

That observation is equally applicable today as it was three years ago, in fact it is probably more important now.

This report highlights yet again significant issues arising from staffing shortages - and this is not isolated to custodial staff - and the flow-on impact this has on services for prisoners such as: recreation, employment, education, industries, programs, health services, and mental health services. We also identified that even if the prison was close to fully staffed there are simply not enough meaningful activities to keep the current population engaged in a constructive daily regime. Consequently, high numbers of men are sitting idle in their units on a daily basis and this is a cause for significant concern, not just the absence of

rehabilitation activities but also from a security and safety perspective. This is not just our opinion as these concerns were shared with us by many staff and members of the management team.

Casuarina needs to have a clear vision and strategic direction, so there is clarity around where it sits within the wider prison system and how it is expected to manage such a complex facility with many different cohorts of prisoners. This was the reason why we made Recommendation 1. The Department's response supported this recommendation as a current project, noting that the scope for the current expansion was being extended to include development of an Operating Model and that a review of the resources required would be carried out.

In our view the implementation of this recommendation cannot wait for a point in time in the future. The current situation being experienced in Casuarina and the challenges and issues we have identified in this report create an immediacy to doing this work. Most importantly, Casuarina needs to be adequately staffed and resourced to cope with the expanded population, deliver the specialised services, and offer a meaningful and constructive daily regime to all prisoners sent there.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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

We received considerable support and cooperation throughout the inspection from the Superintendent and staff at Casuarina and from key personnel in the Department and I am very grateful for their contribution to our inspection work. The men living in Casuarina who took the time to speak with us and share their perspectives also deserve our acknowledgement and thanks.

I acknowledge and thank Dr Emma Crampin, expert health and mental health adviser, and also, Ms Janet Connor, our expert education adviser, for their significant contribution to our inspection work.

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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