

2022 INSPECTION OF KARNET PRISON FARM

THERE IS A LOT TO BE POSITIVE ABOUT IN KARNET

Karnet is a minimum-security prison farm located on the fringe of the Perth metropolitan area. The prison operates on an open style with a reasonably relaxed atmosphere offering meaningful employment and rehabilitation opportunities, and pre-release services for the majority of men who live there. This type of prison environment is not without its risks and challenges, but generally it is a well-managed prison.

It is not perfect, few if any prisons are, but the staff and prisoners told us they were generally happy and, importantly, the majority, but not all said they felt safe. Staff and prisoner surveys and our own observations during the inspection showed that relationships between staff and prisoners were generally good. The normal daily regime was very busy and productive, although it was significantly restricted during our inspection as the prison was in the middle of a COVID Code Amber alert which significantly restricted the operations.

Meaningful employment and training are areas of strength that we have noted at Karnet during this and previous inspections. Much of this comes from the various opportunities that are available, which included traditional prison industries - such as the kitchen, laundry, workshops and grounds maintenance - but also in the abattoir, on the farm and in the market gardens. In addition, some prisoners were approved for employment or activities outside the prison grounds, and for many Aboriginal prisoners through the successful Carey Binjareb program.

The prison farming operations, including the farm, dairy, egg production, market gardens and abattoir provide essential produce to the whole prison estate and are a vital part of the prison food chain. Karnet, like the other prison farms Pardelup and Wooroloo, needs ongoing additional investment in the farm operations, plant and machinery to ensure these vital activities continue and are sustainable. This is why we consistently make recommendations, along the lines of Recommendation 1 in this report, that the prison farms ought to be allowed to retain a portion of their revenue for capital reinvestment. Farming operations, regardless of whether they are operated commercially or out of a prison, require investment to ensure sustainability and growth. With the likely expansion of the prison population into the future, sustainability and growth of prison farming operations and food production are essential. It makes good business sense too.

I have no doubt that the Department agrees with the intention of Recommendation 1, the response to the draft of this report said as much, and it has made the same concession on previous occasions when we have made similar recommendations. But the responses always cite as a barrier the provisions of the *Financial Management Act 2006* and that only the State Government Treasurer can determine if an agency can retain some of the revenue it generates. What we do not know is whether the Department has ever asked. If such a request

has not been made in the past, then this is strongly encouraged. If it has and been unsuccessful, then it may be time to try again.

There is a good reason why we persist with this type of recommendation and that is many farming investments have a long lead time. Waiting until the situation is urgent or in crisis may be too late. Just by way of hypothetical example, if the abattoir at Karnet became unserviceable due to a maintenance or safety issue, then the prison system would have to source commercially most, if not all, of the daily meat consumption across the prison estate. This would be on top of whatever the costs might be to rectify the problem.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We have an Independent Prison Visitor is a community volunteer appointed by the Minister for Corrective Services. She attends Karnet 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 her work and thank her for the contribution she has made to our ongoing monitoring of Karnet.

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