

MEDIA RELEASE

EMBARGOED UNTIL 2PM 10 OCTOBER 2023

2022 Inspection of Karnet Prison Farm

Today, the Inspector of Custodial Services, Eamon Ryan released a report on Karnet Prison Farm, one of Western Australia's minimum-security facilities which seeks to provide pre-release opportunities for men in custody. Mr Ryan said there was a lot to be positive about the prison.

Karnet provides a very busy and productive daily regime. There are a variety of employment and training opportunities that are meaningful, build life skills, and provide positive reintegrative pathways back to community. We observed a strong leadership team, healthy staff-prisoner relationships, and most people told us that they felt safe.

The report also noted that farm operations continued to excel providing essential produce (including meat, milk, eggs, fruit and vegetables) to the whole prison estate. It welcomed several local ideas to improve and broaden production variety to ensure sustainability and growth into a future which likely included an increased prisoner population. However, Mr Ryan explained:

There was a dire need for investment in farming operations, plant and machinery, at Karnet but also at Western Australia's other prison farms. We would like to see a portion of the revenue generated from the farms reinvested back into their operations. Without reinvestment there is significant risk a small problem now could easily become a crisis very quickly. I encourage the Department to examine all possibilities in this regard.

The report also found there was room for improvement for mental health care. The inspection was conducted at a time when COVID lockdowns were common. Mr Ryan said 'these lockdowns exposed gaps in mental health supports at Karnet where a mental health nurse was only available one day per week, and sometimes even that level of service was unreliable.' This meant some prisoners reported being reluctant to seek help for fear they would be transferred from Karnet to a prison with more mental health resources.

Mr Ryan also reiterated findings from his 2021 review examining prisoner access to dental services, stating that:

Dental care at Karnet was woefully inadequate. Over 40 prisoners were on the waitlist to see a dentist when we inspected, one of whom had been waiting for three years and only four prisoners had attended a dental appointment in 2022. While there are many reasons for this, we again recommended the Department (under its MOU with the Department of Health's Dental Health Services) provide regular, reliable and appropriate dental services. In response, the Department advised the provision aligns with community standards. This is disappointing and I urge the Department to continue its discussions with the Department of Health to improve dental care access within prisons.

For further information:

The Inspector, Mr Eamon Ryan, is available for comment from 2pm Tuesday 10 October 2023 on 0421 480 925.

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