

MEDIA RELEASE

2023 INSPECTION OF BUNBURY REGIONAL PRISON

EMBARGOED UNTIL 2PM, 18 JUNE 2024

A historically strong performer, but is it sustainable?

The latest report from the Inspector of Custodial Services has found that Bunbury Regional Prison had maintained an overall strong performance in the delivery of services to prisoners, but the increases in population size and complexity has meant cracks were starting to appear in its operations.

Inspector of Custodial Services, Eamon Ryan, said the overall finding was unsurprising given Bunbury's increased prisoner population, staffing short-falls, and expansion of functions and services without an appropriate adjustment to its overall resources and strategic supports.

Mr Ryan noted that because of its past good performance, Corrective Services often looked to Bunbury Regional Prison as a place to take on new challenges and roles. But the expectation for it to take on an increasingly broad range of services was unsustainable without better strategic planning, infrastructure, and resources.

"Management and staff have a record of just getting on with the job and making things work. But this is becoming more untenable without greater system level support. Bunbury is the largest regional prison in Western Australia and the fourth largest in the state. Better support is needed to ensure its continued success," Mr Ryan said.

The report released today highlights many concerns around staffing and infrastructure that have not kept up with the population and service delivery expansion at Bunbury. Its most recent project has been to develop and implement the Djarraly AOD Reintegration Service, an important and commendable initiative providing support for men with drug and alcohol addictions prior to release back into the community. But this has absorbed much time and effort from many staff, with limited additional supports.

The pressure on operations was also impacted by increased tensions relating to staffing levels, morale, and management practices, as well as the handling of allegations of inappropriate staff behaviour.

"We heard allegations and concerns about conflicts between some staff, and also about how these matters were handled, and the level of communication and support people had received," Mr Ryan said.

"Our Office is not permitted under our legislation to investigate and determine the merits or otherwise of complaints. What we can consider is if there were appropriate mechanisms available for staff to raise grievances or allegations and have them resolved; if there were escalation processes; and if there were external mechanisms available to pursue complaints. Our final obligation would be to refer matters to external investigation agencies, if and when required."

Mr Ryan concluded that inquiries during the inspection indicated that all such processes were in place and accessible to any person that desired to use them. However, prison management and staff did not all feel safe or supported through these processes. We heard of distrust in the structures in place within Corrective Services and the report noted that these may require review and adjustment to provide better support for the staff involved.

There were also many positive service outcomes recognised at Bunbury Regional Prison and detailed in the report including:

- High levels of treatment program delivery
- Prisoner Support and AVS provided strong services
- Management of at-risk prisoners was thorough
- Chaplaincy services were well embedded and valued
- Orientation was well delivered
- High performing re-entry and transition services
- Most prisoners continued to feel safe, despite no discrete protection regimes

For further information:

The Inspector, Mr Eamon Ryan, is available for comment from 2pm Tuesday 18 June 2024 on 0421 480 925.

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