

MEDIA RELEASE

2023 INSPECTION OF WEST KIMBERLEY REGIONAL PRISON

EMBARGOED UNTIL 12PM, 24 JUNE 2024

Prison at a crossroad: West Kimberley needs to rediscover its founding philosophy

Despite local commitment and some positive prison-based initiatives designed to get back to its foundational philosophy, the most recent inspection report of West Kimberley Regional Prison found the facility was still being drawn away from its original purpose.

Inspector of Custodial Services, Eamon Ryan, said given the absence strategic planning, including a Kimberley custodial plan, across Corrective Services, it was not surprising that a once strongly purpose-driven facility like West Kimberley (WKRP) continued to drift from its original course.

“There needs to be a concerted system-driven effort for WKRP to succeed in recapturing its unique philosophy. It was founded on a commitment to ensuring Kimberley prisoners should be held on, or close to, country and traditional culture should drive service delivery,” Mr Ryan said. “But population pressures, demand for beds and lack of an overall strategic plan eroded priorities.”

Mr Ryan said that the plan for a new facility in Broome provided an ideal opportunity for Corrective Services to develop a long-term Kimberley custodial plan that emphasised the role of WKRP and how it can return to its purpose. This was reflected in Recommendation 1 of our report, which was accepted by the Department but noted it would take some time to implement.

In the meantime, Mr Ryan noted that WKRP would continue to be reactive to system-wide pressures, despite the local commitment seen during the inspection to provide more services that were culturally appropriate and meaningful to the local community. While it was essential to try and keep prisoners on-country, urgent action is needed to relieve population pressures on facilities across the state.

“Prisons in the Pilbara and Kimberley are under huge strain. WKRP, Broome and Roebourne prisons are all over 105% capacity (21 June 2024). This puts enormous pressure on delivery of every single service, let alone in a culturally appropriate way,” Mr Ryan said.

Staffing pressures and vacancies found at facilities across WA were also present at WKRP, further impacting service delivery. While prisoners were not being locked down like we had found at other prisons, there were often insufficient staff to deliver services and to safely supervise access to basic activities like recreation, work, and education.

Positive local initiatives were also acknowledged in the report, and Mr Ryan hoped that such innovations and practices would continue to be delivered and supported by the Department. These included:

- funding the design and construction of yarning circles for each male and female units
- engagement with a prominent First Nations expert in cultural support
- practices supportive of prisoner access to family contact
- improved quality and quantity of education services for male prisoners
- good suite of voluntary programs
- positive transition and re-entry services
- continued majority of prisoners to access self-care accommodation

Mr Ryan noted, however, that women's access to many of these positive services was limited, and WKRP needs to work towards better equity of access.

For further information:

The Inspector, Mr Eamon Ryan, is available for comment from 12pm Monday 24 June 2024 on 0421 480 925.

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