

## MEDIA RELEASE

### 2023 INSPECTION OF MELALEUCA WOMEN'S PRISON

EMBARGOED UNTIL 12:00PM, 5 DECEMBER 2024

#### Melaleuca Women's Prison: Making do with limited resources and supports

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Melaleuca Women's Prison was not designed or built to accommodate women and struggled to meet the needs of the women sent there, Inspector of Custodial Services Eamon Ryan said following his most recent inspection of the prison.

The Melaleuca inspection report, released today, highlights many examples of infrastructure limitations that restrict daily operations and impact service delivery for the women held there.

"As a facility originally designed as additional accommodation units for men in Hakea Prison, Melaleuca has struggled to meet the complex and unique needs of women held there on remand. The prison is limited by its small footprint, the addition of inadequate spaces necessary to provide essential services and activities, and increasingly the stresses of short staffing," Mr Ryan said.

The report evidences the impact of inadequate infrastructure essential to a dedicated women's facility, including:

- The absence of therapeutic crisis care cells
- lack of appropriate self-care accommodation
- no dedicated programs or education spaces
- no accommodation designed for pregnant women
- minimal industry/workspaces
- poor cultural spaces
- no gym or indoor recreation space, and
- no purpose-designed management unit.

Mr Ryan noted this was exacerbated by ongoing increases in prisoner numbers. In the financial year before the inspection, the daily average population of Melaleuca had risen by 21% and during the inspection the prison was at 87% capacity. Population pressure had continued throughout 2024, with Melaleuca being consistently at over 90% capacity, and on 27 November 2024 at nearly 95%.

"The infrastructure at Melaleuca provides no room to manage record prisoner numbers. There is no way to adequately manage the diverse needs of all the women held on remand. All available spaces at the prison must serve multiple functions, limiting the ability to provide consistent and ongoing services as needed."

The report also noted the absence of an integrated strategic model of care for women. Despite finding a mostly hard working and dedicated management and staff, evidence showed there was limited shared understanding and approach to managing women in their care.

"While we found many references to the need for a 'trauma-informed approach' and a Departmentally endorsed women's framework '*Better Futures*', there was a lack of awareness of the framework and no systemic strategy in place for its communication or how to operationalise it," Mr Ryan said.

Positively, the inspection did find that following a period of instability, a settled and cohesive management team was in place. However, poor staffing allocations identified during previous inspections remained. This and system-wide staffing shortages placed a further strain on service delivery.

“The inspection found the prison was constantly operating short staffed and with many staff redeployed to cover unfilled essential positions. Despite efforts from staff to put programs and services in place for women, they were often missing out on important opportunities for support that could help them rehabilitate and successfully return to their families and the community,” Mr Ryan said.

The report also highlights some of the positive services being delivered at Melaleuca including:

- a good range of voluntary programs
- a workable social visits policy that supported women staying connected with family
- proactive transition to release services, and
- some appropriate and balanced security practices recognising the needs of women who may have been victims of trauma and violence.

The Department’s response to a draft of this report acknowledged many of the shortcoming identified and outlined plans to address them, many of which are dependent on additional support and resourcing from government.

**For further information:**

The Inspector, Mr Eamon Ryan, is available for comment from 12:00pm, Thursday, 5 December 2024 on 0421 480 925.

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