

MEDIA RELEASE – EMARGOED UNTIL 12 NOON ON MONDAY 18 DECEMBER 2017

Report No. 113 – West Kimberley Regional Prison

West Kimberley Regional Prison has made positive progress in recent months, but it's under strain, and the Kimberley needs a better plan for justice services

The Inspector of Custodial Services' March 2017 inspection of West Kimberley Regional Prison (WGRP) found a prison that was under strain, but trying hard to meet its aim of providing innovative services to Kimberley Aboriginal prisoners.

Inspector Neil Morgan said that the first inspection of the prison three years ago had provided hope and a promise of innovation, but population pressures and budget restrictions had restricted progress.

'WGRP was built to harmonise with the landscape and to work with Aboriginal prisoners in a way that respected their cultures. It has been successful at this, but by March 2017 it was under real strain,' Mr Morgan said. 'Prisoner numbers had increased beyond capacity, and 47 people were sleeping on mattresses on floors. This was degrading and contrary to the philosophy of respect. On top of this, severe staff shortages had reduced prisoners' access to work, education, programs, and recreation, and had also put the successful self-care model under threat.'

Positively, Mr Morgan said that the Department had responded to his concerns and was already addressing a number of issues, including:

- installing additional beds (which was planned before the inspection)
- taking steps to support and continue the successful self-care model
- easing staff shortages
- providing Vocational Support Officers with long-awaited entry training
- committing to increase appropriate interaction between male and female relatives in the prison
- pursuing strategies to enhance cultural services, such as an Aboriginal Services Committee, and cultural competency training by a local Aboriginal Corporation.

Unfortunately, the report also found that, despite high numbers at WGRP and Broome Prison, only 48 per cent of Kimberley prisoners were accommodated in their own region.

'The loss of connection with family, community, and culture is especially acute for people from the East Kimberley, which has no prison of its own. I have recommended that the Department of Justice develops a strategic regional plan for the Kimberley region, consulting with corrections staff and relevant community stakeholders, particularly in the East Kimberley,' Mr Morgan said.

'The Department has supported that recommendation. But it has made the same commitments in the past, and hasn't delivered. We hope that this time, for the sake of Kimberley communities, it will do so.'

Neil Morgan

Inspector

For more detail, please see the Inspector's Overview to the Report and Key Findings (copies attached).

For Further Media Information

The Inspector, Mr Neil Morgan, will be available for comment from 12noon on Monday 18th December 2017 and can be contacted on 0427 426 471.

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