

# Inspector's Overview

## BUNBURY REGIONAL PRISON IS PERFORMING WELL, BUT THE PENDING EXPANSION MUST BE PROPERLY MANAGED AND RESOURCED

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### BUNBURY REGIONAL PRISON IS BEING EXPANDED

In December 2017, the State Government announced that Bunbury Regional Prison (Bunbury) and Casuarina Prison (Casuarina) will be expanded, adding 672 beds to the prison system (Logan and Wyatt, 2017).

Casuarina will have four new, double-bunked accommodation units with a total capacity of 512. Bunbury will have a new, double-bunked accommodation unit inside the main prison, and an unused minimum-security section just outside the main prison (Unit 5) will be re-opened. In total, Bunbury will hold another 160 prisoners.

The Government has committed to upgrading some facilities at the two prisons, including kitchens, laundries and video court facilities. It is not yet clear, however, whether additional resources will be put into areas such as education, employment and health services.

The two projects are scheduled for completion by the end of 2019. The total projected cost is \$120 million - \$96.3 million will be spent on Casuarina and \$23.7 million on Bunbury. The Bunbury project will be funded through the Royalties for Regions program as a high priority infrastructure project. It will bring a number of short-term and long-term employment opportunities to the city.

This is a remarkable change in fortunes for Bunbury. Twelve years ago it had been earmarked for potential closure. At the end of 2019, it will be the State's fourth largest prison, after the three metropolitan megaliths of Acacia, Casuarina and Hakea.

### THE EXPANSION PROJECTS NEED TO TARGET NEED

From 2012 to 2017, the government dismissed or under-played the realities of prison overcrowding. This generated a number of risks for prison staff and prisoners. It also meant that the system had little or no capacity to handle further growth (OICS, 2016). I therefore welcome the new government's acknowledgement that the prison system is seriously overcrowded. I also welcome the commitment to invest in additional infrastructure.

It is important for the Department of Justice to use the expansion projects at Bunbury and Casuarina to better meet the needs of specific cohorts of offenders. They include people with mental health or substance abuse issues, as well as older or infirm prisoners. Better targeted services will improve the quality of interventions and reduce the risk of recidivism. Bunbury is ideally placed to meet some of these needs.

It may seem obvious that we need to target need, but in my view, opportunities were lost during the massive prison expansion programs that ran from 2009 to 2016. Well over \$700 million was spent on additional prison infrastructure. Some of this was certainly well-targeted. For example, the new Eastern Goldfields prison was desperately needed, and the privately-operated Acacia Prison used its expansion intelligently, developing more distinct regimes for young people and long-term prisoners. However,

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the new accommodation that was added at prisons such as Hakea, Casuarina and Albany was simply seen as 'adding more beds'. Mental health and other needs were not built in.

Full details of the 2018 expansion plans for Bunbury and Casuarina are yet to be released. I urge the government and the Department to maximise the opportunity to target needs not numbers.

### **WE NEED TO FIND WAYS TO REDUCE THE PRISON POPULATION**

It is not socially desirable or economically sustainable for prisoner numbers to grow as fast as in the last decade, and we should not focus simply on increasing prison capacity. The state needs to improve its evidence base on what is driving numbers, and to develop new strategies.

Western Australia's prison population was relatively stable during 2017. However, it had doubled from 2006 to 2016. This did not seem to be a response to rising crime, as there was no comparable change in the rate of recorded crime over the same period. There was also no comparable increase in the number of people serving sentences in the community. And, while prisoner numbers have gone up, the number of juveniles in detention has declined

WA has the highest rate of imprisonment in the country, apart from the Northern Territory, and by far the highest rate of Aboriginal imprisonment. Not surprisingly, costs have blown out. In addition to the huge capital expenditure costs, it now costs on average around \$120,000 a year to keep one person in prison.

The government has signalled its intentions to cap or reduce prisoner numbers, and a number of projects are underway. These include the 'Justice Pipeline' Model which seeks to improve data linkage in order to better understand the flow of people through the system, and the impacts of decisions and initiatives at different stages. This is long overdue and very welcome. Importantly, the Bunbury/Casuarina expansion projects provide a window of opportunity for this work to mature into criminal justice planning.

### **BUNBURY HAS BEEN PERFORMING WELL UNDER PRESSURE, BUT THE EXPANSION MUST BE PROPERLY PLANNED AND RESOURCED**

This report shows that Bunbury is a good performer, as it has been for many years. It has shown an ability to respond to pressures and to manage change, usually with a minimum of fuss. It is therefore well-placed for the pending expansion. However, there are a number of existing pressure points. The expansion will add to these and pose additional challenges for the site, and for management, staff and prisoners.

The Bunbury prison site is unique in Western Australia. It is really two prisons in one, each self-contained. The main, medium security prison currently holds 220-230 prisoners. The separate Pre-release Unit (PRU) holds around 120.

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The split site already presents significant logistical, security, management and resourcing challenges. Bunbury has never been allocated the resources for the PRU that have been given to similar-sized (or smaller) stand-alone prisons such as Boronia Pre-release Centre for Women and Pardelup Prison Farm. Although the PRU is very different from the main prison operationally and philosophically, it has no management team (just one manager), and does not have its own staff. Most services are provided through the main prison, and if priorities conflict, the main prison tends to take priority. These challenges will increase when numbers increase in the main prison and when Unit 5 (which is outside the perimeter of the main prison but adjacent to it) re-opens. Most of the recommendations in this report are designed not only to improve current practice but also to reduce future risk.

Prisoner numbers are already creating pressures and these pressures will increase. The main prison is currently operating at 50 per cent above its design capacity of 150. Most prisoners are sharing cells, some of which do not even meet Red Cross standards for single cells in developing countries (OICS, 2016). The PRU is 70 per cent above its design capacity and, as a result, has lost much of its identity and potential.

This report outlines the impact of these pressures. In short, the prison has astutely managed its resources, and some areas such as education have improved. But most services are under pressure, and backlogs or delays are too common. Health Services, in particular, have not kept pace with increased numbers and increased demand.

The new unit at Bunbury will increase the main prison's population by over 50 per cent. The government has said that the Casuarina and Bunbury expansion project will include any necessary upgrades to kitchens, laundries and video-links. But it is important that areas such as security, education, health, recreation and employment also receive adequate investment.

In summary, management and staff at Bunbury deserve the community's appreciation and respect for what they have achieved. It is a well-run prison and a good place to work. Unfortunately, a small number of staff still do not seem to recognise this.

Looking ahead to the expansion, the prison has the opportunity to build its standing as a safe, secure and positive environment, provided that the issues we have raised are addressed. But concrete planning needs to start now on issues such as infrastructure upgrades, management structures, services for the intended prisoner cohorts, and security and safety. This must involve collaborative engagement between the Department centrally and the prison itself.

**Neil Morgan**  
**12 February 2018**