



Inquiry into the Efficiency and Performance of Western Australian Prisons

Overview

ABOUT THIS INQUIRY

The Treasurer of Western Australia asked the ERA to undertake an inquiry into the performance and efficiency of Western Australia's prisons.

The purpose of the inquiry was to find ways to improve the prison system, delivering better outcomes for offenders and society, and better value for taxpayers.

The ERA was also asked to provide a set of measures to assess the performance of each of the State's prisons, and the prison system as a whole.

During the inquiry, the ERA consulted with stakeholders from across the public, private, and not-for-profit sectors, and visited prisons across the State. The ERA also conducted extensive research, and consulted with international corrective services agencies to identify what has worked well in other countries.

This fact sheet provides an overview of the importance of prisons, the cost of operating Western Australia's prisons, and the issues and solutions identified by the ERA in the course of the inquiry.

WHY DO PRISONS MATTER?

Prisons are expensive to operate and it is important to ensure that taxpayers' money is well spent. Western Australia currently invests over \$600 million a year keeping prisoners in custody.

Prisons can also play a positive role in reducing reoffending and improving broader social wellbeing. At their best, prisons can improve outcomes for overrepresented groups, including Aboriginal prisoners and prisoners with mental health issues.

However, at present 40 per cent of offenders released from Western Australia's prisons will return to corrective services within two years.

To ensure the investment in the prison system is money well spent, prisons need to go beyond locking up offenders, and provide them with the best opportunity to reintegrate into society upon release.

The benefits go beyond protecting the would-be victims of crime and reducing the cost of incarcerating offenders in the future. Avoiding future crime also reduces the burden on police, courts, and health and welfare services.

Western Australia's prisons

There are 15 prisons in the Western Australian prison system. Thirteen are operated by the public sector and two are operated privately by Serco Australia.

Prisons in Western Australia vary significantly in terms of demographics, security rating, and other characteristics. The State's prisons are shown below, by 2014-15 daily average population.

Public Prisons	Population	Security
Hakea	900	All
Casuarina	785	All
Karnet	320	Min
Bandyup	318	All
Woorloo	300	Min
Bunbury	294	Max
Greenough	291	All
Albany	255	All
West Kimberley	202	Med/Min
Roebourne	167	All
Boronia	89	Min
Pardelup	82	Min
Eastern Goldfields	78	All
Private prisons	Population	Security
Acacia	1,390	Med
Wandoo	71	Min

HOW MUCH DOES IT COST TO RUN THE PRISON SYSTEM?

In 2013-14, it cost \$615 million to keep Western Australian prisoners in custody, up from \$504 million in 2010-11.

The three large metropolitan prisons - Hakea, Casuarina and Acacia – account for over 40 per cent of that expenditure, and house around half of the State’s prisoners.

The cost of keeping prisoners in custody (2014-15 \$)



On average it costs \$332 per day to keep an offender in custody. However, this varies considerably from prison to prison, ranging from \$185 at Acacia, to \$1,292 at Wandoo.

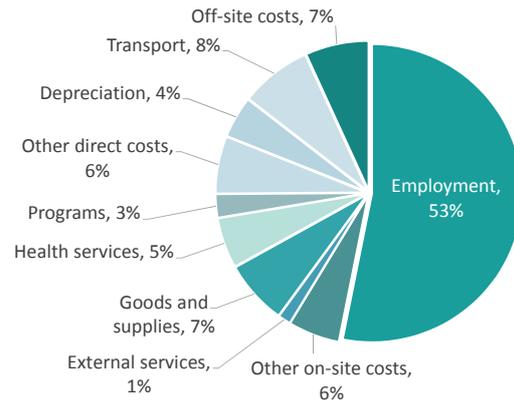
Average cost per prisoner per day (2010-11 to 2013-14)

Prison	Cost per prisoner per day	% of Total Population
Wandoo	\$1,292	0.7
West Kimberley	\$1,120	1.8
Broome	\$868	1.6
Roeboorne	\$564	3.3
Eastern Goldfields	\$433	2.0
Bandyup	\$382	5.3
Casuarina	\$367	13
Karnet	\$345	5.8
Greenough	\$342	6.0
Albany	\$340	6.4
Pardelup	\$330	1.6
Boronia	\$323	1.6
Bunbury	\$317	6.9
Hakea	\$298	17.4
Wooroloo	\$260	7.2
Acacia	\$185	20.7

HOW IS THE MONEY SPENT?

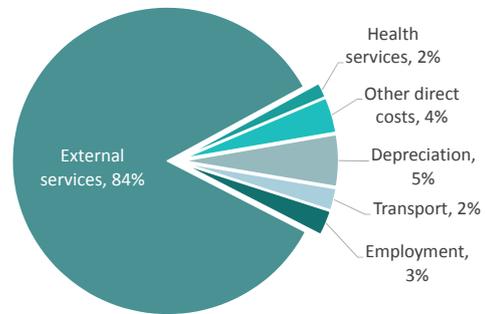
Employment expenses account for over half of the cost of running Western Australia’s public prisons. Other major costs include prisoner transport, and the cost of any supplies used in running prisons (for instance, the cost of food).

Costs in Western Australia’s public prisons



In private prisons, the largest cost is that of paying the private operator to run the facility – ‘external services’ in the chart below.

Costs in Western Australia’s private prisons



WHERE CAN THE PRISON SYSTEM IMPROVE?

The ERA found that the Western Australian prison system will benefit from improvements in four main areas:

- Establishing **clearer roles and responsibilities** for the Department of Corrective Services and the Superintendents who run each prison.
- Making the Department and Superintendents **more accountable** for how successful they are in meeting these responsibilities.
- Making the prison system **more transparent**, so stakeholders and the Western Australian public can understand how the State’s prisons are performing.
- Establishing **better information systems, planning, and processes** within the Department. These will support the Department in measuring performance, and in making good decisions for the future.

WHAT DID WE RECOMMEND?

The ERA made 44 specific recommendations to improve Western Australia's prison system. These aim to incorporate some of the best practices seen elsewhere in the world.

The ERA's report groups these recommendations into four categories:

- Establishing consistent standards across the prison system.
- Setting clear and meaningful performance benchmarks.
- Introducing better planning, processes, and use and disclosure of performance information.
- Establishing a better framework for choosing prison operators that considers the merits of public, private, and not-for-profit providers.

CONSISTENT STANDARDS ACROSS THE PRISON SYSTEM

Formal agreements should be established between the Department and each public prison Superintendent.

These agreements (called 'Service Level Agreements') clarify what is expected of each Superintendent, and ensure that all prisons – public and private – are held to the same performance standard. They also ensure that Superintendents have a clear understanding of their decision-making powers in operating the prison.

These Service Level Agreements perform the same function as contracts established between the Government and private prison operators. They set performance targets, outline financial arrangements, and introduce incentives for good performance, and consequences for poor performance.

The agreements should also be subject to the same public disclosure requirements as the contracts between the Government and private prison operators.

PERFORMANCE BENCHMARKS

An effective prison system needs both clear performance measures, and a reliable way to assess whether those measures are being met.

Snapshot: Western Australia's Prisons

The average age of a prisoner is **35 years**

27% of prisoners are minimum security, **53%** medium security, and **20%** maximum security

One third of prisoners sentenced in 2013-14 had a stay of less than 8 days

Aboriginal Australians make up 40% of the prison population, but only 3% of the general adult population

Western Australian prisons have the highest level of indigenous overrepresentation in Australia

Around **78%** of prisoners have been sentenced, and **22%** of prisoners are being held on remand

61% of people sent to prison in 2014 had been in prison before

Around **90%** of prisoners are male, and **10%** female

The Western Australian prison population is growing faster than the general adult population

Targets for each measure should be set at a level that provides prisons with an incentive to improve.

In this inquiry, the ERA was asked to develop a set of performance measures for Western Australia's prison system.

The recommended measures cover safety and security, rehabilitation, prisoner quality of life, and prison management.

Defining consistent measures that apply across all prisons is challenging, since Western Australia's prisons vary significantly in terms of size, remoteness, and they type of prisoners accommodate. Some prisons are designed largely to house remand prisoners, and others to rehabilitate prisoners in anticipation of their release.

To address this problem, the ERA recommended a 'weighted scorecard' approach. This means that the Department will use the same set of performance measures for all prisons, but will set individual targets for each prison.

These targets will reflect the overall relevance and priority of each measure, in each of the State's prisons.

The weighted scores for each prisons will correspond to an overall performance grade, used to compile a 'league table' of Western Australia's prisons. This allows for a fair comparison of prison performance across the system.

Most importantly, this performance information should be made public. This will allow the public to understand whether the State's prisons are performing well, and where they need to improve.

EFFECTIVE PLANNING, PROCESSES, AND USE OF INFORMATION

Meaningful performance measurements and good decision-making rely on evidence and accurate data. These are critical in planning for the future, and understanding how the prison system can be improved.

The ERA identified a variety of opportunities for improvement in this area, spanning the Department of Corrective Services' infrastructure planning, program delivery, financial management, and data sharing processes.

The ERA provided recommendations to:

- Introduce more sophisticated modelling of Western Australia's future prison requirements.
- Improve planning before investing in major prison projects.
- Ensure that prisoner programs are targeted where and when they will yield the greatest benefits.
- Improve data collection and analysis, to determine what works best to rehabilitate prisoners.
- Improve management of financial and administrative data and records.
- Increase collaboration with universities, other Government departments, and not-for-profit service providers.
- Improve publication of transparent, reliable, and detailed information about the prison system, wherever this does not compromise security.

A FRAMEWORK FOR CHOOSING PRISON OPERATORS

At present, the Government decides whether a prison should be privatised, then seeks tenders from commercial providers. The ERA found that a 'commissioning' model would be a better option, and should be considered once the other reforms recommended in the report have been implemented.

Under commissioning, the Government seeks tenders from across the public, private, and not-for-profit sectors, and only makes a decision once all options have been considered.

This model ensures that, where public and not-for-profit providers can deliver a better outcome than private providers, they will have the opportunity to do so. The Government can also seek tenders for specific services, rather than a single operator for the prison, where this is likely to deliver a better result

This fact sheet is part of the ERA's 2015 Inquiry into the Efficiency and Performance of Western Australian Prisons.

The full report is available at erawa.com.au

CONTACT US

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