



Media Statement

4 November 2015

Inquiry identifies opportunities to improve prison system

An inquiry into the Western Australian prison system has highlighted the need to improve the transparency of the public prison system and ensure that public prisons have incentives for better performance.

The Economic Regulation Authority (ERA) was asked by the Treasurer to conduct an independent inquiry to identify how to improve the efficiency and performance of the prison system.

ERA chairman Stephen King said prison reform is an important issue because good prisons deliver benefits to the whole of society.

“It’s important to remember that prisons aren’t just about incarceration. A well run prison can help reduce offending and improve broader social wellbeing,” Dr King said.

“Western Australia currently invests more than \$600 million a year to keep prisoners in custody, so it’s important to ensure that taxpayers’ money is well spent,” he said.

“Providing information to allow external scrutiny of the public prison system is key to improving performance.

“Currently, little information is available on the performance of public prisons. In contrast, private prisons are held to high standards of transparency and accountability. This includes the publication of annual reports on the performance of private prisons against contractual obligations.

“Publishing performance information on public prisons will help to ensure greater accountability and transparency.

“We have recommended a set of performance measures for individual prisons and the prison system as a whole. Performance measures for individual prisons will form the basis of a ‘league table’ of prisons.

“The Department of Corrective Services will need to ensure they have the right staff and review their data management systems in order to compile the league table.

“We have recommended options the Department could apply to further incentivise improvements in prison performance, including allowing prisons to retain a share of any additional revenue they generate through improvements in the performance of the prison.

“More generally, we consider that the quality and performance of the prison system can be improved by strengthening governance arrangements and through greater collaboration with the not-for-profit sector and universities.”

Dr King said the improvements will contribute to better rehabilitation outcomes, which is in the best interests of the Western Australian community.

“Improved rehabilitation of prisoners means they are less likely to come back into contact with the justice and prison system, reducing the cost burden on taxpayers. Additionally, rehabilitation reduces the social and financial costs on victims of crimes committed by prisoners that have not been rehabilitated,” he said.

In conducting this inquiry, the ERA received submissions from, and met with, a range of stakeholders (including people working in the department and prisons, the not-for-profit sector, unions, and private prison providers), visited six prisons across the State, and considered approaches used in jurisdictions across Australia and internationally.

The ERA submitted the final report of the prison inquiry to the Treasurer on 8 October 2015.

To read the final report, visit the ERA website at <https://www.erawa.com.au/home>

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