

Media release - Overcrowding at Brisbane Women's Correctional Centre

Ombudsman releases report on the overcrowding at Brisbane Women's Correctional Centre

27 September 2016

Queensland Ombudsman Phil Clarke today presented his report, *Overcrowding at Brisbane Women's Correctional Centre: An investigation into the action taken by Queensland Corrective Services in response to overcrowding at Brisbane Women's Correctional Centre*, to the Honourable Peter Wellington, Speaker of the Queensland Parliament, for tabling.

The Ombudsman has found that the Brisbane Women's Correctional Centre (BWCC) is the most overcrowded correctional centre in Queensland and that the level of overcrowding, compared to prisons for men, was unreasonable and improperly discriminatory.

“The practice of housing two prisoners in a single cell, known as doubling-up, is more prevalent at BWCC than in men’s correctional centres” Mr Clarke said.

Doubling-up means that one prisoner, in most cases, sleeps on a mattress on the floor, with her head close to an exposed toilet, while the other prisoner sleeps in the cell’s bed. In some cases pregnant women have been required to sleep on a mattress on the floor.

“In my view, Queensland Corrective Services (QCS) has failed to provide adequate living conditions for prisoners at BWCC,” said Mr Clarke.

“I have previously advised QCS that I consider the use of doubling-up as a long-term strategy for managing prisoner population to be unreasonable, yet I find that it continues at BWCC with QCS having only limited plans to mitigate its impact.”

“I am very concerned that overcrowding at BWCC has coincided with a significant increase in the incidences of assault and self-harm.”

The investigation found that only a small proportion of prisoners have been able to access education and training due to the increasing population and the demand on these services. It also found that overcrowding has had a direct effect on QCS’s ability to deliver programs at BWCC that are aimed at providing prisoners with transitional support and addressing their offending behaviour and substance abuse.

“I am concerned about the low number of prisoners accessing these programs, which are an important part of a prisoner’s rehabilitation and help reduce the risk of reoffending.”

“Given the level of overcrowding at BWCC and the impact it appeared to be having on the prisoners, I considered it was in the public interest to investigate and report publicly on this issue.”

“I have recommended that QCS take significant and immediate action to improve the living conditions of prisoners at BWCC.”

Mr Clarke also recommended that QCS increase programs to mitigate the risk of reoffending, improve access to psychological services and immediately implement initiatives to reduce the growth in female prisoner numbers and overcrowding.

The Queensland Ombudsman is an independent officer of the Parliament.

The Ombudsman can investigate complaints about state government departments and agencies, local councils and publicly funded universities.

The Ombudsman ensures public agencies make fair and balanced decisions for Queenslanders by investigating complaints and conducting own-initiative investigations that tackle broader, systemic concerns.

The Ombudsman can make recommendations to rectify unlawful, unfair or unreasonable decisions and improve administrative practice.

Overcrowding at Brisbane Women’s Correctional Centre: An investigation into the action taken by Queensland Corrective Services in response to overcrowding at Brisbane Women’s Correctional Centre was tabled on 27 September 2016.

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