

Media release

21 February 2024

New Ombudsman report: *Prison overcrowding and other matters*

- The Queensland Ombudsman's report, *Prison overcrowding and other matters report*, was published today
- The Legal Affairs and Safety Committee (LASC) of the Queensland Parliament referred various matters to this Office about Queensland's corrective services system. This report details the Office's investigation of the matters that LASC raised.
- The most significant issue investigated was the impact of prison overcrowding.
- The report recommendations were accepted without reservation by the QCS Commissioner.

The *Prison overcrowding and other matters report: An investigation in response to a reference by the Legal Affairs and Safety Committee of the Queensland Parliament*, by the Office of the Queensland Ombudsman (the Office), was today tabled by the Honourable Curtis Pitt MP, Speaker of the Queensland Parliament.

The Legal Affairs and Safety Committee (LASC) of the Queensland Parliament referred various matters to this Office about Queensland's corrective services system. This report details the Office's investigation of the matters that LASC raised.

Among the issues referred that were within the Office's jurisdiction, the most significant was the impact of prison overcrowding.

Prison overcrowding

The Office investigated the overcrowding of Queensland prisons generally and specifically at Maryborough Correctional Centre (MCC).

The report found that responses to overcrowding include increased staffing levels, increased number of prison cells, fitting cells with bunk beds, and workplace health and safety initiatives.

While these responses have addressed some of the impacts of overcrowding, the report outlines recommendations to further address the ongoing significant risks to officers and prisoners.

What the Office recommended

Strategies the Office recommended to QCS include:

- providing advice to government on options to expand the number of cells available
- continued focus on workplace health and safety responses for officers

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- addressing staffing issues created by overcrowding
- managing the impact of overcrowding on prison services and infrastructure
- ensuring the availability of psychology services to prisoners in shared cells
- improving the configuration of existing shared cells to reduce impacts on prisoner wellbeing
- reducing the application of modified unit routines
- improved decision-making and risk assessment processes for shared cell arrangements
- ensuring transparency of information about prisoner numbers and overcrowding
- improved recognition in regional prisons of the special legal status of remand prisoners.

Specific recommendations for MCC include continuing to address staffing levels, improving infrastructure and access to services.

The Office did not make any adverse findings or recommendations about the QCS rank structure and uniform dress standards, or funding of uniforms and personal protective equipment.

The report recommendations were accepted without reservation by the QCS Commissioner.

Implementation

The ongoing implementation of the recommendations will be monitored as part of the program of inspections of prisons and subsequent reports to Parliament under the *Inspector of Detention Services Act 2022* (IDS Act).

The report

[Download the full report: *Prison overcrowding and other matters report: An investigation in response to a reference by the Legal Affairs and Safety Committee of the Queensland Parliament*](#)

Quotes attributable to the Queensland Ombudsman and Inspector of Detention Services, Anthony Reilly:

“Prisons have been overcrowded since 2014–15, with resultant impacts on officers, prisoners and prison infrastructure. Considered together, these impacts present a fundamental challenge to Queensland Corrective Services in achieving its statutory objective of humane containment.”

“QCS’ response to this report is positive as it acknowledges the challenges and work to be completed to address the issues in question. I note this is a large task and will take considerable time and effort to achieve.”

[ends]

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Media contact: Meredith Evans 07 3005 7049
or media@ombudsman.qld.gov.au

FAQs

How will overcrowding and other recommendations be addressed in Queensland prisons?

The report recommendations were accepted without reservation by Paul Stewart, Commissioner, Queensland Corrective Services (QCS). Appendix D in the report contains a letter from the QCS Commissioner in response to the draft Queensland Ombudsman report. Any questions on how the report recommendations will be implemented should be directed to QCS.

Why is this report released under the *Ombudsman Act 2001* (Ombudsman Act) rather than the *Inspector of Detention Services Act 2022* (IDS Act)?

The Office received a reference from the Legal Affairs and Safety Committee under section 19 of the Ombudsman Act which requires this Office to investigate and produce a report related to the reference.

The recommendations from this report are about improvements to conditions in places of detention, which aligns with the area of activity of the IDS Act. The ongoing implementation by QCS of the recommendations will therefore be monitored as part of the program of inspections of prisons and subsequent reports to Parliament under the IDS Act.