



Bandyup Action Group

a subcommittee of the
Deaths in Custody Watch Committee WA

MEDIA RELEASE – For Immediate Release

OBVIOUS RACIAL SPLIT IN BANDYUP: BANDYUP ACTION GROUP CALLS FOR FEWER PRISONERS, NOT MORE PRISONS

The Bandyup Action Group is calling for an immediate reduction in women being imprisoned after the Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services released its report on Bandyup Women’s Prison describing appalling overcrowding and understaffing.

The report found that Bandyup is the “hardest and most neglected prison in the state”. Aboriginal women are being overrepresented in the most decrepit part of the prison, while non-Aboriginal women are accommodated in self-care units and newer parts of the prison. Given almost 50% of the women in Bandyup are Aboriginal the racial divide is obvious to the naked eye on visiting the units in the prison.

Corrective Services staff have reportedly said “it is better than where they come from”, referring to the more than 30 Aboriginal women sleeping on the floor, according to calls made to the Deaths in Custody Watch Committee. The Inspector said, “The practice of sleeping women on the floors is disrespectful and degrading [and] ... it does not happen in male prisons.” This practice and the attitude shows institutionalised racism and sexism is entrenched in the culture of Corrective Services and in the criminal ‘justice’ system more broadly.

Given that on 23 October 2014 the Premier promised to reduce the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in prison, the announcement that \$20 million will be spent to further incarcerate women rather than try to reduce recidivism rates is a blatant contradiction.

The Bandyup Action Group is concerned that with the heightened risk to personal safety at the prison, it will take more deaths in custody before the issues around women’s imprisonment are addressed.

The Bandyup Action Group, a subcommittee of the Deaths in Custody Watch Committee WA, wants to hear from women with lived prison experience, and those interested in addressing this important issue. We believe the community has a lot to say about the government’s proposed solution. These accounts will be gathered into a ‘people’s report’ and will form the basis of an action plan for the committee’s advocacy. Find us on Facebook or email bandyupactiongroup@gmail.com for more details.

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Glossary

Community work order: a non-custodial option for serving out a sentence in the form of unpaid work in the community. These are poorly resourced in WA, particularly in regional areas, meaning that it is not an option for some people sentenced for trivial, non-violent offences. They can also be particularly problematic for women who are typically carers of children.

Deaths in Custody Watch Committee WA: The committee's aim is to monitor and work to ensure the effective implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.

Decarceration: An active process that sees incarceration as a socially harmful and ineffective means of addressing social problems. It stresses the need to build communities, not prisons: by strengthening social and cultural institutions that foster individual and community wellbeing, the number of people being jailed will diminish.

Justice reinvestment: The practice of diverting funding away from prisons and into community programs with the aim of reducing the number of people being put in prison by addressing the issues that lead to people being imprisoned.

Statistics and figures

Indigenous people as a percentage of the population: Nationally: **2.5%** In WA: **3.8%**

Indigenous people as a percentage of people in custody: Nationally: **26.1%** In WA: **38.5%**

Indigenous women as a percentage of all women in custody: Nationally: **29.3%** In WA: **51.5%**

Total number of people imprisoned for fine default in WA in 2013: 1358

Number of Aboriginal people imprisoned for fine default: 590

Number of women imprisoned for fine default: 358

Number of Aboriginal women imprisoned for fine default: 223

Sources

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