

Media release

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PRAISE FOR ‘SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENTS’ RESULTING FROM ESTABLISHMENT OF OFFICE OF THE CUSTODIAL INSPECTOR

The “significant improvements” that have happened across the state’s custodial centres in the past seven years have been praised by Richard Connock, as he submitted his last [Annual Report](#) as Tasmania’s Custodial Inspector.

Mr Connock said since the Office of the Custodial Inspector (the Office) was established in 2017, proactive inspections across the Tasmanian Prison Service and Ashley Youth Detention Centre have resulted in improvements in a number of areas.

“Whilst recommendations to address issues like lead in drinking water have been addressed quickly, others have required significant government investment – an example being the increase in mental health staff required to service the needs of people in custody,” he said. “Many of the changes implemented as a result of my office’s recommendations would not have occurred without my inspection team being in places of detention speaking to people in custody, staff and various stakeholders, and reporting publicly on our findings.

“As I approach retirement, I am confident that the role and value of the Custodial Inspector has become well established. An independent body shining a light into closed places is critical to build trust that the human rights of people deprived of their liberty are upheld, and when they aren’t, that there is accountability and action to address any failings.”

Mr Connock said in 2023-24 multiple reports into the state’s custodial centres had been sent to the responsible Ministers for tabling and to responsible Departments for comment. These were the [Adult Health Care Inspection Report 2023](#), [Youth Health Care Inspection Report 2023](#), [Youth Wellbeing Inspection Report 2024](#), [Inhumane Treatment in Dry Cells – Review Report 2024](#) and Adult Wellbeing Report 2024, which will be released later this year.

Mr Connock said the inspections leading to these reports highlighted that lockdowns continued to be of concern to his Office due to the impact on people in custody, as well as staff in custodial centres, particularly at Risdon Prison Complex (RPC). The planned number of hours out of cell per day for medium and maximum security units at RPC is 8.3 hours, and 9 hours for the Southern Remand Centre (SRC), but this is rarely achieved.

“To see average time out of cell figures in 2023-24 in maximum and medium units at RPC around half of the planned hours out of cell is disturbing,” he said. “In the worst case, in the maximum units at RPC, it was 3.4 hours.

“To reach such a low daily average time out of cell means there have been multiple days where people have no time in the open, out of their cell or unit, at all, which is contrary to the *Corrections Act 1997* and international standards.

“We have consistently heard from people in custody, staff and medical experts of the damaging psychological and physical impacts of these lockdowns.”

Mr Connock said his office would continue to monitor lockdowns and their impact on those in custody, as well as a number of other issues – some of which have only recently been brought to his inspection team’s attention.

“Near the end of the reporting year, during our Transition to Adulthood inspection, a teenager* raised concerns with us about a ‘Hostile Management Regime’ they had been placed on in Tamar, a high security maximum unit within RPC,” he said. “The teenager spoke about having their mattress taken away from them for days and only having two canvas blankets. There were no personal items allowed in the cell. They said they had to lie face down on the ground with their hands behind their back before their cell door was opened.”

TPS uses Tamar to house people in custody who are identified as presenting the highest risk to the safety, security and good order of the prison system. They are required to have a separation order that has been approved by the Director of Corrective Services, or their delegate, in line with requirements of the *Corrections Act 1997*.

“My office made inquiries with TPS, which confirmed there was a Hostile Management Regime in place in Tamar, but advised that it was an unsanctioned practice that was contrary to its policies and procedures, and that the use of the regime was stopped following us raising it,” Mr Connock said. “We will be reviewing this issue as it raised potential human rights concerns. We will report on it in our *Transition to Adulthood* inspection or a separate review report.

“We encourage any people with knowledge of this regime to contact us, including staff and people in custody.”

Mr Connock [reiterated his call](#) on the State Government for adequate protection from reprisals for people raising concerns with his office.

“If the teenager who initially reported the Hostile Management Regime detailed above hadn’t done so, due to fear of reprisal, then we wouldn’t have been able to raise it with TPS and have it stopped,” he said. “While people can contact us anonymously, and we strive to protect the identity of people who provide us with information, sometimes assumptions and conclusions can be drawn from the circumstances being reviewed and reported on. There are no protections against reprisal targeting those who have spoken with my office. There should be.

“At this point we are unaware of any reprisals coming from the teenager’s report, but we will be monitoring this closely. However, it is important that the State Government address this legislative defect in the interests of improving the welfare of people in custody, and those who work with them.”

Call for more funding for Office of the National Preventive Mechanism

In releasing the *Office of the Custodial Inspector Annual Report 2023-24*, Mr Connock expressed his disappointment that the establishment of the Office of the Tasmanian National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) had stalled due to a lack of government funding.

“The NPM represents an opportunity to expand the proactive mandate of the Custodial Inspector to prevent ill treatment in police and court custody, and importantly to non-custodial settings,” he said. “This includes places such as secure mental health facilities, aged residential care, and disability support settings.

“Successive Royal Commissions and Commissions of Inquiry have highlighted the need for increased monitoring in these places where people are deprived of their liberty. Despite significant investment from the Tasmanian Government to scope the requirements of establishing the Tasmanian NPM, the recommendations arising from this project have been met with relative silence.

“It is my hope that the next NPM will be able to build upon the nation-leading work done in Tasmania to date. This includes demonstrating the benefit increased monitoring will have in preventing ill treatment in Tasmania where people are deprived of their liberty, custodial or otherwise.

“However, appropriate funding will be essential for the NPM to fulfil its mandate.”

*18 and over