

Media release



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MORE MUST BE DONE TO FACILITATE THE RIGHT TO VOTE IN PRISON

Custodial Inspector Richard Connock has commended the Tasmanian Prison Service's (TPS) recent work to give people in custody more access to voting, but says more needs to be done to uphold democratic rights.

"It is timely ahead of the federal election on 3 May that we are tabling our review report [*Overcoming barriers to voting in prison*](#)," Mr Connock said. "Democracy is about public participation. Being able to vote on who governs us – our representatives at the local, state and federal levels of government – and proposed changes to the Australian Constitution are core features of that participation.

"Despite this, people in custody face barriers to exercise their right to vote and, for some, their participation is restricted throughout their term of imprisonment. While TPS has made some inroads into making voting easier and more available to people in custody in Tasmania, there are still some significant challenges that need to be overcome."

The Office of the Custodial Inspector's [*Overcoming barriers to voting in prison – review report 2025*](#) was tabled in State Parliament today. It makes seven recommendations designed to improve people in custody's ability to engage in the democratic process and the community as, ultimately, this is where they will return on their release.

"While the right to vote is unlikely to be a primary concern for some in custody, with far more basic conditions not being consistently met such as access to the open air, every right deserves to be upheld," Mr Connock said. "Importantly, the right to vote does ensure people can have a say on the delivery of government services, which include prison services. Removing barriers to voting will likely mean people in custody will be more able, as well as willing, to have a say."

Mr Connock said it was commendable that TPS had facilitated some improvements since his office raised its initial observations in 2022.

"We proactively engaged with the TPS to find out how it was facilitating participation in the 2023 referendum on the proposed law to alter the Australian Constitution to recognise the First Peoples of Australia by establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice," he said. "Enabling voting in prison was especially pertinent given the high rate of incarceration

of Aboriginal people in Tasmania. Around the same time, the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) contacted the Secretary of the Department of Justice to discuss voting options for people in custody. The subsequent efforts of TPS and AEC to support in-person voting was an excellent demonstration of ensuring participation.

“However, in the lead-up to the 2024 Tasmanian state election, we again made enquiries about whether mobile polling services would be available in prison. The TPS advised it had already proactively engaged with the Tasmanian Electoral Commission, but unfortunately mobile polling services were not possible.

“While TPS has been actively working with electoral commissions as new elections approach, and preparations are well underway for the federal election in May, we would like to see processes on voting in Tasmanian prisons embedded in TPS policies and procedures.”

Mr Connock also called for changes to the laws on the eligibility of people in prison to vote to reduce disenfranchisement.

“People with a sentence of three years or more are ineligible to vote in Tasmania in local, state and federal elections,” he said. “The disproportionate incarceration of Aboriginal people makes these voting restrictions essentially discriminatory.

“We believe sufficient factors exist to review the current restriction at state and local government levels and have made a recommendation to state parliament related to this.”

Mr Connock said that, despite sending a copy of the report to the Minister for Corrections and Rehabilitation for response prior to tabling, this recommendation was not acknowledged or addressed.

“Unfortunately, the Minister’s response did not directly address this recommendation nor was our offer to meet to discuss the report taken up,” he said. “However, given this is a matter for the Tasmanian parliament to consider, not just the state government, we remain hopeful that our recommendation will still be considered.”

Mr Connock noted that this recommendation was limited to state legislation given his jurisdiction.

“I consider the voting restriction for people in custody at the federal level outside my remit. However, it is a timely reminder, in the midst of an election campaign, that ongoing and meaningful funding for the National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) is still unclear,” he said.

“The Commonwealth Ombudsman, as the NPM Coordinator for Australia, is better placed to comment on federal legislation and its impact on the treatment of people in custody. Regrettably, the Commonwealth Ombudsman has stated repeatedly in annual reporting that their NPM office is yet to be properly resourced. This is despite NPM implementation being a core obligation of the Australian Government since ratifying the *Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture* in 2017.”

**Issued by Paula Catchpole on behalf of the Office of the Custodial Inspector.
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Please note the Custodial Inspector is unable to make further comment than what is in this release and the reports.

The Tasmanian Custodial Inspector oversees 'custodial centres' - the prisons run by the Tasmania Prison Service and the Ashley Youth Detention Centre (AYDC) run by the Department for Education, Children and Young People. The Custodial Inspector can inspect prisons or AYDC at any time and make recommendations for improvement. More information can be found at the Custodial Inspector's [website](#).

This report has also been released in an Easy Read version, which can be found here https://custodialinspector.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/805510/Easy-Read-Overcoming-barriers-to-voting-in-prison-review-report-2025-Web-Version.pdf

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