



First hostage incident at the Alexander Maconochie Centre resolved peacefully

The review of a hostage taking incident at the Alexander Maconochie Centre on 27 March 2021, conducted by the Office of the ACT Inspector of Correctional Services, found that the situation was appropriately managed by ACT Corrective Services. Thanks to effective rapport and communication skills, Corrections Officers were able to negotiate the release of the detainee who had been taken hostage by another detainee. Fortunately, the hostage was physically unharmed, and a peaceful surrender occurred after about 90 minutes.

The ACT Inspector of Correctional Services, Neil McAllister, presented the review for tabling in the ACT Legislative Assembly today. The review makes seven recommendations.

Mr McAllister said, "ACTCS does not have trained hostage negotiators, which is not surprising given that hostage incidents are not a common occurrence in Australian prisons. The 27 March 2021 incident was the first hostage incident at the AMC since it commenced operation in 2009."

"It is difficult to justify a need for ACTCS to have professionally trained hostage negotiators. However, there is necessity for ACTCS to enhance the skills of senior Corrections Officers to deal with hostage situations."

"The senior CO who communicated to the detainee during the incident did an excellent job, partly at least because he knew the detainee well and was able to establish a rapport with him quite quickly. However, if the incident had gone on for hours or longer, that CO would have been relieved by someone who may not have had the same connection with the detainee."

The review has also raised concerns about the approval of the use of chemical agents in this incident. While it did not become necessary, a CO trained in the use of OC spray (pepper spray) was on standby to deploy it in the event the situation required immediate intervention. However, it is a matter of concern to OICS that currently, ACTCS does not have a notified policy or procedure specific to the use of chemical agents.

Mr McAllister said, "Given the potential effects of OC on detainees and unprotected staff, there must be very clear policy around their use and clear and detailed procedures for decontaminating people, clothing and premises exposed to the agent. This is not currently the case at AMC."

The review also identified a number of issues relating to existing policies and procedures for the management of a hostage situation, including lack of clear direction about when a victim's family must be notified, and the role of health services in administering essential medications during such an incident.

For more information

The full report can be found at ics.act.gov.au

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