Work camps overview

Work camps have been operating in Western Australia for more than 15 years.

In this time, thousands of offenders have participated in the program and returned approximately 600,000 hours of labour, equating to roughly $8.5 million in reparation to the community.

This work has included tree planting and coastal regeneration, maintenance of national parks and reserves, restoring heritage sites and buildings of significant historical value, as well as a range of other community projects undertaken for not-for-profit organisations.

The projects provide opportunities for eligible minimum security prisoners who are nearing release to improve their work skills and job readiness.

The primary objectives of the program are to:

- provide reparation to the community by engaging offenders in constructive employment on projects that enhance community life and maintain community assets
- enable offenders to develop work and life skills that may increase their chances of successful re-integration into the community on release
- encourage offenders to develop a work ethic by engaging them in regular work practices and encouraging self-responsibility
- support a graduated management regime for prisoners according to their security rating and sentence

There are four regional work camps:

- Kimberley (Wyndham),
- Eastern Goldfields (Warburton),
- Wheatbelt (Dowerin)
- Great Southern (Walpole)

Work camps generally operate under the same guiding principles and towards the same outcomes for offenders.

Work camps in the more remote regions are particularly well suited to Aboriginal offenders.
Operating philosophy

Work camps are minimum security facilities, managed by minimal staffing with a co-ordinated support structure from their ‘home’ prison.

Each camp has its own philosophy and unit plans designed to assist the host community – including in natural disasters such as fires and floods as well as search and rescue operations.

Camps have separate living quarters, kitchen/dining areas, workshops/classrooms as well as a laundry/recreational building.

They are designed to be self-sustainable with active participation in recycling and market gardening to help maintain the camp.

As a minimum security facility, prisoners are given a specific level of trust. While there are no containment fences, the camp does have a specific fence line which prisoners may not cross.

The work camp program is voluntary and prisoners are encouraged to participate with specific incentives including:

- additional gratuities (money they earn while working at the camp)
- additional phone calls
- flexible visiting hours
- extra home leave incentives
- access to external skill-based educational facilities

The camps have a no tolerance policy on drugs and alcohol.

Prisoners working within the community are always supervised, usually by a work camp officer but sometimes by local business operators where they may be gaining experience prior to being discharged or where they are assisting in maintaining local community agencies.

Work camps have very few occurrences of stand over tactics, bullying, assaults, contraband or escapes due to their voluntary, no tolerance and release and community engagement strategies.