

GENERAL

**Watchdog call to clarify prison rights**

AMANDA BANKS

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A controversial State Government plan for a Human Rights Act fails to provide adequate guidance on protection standards for prisoners and ignores the particular issues faced by Aboriginal people and women in custody, WAs prison watchdog says.

In a written submission to the committee set up to investigate the Act, Inspector of Custodial Services Richard Harding also calls for criminal justice authorities to be required to consider managerial practices such as the use of force, loss of privileges and cell sharing in the context of human rights.

In a submission supporting the Act, Professor Harding said he had seen "inroads" made into human rights both necessarily and gratuitously during nearly 50 inspections of the States jails.

"This is a laudable initiative likely to benefit many groups and individuals, including prisoners, who do not command a great deal of sympathy in the media or the community at large," he said.

His submission says that overall standards in prisons should be encapsulated in the Human Rights Act by a cross-reference to the Standard Guidelines for Corrections in Australia.

It also argues that the Government should not be able to avoid its responsibilities by outsourcing to non-Government groups and must be held liable for the treatment of prisoners by contractors such as in privately managed facilities.