



Commonwealth
National
Preventive
Mechanism

 FOR CONSUMERS

Post Visit Summary

Northern Alternative Place of Detention (APOD)

June 2025 and February 2026

August 2026

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Summary

Our visit

The Commonwealth National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) conducted two visits to the Northern Alternative Place of Detention (APOD), the first on 17 and 19 June 2025 and the second on 11 February 2026.

The Northern APOD is a permanently staffed Alternative Place of Detention facility located in a hotel in Darwin in the Northern Territory. The Northern APOD is controlled by the Australian Border Force (ABF). Detention services are contracted to Secure Journeys, and health services are contracted to Healthcare Australia (HCA).

The visits were conducted by OPCAT Monitors from the Commonwealth NPM. During the visit in June 2025, we were accompanied by an Indonesian interpreter.

The Commonwealth NPM's previous visit to the Northern APOD was conducted in April 2024 and a Post Visit Summary (PVS) was published on 12 December 2024.¹

Methodology

The primary function of an NPM is visiting places of detention.

The Commonwealth NPM visits places of detention to:

- Monitor the treatment of people in detention and the conditions of their detention
- Identify any systemic issues where there is a risk of torture or ill-treatment
- Make recommendations, suggestions, or comments promoting systemic improvement.

¹ [Post Visit Summary – Northern Alternative Places of Detention \(APOD\)](#)

The Commonwealth NPM conducts three types of visits: announced, unannounced, and semi-announced. The type, location, and timing of each visit is determined by the Commonwealth NPM alone.

Each place of detention is assessed in terms of its performance based on the management and conditions for people in detention. We assess these against the five indicators of a healthy detention facility, adapted from those used by other international and domestic visiting bodies.

The five indicators of a healthy centre are:²

Safety	People in detention are held in safety and that consideration is given to the use of force and disciplinary procedures as a last resort.
Respect	People in detention are treated with respect for their human dignity and the circumstances of their detention.
Purposeful activity	The detention facility encourages activities and provides facilities to preserve and promote the mental and physical wellbeing of people in detention.
Wellbeing and social care	People in detention are able to maintain contact with family and friends, support groups, and legal representatives, and have a right to make a request or complaint.
Physical and mental health	People in detention have access to appropriate medical care equivalent to that available within the community. Stakeholders work collaboratively to improve general and individual health conditions for people in detention

² These indicators have been adapted from expectations used by international and domestic inspectorates.

This report is based on:

- Documents we reviewed prior to the visit – we received documents from the ABF as part of a formal document request. These included copies of administrative records and decisions, operational procedures and population data.
- CCTV footage review
- Interviews and discussions with staff
- Interviews and discussions with people in detention
- The observations of the visiting OPCAT Monitors.

During the visit, OPCAT Monitors met with the ABF Superintendent at the Northern APOD. The team also spoke with people in detention during both visits.

What we found

At the time of the Commonwealth NPM's visit to the APOD in June 2025, the service provider running the facility had recently changed to a new provider, Secure Journeys. The footprint of the APOD had also recently expanded from occupying two floors in a hotel complex to occupying the entire hotel building. This significantly increased the accommodation capacity of the facility from 20 people to 50 people.

Because of these changes, Secure Journeys was still developing and embedding new practices and procedures in the day-to-day operations of the APOD.

At the time of the first visit, works were being undertaken to improve access to fresh air and outdoor recreation, in accordance with a recommendation made by the Commonwealth NPM after a previous visit to the Northern APOD. While works were underway, however, we observed that access to fresh air and outdoor recreation had been restricted even further.

By the time of the second visit in February 2026, the works to improve the outdoor access area were nearing completion and we were satisfied that people had appropriate access to fresh air and outdoor recreation facilities. We also found that the general amenity of the facility for people in detention had improved with new programs and activities facilities in place and improved maintenance of the floors used to accommodate people in detention.



Recommendations and suggestions

Based on our visits to the Northern APOD, I recommend the following:



Recommendation 1

Within six months, the Department of Home Affairs should ensure that an emergency generator is in place at the Northern APOD to ensure continuity of services to people in detention at the facility in the event of loss of electricity connection to the network.



Recommendation 2

ABF should introduce a contingency planning process to ensure that daily access to suitable areas for outdoor recreation is not impeded by construction works or other similar circumstances.



Recommendation 3

As soon as practicable and within six months at the latest, the Department of Home Affairs should ensure that personal and family visits are made available for people detained at the Northern APOD.

I also make one suggestion:



Suggestion 1

The Department of Home Affairs should consider options for improving the accessibility of the programs and activities space at the Northern APOD, with a view to providing equitable and dignified access to people in detention with mobility-related disability.

Facility & demographics

The Northern APOD occupies a hotel building in Darwin City and has a reported capacity of 50 people.

At the time of our June 2025 visit, the APOD had recently been expanded to occupy the entire hotel building, having previously occupied just two floors of the 8-story building.

One floor provides facilities for programs and activities for people in detention and another floor houses a medical clinic, staff offices and amenities, storage, and a reception and processing facility for new arrivals. The rest of the floors are available to accommodate people in detention.

The majority of people held at the Northern APOD are Illegal Foreign Fishers from Indonesia who are held at the APOD pending court appearances and/or repatriation to their home country. The APOD also occasionally houses other groups of people including those whose visas have been cancelled or people who have overstayed their visas.

On 17 June 2025 there were 19 people being held at the facility, including 15 Illegal foreign fishers and 4 people who had recently been released from prison or police custody, including women.

At the time of our second visit on 11 February 2026, 11 people were being held at the facility including 10 Illegal foreign fishers and 1 person who was waiting to be repatriated to their home country after being released from prison.



Observations

Safety

Safety and induction video

During our visit in February 2026, Monitors noted that Secure Journeys had introduced a new video induction package that has been developed locally to address the needs of the main cohort of people held at the APOD, that is, Illegal Foreign Fishers from Indonesia. This video package is available in English as well as Bahasa Indonesia. It is designed to explain to new arrivals at the APOD the fire and emergency procedures for the facility, and their rights and responsibilities while they are in detention. It also provides general information about the operations of the facility including programs and activities, facilities for religious needs, laundry facilities and the cleaning schedule. The availability of this video presentation addresses many of the language and literacy barriers that may otherwise prevent people in detention from gaining a proper understanding of safety issues while they are detained.

Monitors noted that general signage throughout the facility has also been translated into Bahasa Indonesia including menus, canteen forms, programs and activities schedules and laundry signs.

No emergency generator available

Just prior to our second visit in February 2026, a cyclone had passed nearby Darwin, and this highlighted that the Northern APOD does not currently have an emergency generator in place should electricity connection to the grid be lost. This has the potential to negatively affect the provision of basic services to people in detention as well as movement of people in detention and staff throughout the multi-story facility.



Recommendation 1

Within six months, the Department of Home Affairs should ensure that an emergency generator is in place at the Northern APOD to ensure continuity of services to people in detention at the facility in the event of loss of electricity connection to the network.

Respect

Access to fresh air and outdoor recreation

In the report of the Commonwealth NPM's previous visit to the Northern APOD in 2024, we raised concerns about the facilities that were used to provide access to fresh air and outdoor recreation for people in detention. Our view at the time was that the facilities did not meet international standards and guidelines such as the Mandela rules.³ We recommended that action be taken to ensure that people detained at the Northern APOD were provided with immediate access to appropriate outdoor recreation and exercise facilities.

During our visit in June 2025, works had commenced to address the concerns we had raised. While these works were underway, however, access to fresh air and outdoor recreation for people in detention had been restricted even further. The only outdoor space accessible to people in detention was an area measuring approximately 6 meters long by 2 meters wide, enclosed by temporary fencing.

³ [United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners](#)





Figure 1: Temporary outdoor access area, June 2025

We were advised that the use of this area was a short-term solution while works were undertaken to improve the normal outdoor access area and it had only been intended to be in use for a few weeks. However, unexpected delays in construction had meant that it had already been in use for around three weeks, and at the time it was not known when the new area would be available for use.

We were initially advised that people in detention could access the temporary area upon request during daylight hours and they would be escorted down to the area for short periods of time and then escorted back to their accommodation. However, it was apparent from speaking to people in detention and operational staff that this outdoor area was effectively being used as a smoking area and not for access to fresh air or outdoor recreation. People in detention advised us they were only allowed access to the outdoor area for short periods of approximately 10 minutes at a time. Rule 23 of the Mandela rules states that people in detention “shall have at least one hour of suitable exercise in the open air daily if the weather permits”. At the time of the visit in June, this standard was not being met.

The women in detention we spoke to during our June 2025 visit advised that they had not been able to access the outdoor area as they did not smoke, and that they had not had

access to fresh air at all in the almost two weeks they had been held at the facility. We provided feedback on this matter to the ABF staff onsite and staff acted immediately to advise the women in detention that they were able to access the outdoor area.

By the time of our second visit in February 2026, the works to the outdoor access area were nearing completion and we noted considerable improvements to the outdoor facilities. People in detention had supervised access to outdoor recreation facilities including a shaded area and a grassed area. Outdoor programs and activities were being undertaken in the area. The Commonwealth NPM is now satisfied that people in detention have access to a suitable area for fresh air and outdoor recreation for appropriate time periods in accordance with international standards and guidelines.



Figures 2 and 3: New outdoor recreation area Northern APOD, February 2026



Recommendation 2

ABF should introduce a contingency planning process to ensure that daily access to suitable areas for outdoor recreation is not impeded by construction works or other similar circumstances.

Women in Detention

At the time of our visit in June 2025, there were a number of women detained at the Northern APOD. While women are not typically detained in this facility, Monitors observed that reasonable provisions had been made to meet the needs of the women detained.

They were accommodated on a separate floor to the male people in detention and female detention services officers were on duty to supervise them.

We noted that feminine hygiene products were freely available to the women and appropriate disposal facilities were in place.

Wellbeing and Social Care

Personal and family visits not available onsite

Monitors noted with concern that personal and family visits are not available at the Northern APOD.

The majority of people detained at the Northern APOD are Illegal Foreign Fishers who were not resident in Australia prior to entering detention, and are therefore unlikely to have significant connections to Australia. However, Monitors were advised by staff that, due to the increased capacity of the APOD, the facility was now being used to detain other cohorts, including people whose visas have been cancelled or who have overstayed their visas. People in these cohorts, who may have been residing in Australia for some time prior to entering the detention, are more likely to have connections with the Australian community and may wish to access family and personal visits. Maintaining connections with family, friends and community contacts plays a key role in supporting the mental health and wellbeing of people in detention and access to such visits is a requirement in international standards and guidelines.⁴

When Monitors raised this issue with onsite staff, we were advised that if a request was received it may be possible to facilitate a visit at an offsite location, such as at the airport. However, the people in detention Monitors spoke to were not aware of this option. One person Monitors spoke to during the second visit advised that they had specifically been told personal visits were not available.

Monitors were advised that professional visits, such as with lawyers or consular staff, are currently facilitated onsite.

⁴ Mandela Rules – **Rule 58**: Establishes that prisoners have a right to regular contact, including visits, with family and friends.



Recommendation 3

As soon as practicable and within six months at the latest, the Department of Home Affairs should ensure that personal and family visits are made available for people detained at the Northern APOD.

Purposeful Activity

New programs and activities facilities available

Following the expansion of the Northern APOD facility to occupy the entire hotel building, the detention service provider, Secure Journeys, has established one entire floor as a programs and activities space for people in detention.

At the time of our second visit in February 2026, this area was well fitted out with recreational equipment including table tennis and pool tables, badminton equipment, arts and craft items and a small library with books available in multiple languages. The area is also intended to be used for religious services and is equipped with various religious texts and prayer mats.

One potential barrier to the use of this area is that the floor on which it is situated does not have general lift access available. It is instead accessed via stairs from the floor below, potentially restricting access by people with mobility-related disability. Monitors raised this issue with staff who advised that in this scenario, a goods lift could be used to bring a person with mobility-related disability up to the floor and they would then be escorted by staff through a restricted area and into the programs and activities space.

Monitors were satisfied that this arrangement would enable people with mobility-related disability to access the programs and activities space. However, Monitors also noted that directly addressing the accessibility barrier (such as through using a mobility ramp or installing a stair lift) would provide a more equitable and dignified access method than the workaround described.





Suggestion 1

The Department of Home Affairs should consider options for improving the accessibility of the programs and activities space at the Northern APOD, with a view to providing equitable and dignified access to people in detention with mobility-related disability.

Physical and Mental Health

Improved onsite medical services

The contractor providing medical and health services within the Immigration Detention Network changed in December 2024 and since that time the scope of services available at the Northern APOD has significantly expanded.

Prior to the change in service provider and expansion in the Northern APOD's capacity, the clinic at the Northern APOD was remotely managed with only one onsite staff member available within normal business hours Monday to Friday. The clinic is now managed onsite and is staffed by 4 full time staff, including primary health and mental health nurses and a number of casual staff, for 12 and a half hours a day, 7 days a week. After hours services are provided via a remote virtual health service.

General practitioner services are still provided via telehealth services but at the time of our visit in February 2026, we were advised that efforts are underway to have a GP onsite at the APOD one day per week.

Monitors considered that the expanded medical services would improve access to physical and mental health care for people detained at the Northern APOD, particularly once a GP is available onsite.

Post Visit Events

NAPOD closure due to mould outbreak

In March 2026, shortly after our second visit to the Northern APOD, the Commonwealth NPM was advised that a mould outbreak had been identified on one of the accommodation floors. On further investigation, other floors of the building were found to also be affected. This resulted in the people detained at the Northern APOD being moved to temporary accommodation at other facilities while remediation works were undertaken.

People in detention were accommodated at these alternative facilities for around one month while treatment and repairs were undertaken. We have been advised that preventive maintenance measures have been put in place including regular maintenance and cleaning, an air quality testing regime and ongoing monitoring to prevent future outbreaks and ensure ongoing compliance with accommodation and hygiene standards.

Mandate

The Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT) is an international human rights treaty designed to strengthen the protections for people deprived of their liberty and potentially vulnerable to mistreatment and abuse. OPCAT does not create new rights for people who are detained, rather it seeks to reduce the likelihood of mistreatment.

OPCAT combines monitoring at an international level (by the Subcommittee for the Prevention of Torture) and by National Preventive Mechanisms (NPMs) at a domestic level. NPMs are independent visiting bodies, established in accordance with OPCAT, to examine the treatment of persons deprived of their liberty, with a view to strengthening their protection against torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment. An NPM is not an investigative body.

The mandate of an NPM differs from other bodies in its preventive approach: it seeks to identify patterns and detect systemic risks of torture and ill-treatment, rather than investigating or adjudicating complaints. In July 2018, the Australian Government announced the Commonwealth Ombudsman as the visiting body for Commonwealth places of detention (the Commonwealth NPM). At present, the Commonwealth NPM visits places of detention operated by:

- the Department of Home Affairs
- the Australian Federal Police
- the Australian Defence Force



Australian Government

Department of Home Affairs

SECRETARY

Our ref: EC26-003470

Mr Iain Anderson
Commonwealth Ombudsman
GPO Box 442
Canberra ACT 2601

Iain
Dear Mr Anderson,

Thank you for your letter of 12 June 2026 enclosing the draft *Post Visit Summary – Northern Alternative Place of Detention* report following the Commonwealth National Preventive Mechanism's (NPM's) visits to the Northern Alternative Place of Detention (APOD) in June 2025 and February 2026.

The Department values its ongoing engagement with the Commonwealth NPM and looks forward to continuing to work collaboratively to address the recommendations and suggestion outlined in the report.

The Department has carefully considered the report and notes it acknowledges a number of improvements made between the June 2025 and February 2026 visits, including enhancements to facilities, activities, provisions for women, signage and induction materials. No factual errors, omissions, or operationally sensitive information were identified in the report.

A detailed response to the report's recommendations is provided at **Attachment A**. All recommendations and the suggestion are agreed.

If your office has further questions, [REDACTED],
[REDACTED], is best placed to assist and can be contacted at [REDACTED].
Alternatively, you are welcome to contact me directly if that is helpful.

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]
Stephanie Foster PSM

10 July 2026

Department of Home Affairs response to Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Within six months, the Department of Home Affairs should ensure that an emergency generator is in place at the Northern APOD to ensure continuity of services to people in detention at the facility in the event of loss of electricity connection to the network.

The Department of Home Affairs **agrees** with Recommendation 1.

The Northern Alternative Place of Detention (APOD) operates within a leased facility, with detention services delivered by Secure Journeys under contractual requirements to provide services comparable to those in other detention settings.

In response to the issue identified during the visit, interim risk mitigations are in place to maintain safety and essential services during any loss of power, including the provision of battery-operated lighting and cooling measures to address immediate Work, Health and Safety risks.

The Department is considering longer-term options to strengthen infrastructure resilience at the site, including advice on the feasibility, cost, and implementation of an emergency generator. The Department will also need to consider any potential contractual constraints associated with the leased premises.

Recommendation 2: ABF should introduce a contingency planning process to ensure that daily access to suitable areas for outdoor recreation is not impeded by construction works or other similar circumstances.

The Department **agrees** with Recommendation 2.

The Department acknowledges that access to outdoor recreation was temporarily constrained during construction works to upgrade facilities, as noted in the report.

Substantial improvements have since been delivered, including enhanced outdoor recreation areas, which are now available for use by detainees. Ongoing works are being managed to minimise disruption to access.

The Department is strengthening contingency planning arrangements to ensure continuity of access to suitable outdoor areas during future works or similar disruptions.

It is noted that, consistent with existing procedural settings, service delivery in non-facility APOD environments may differ from larger immigration detention centres due to the built environment; however, the Department will continue to seek to maximise access to outdoor exercise wherever practicable.

Recommendation 3: As soon as practicable and within six months at the latest, the Department of Home Affairs should ensure that personal and family visits are made available for people detained at the Northern APOD.

The Department **agrees** with Recommendation 3.

The vast majority of the detainee population in the NAPOD are Illegal Foreign Fishers that have been apprehended and transit the NAPOD within a 21-day period. Any other NAPOD inflows are either removed within a 24hr period or placed within the greater network. Detainee visits can be facilitated at the NAPOD on a case-by-case basis. All visits are subject to an assessment of operational requirements, and safety and security checks to ensure the safety and security of the facility, detainees, visitors and staff. If extenuating circumstances were presented, where a visit is required but not able to be facilitated at the NAPOD, visits can be organised at the aviation precinct prior to removal or further placement. The Department acknowledges that professional visits including legal and consular, are available onsite.

Suggestion 1: The Department of Home Affairs should consider options for improving the accessibility of the programs and activities space at the Northern APOD, with a view to providing equitable and dignified access to people in detention with mobility-related disability.

The Department **agrees** with Suggestion 1.

The Department will consider improvements to accessibility of programs and activities spaces as part of broader ongoing service enhancements across the Northern APOD.

This includes consideration of options to improve equitable access for detainees with mobility-related disability, consistent with contractual obligations for the delivery of appropriate programs and services to all detainees.

Any enhancements will be assessed in combination with other infrastructure and service improvements being progressed at the site.

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