

# Don Dale Juvenile Detention Centre

1991 –

**Other Names:** • Don Dale Youth Detention Facility

## Details

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The Don Dale Juvenile Detention Centre which opened in 1991 was the first purpose built institution for young offenders in the Northern Territory. It provided secure accommodation for up to 25 boys and girls, aged between 10 and 16 or 17. The Centre replaced Giles House and Malak House, and took in young offenders from all over the Northern Territory. In July 2016, the Prime Minister announced a Royal Commission to inquire into the mistreatment of children and young people in juvenile detention at Don Dale and other facilities in the Northern Territory.

The Don Dale Juvenile Detention Centre was the Northern Territory's first purpose designed and built institution for young offenders. It replaced Giles House and Malak House which had operated as detention centres since 1978 and 1987 respectively. Constructed next door to Berrimah Gaol in Darwin, the Don Dale Centre provided medium to high level secure care for children and young people between the ages of 10 and 16 years. Males and females, sentenced or on remand, were sent to Don Dale from all over the Northern Territory. All were placed in the same complex, usually in single cells. In 2001 Department officials noted that this situation made it difficult to isolate individuals or groups.

Various sources dating from 1995 through to 2001 suggest that Don Dale provided secure care for between 22 and 30 young people. A survey conducted on 31 December 1992 stated that 13 of the 24 'official beds', (4 reserved for girls) were occupied. The residents at that time included eight Aboriginal boys, two non-Aboriginal boys and one Aboriginal girl.

In July 2000, the Juvenile Justice Act was amended to change the definition of 'juvenile' to a young person who had not yet reached the age of 18. This meant that from that year, 17 year olds were committed to the Detention Centre. In its annual report for 2000-2001, the Department of Corrections commented that the addition of this new age group had 'changed the dynamics' of the institution, a situation which presented 'major new management issues'. The Department responded to these changes by renovating the building to allow for two separate management regimes within the Centre.

In the early 2000s all young people resident at Don Dale were expected to attend school unless they were involved in outside work programmes or vocational courses. When young people were first admitted, the education unit at the centre assessed their skills and allocated them to small groups which taught literacy and numeracy at their level.

In October 2003 the Northern Territory Government announced that facilities at Don Dale would be expanded so that residents could be separated according to whether they were male or female, on remand or sentenced, and whether they were in need of high or low level security. Planned additions to the complex included the construction of a kitchen, workshop, education centre and sport field, plus a 16 bed low to medium security accommodation block. At the time these plans were announced 19 young people were in the centre. These renovations appear to have been completed sometime in 2006.

In February 2000, a death in custody occurred at the Don Dale Detention Centre. The case involved a 15 year old boy from Groote Eylandt who had been sentenced under the Northern Territory's mandatory sentencing laws for stealing felt tipped colouring pens. A Coronial Inquiry into the circumstances of the death resulted in a number of recommendations being made related to training of staff and management practices in the Centre.

In 2013 the Don Dale Detention Centre provided medium to high security accommodation for up to 38 juvenile offenders of both sexes. Young people from Darwin and surrounding regions were placed in the institution.

In 2014 Don Dale Juvenile Detention Centre relocated from its original site, the former premises of Malak House, to the adjacent property of the former Berrimah Gaol. In September 2014 it was renamed Don Dale Youth Detention Centre.

The Northern Territory Children's Commissioner conducted an 'own initiative investigation' into incidents occurring at Don Dale in August 2014 – including the use of tear gas and restraints on young people, and released its report in August 2015. The Human Rights Law Centre subsequently made a request for urgent action on the treatment of young people at Don Dale to the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment, at the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva.

In July 2016, following an investigation by the television program Four Corners, the Prime Minister announced a Royal Commission to inquire into the mistreatment of children and young people in juvenile detention at Don Dale and other facilities in the Northern Territory.

## Gallery



**Photograph 0427 - Darwin's Berrimah Prison April 2010**

**Description:** Aerial view of Darwin Correctional Centre, Berrimah



**Don Dale Juvenile Detention Centre**

## More info

### Chronology

- Malak House Remand and Assessment Centre (1979 - 1987)
  - Malak House Juvenile Detention Centre (1987 - 1991)
- **Don Dale Juvenile Detention Centre (1991 – )**

### Related Entries

#### Run by

- [Department of Correctional Services, Northern Territory Government \(1989 - 2001\)](#)  
Date: 1991 - 2001

- [Department of Justice, Northern Territory Government \(2001 - 2013\)](#)
- [Department of Correctional Services, Northern Territory Government \(2013 - 2016\)](#)
- [Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities, Northern Territory Government \(2016 - current\)](#)

#### Related Organisations

- [Giles House Juvenile Detention and Training Centre \(1978 - 1991\)](#)  
When Giles House Juvenile Detention and Training Centre closed, all young offenders from Alice Springs went to the Don Dale Detention Centre in Darwin

## Resources

- [Key moments in Penal Culture in the Northern Territory 1970 - present](#), The Australian Prisons Project, 2012
- Office of the Children's Commissioner, Northern Territory, [Own initiative investigation report: services provided by the Department of Correctional Services at the Don Dale Youth Detention Centre](#), August 2015

## Records

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For more information and to access your records, follow the links below:

### Records

- [Correctional Services records, Northern Territory Government \(1970s - current\)](#)
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You can view this page online by visiting <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/entity/don-dale-juvenile-detention-centre-2/>