

**Submission
No 4**

COMMUNITY SAFETY IN REGIONAL AND RURAL COMMUNITIES

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NOT the APY lands or any remote location in Australia

This story is about the complete breakdown of law and order and hope in a small rural community in the north of NSW. This town is not located in a remote, outlying part of our vast continent it is on a national highway and hundreds of people pass through it daily. It is located in a shire that reports to be one of the most agriculturally productive local government areas in Australia.

Outside this small town is an Aboriginal community that began life as a 'reserve' and then became a 'mission'. Over the past few decades, this small community has gained national publicity for some of the worst living conditions in Australia. In 2011 a film about this community was written and directed from experiences and memories that the director had growing up when visiting relatives there. It raised many issues of the state of aboriginal health, culture and substance abuse in this particular community. It was an alarming depiction of the extreme challenges facing the next generation of Gamilaroi people in this community. You would not recognise this as Australia if you ever happen to visit this place and it is 14km off the national highway between Brisbane and Melbourne.

In September 2022 members of my family were victims of a crime spree in the town where our mother has retired to, which is located on the NSW/Qld border. Break and enter and car theft is increasingly common. We had gathered to celebrate our mother's 80th birthday and 3 vehicles were stolen from her driveway. The local Qld police woke us with a phone call to inform us that our vehicles had been seen on CCTV in the NSW town that is 10 km away. They were sorry not to be able to help us now as the matter had now become something for the NSW police to deal with. Cross border issues with policing this region complicate every part of these crimes for the victims but seem to aid the criminals in their ongoing and increasing criminal activity.

The cars that are stolen in Qld and driven over the border to NSW are most often found on fire or completely burnt out just a few hours after having been taken from their owner. They are set alight in the streets of the local town, on the side of the road, at the mission or near the river. Public places but no-one seems to be able to stop this. So within a very short timeframe, the victim has no vehicle and the perpetrator(s) have no material gain beside the memory of the thrill of the crime. It feels completely futile. A game apparently, with points for the stealing, the type of vehicle and for fuelling up without paying. The police are sympathetic, polite and caring but in your time of need seem to be unable to help in any meaningful way by trying to stop, or apprehend your vehicle before it gets set alight or hidden for more 'fun' the following night. If the police do happen to apprehend any offenders it is often reported that despite the police opposing bail, the offenders (who very often have numerous prior outstanding property and car related charges) are released on bail by the magistrates both in Qld and NSW.

Everyone in the surrounding community pays a price for this ongoing crime, business, home and car insurances in and around these towns have skyrocketed or are simply not offered to these postcodes by some companies.

An employee of ours lived in this local town and drove out to us for his work (a 20km commute) He was a loyal, hard-working, quiet man that mostly kept to himself. Earlier this year he died in his home having phoned 000 in the middle of the night complaining of chest pain. On arrival the ambulance were unable to access his house and called the local fire brigade for assistance. He was so securely locked into his own home emergency services were unable to assist him and he had died

by the time they managed to get to him. He had secured his home with timber or iron over every window and had built a locked cage that contained his car and secured the entrance to his home. He had lived like this for 20 years as a result of a home invasion and suffered severe injuries from being bashed by the intruders from his own local community.

Then in the early hours of a Monday morning last month a utility was unlawfully taken from our rural property. NSW Police drove the 20km to tell us of it being driven erratically in the streets of our local town. Why were they on our doorstep chatting and saying they are sorry and not doing anything to apprehend or recover the vehicle? Then Reports on social media that another 4WD vehicle stolen that same night had already been found burnt out. We decided to try and recover the vehicle ourselves (as some others have done) and contacted a local aviation service to search. Our vehicle was located bogged near the river at the back of the mission. It was recovered and awaits insurance assessment.

The following night another 5 vehicles stolen with reports of youths doing circle work in front of the local police station and then photos of a 4WD being burned on a vacant block next door to the police station. Car-jackings have occurred in Moree recently. This situation is escalating. Where is the law enforcement that we as tax payers are entitled to? Why are there no consequences for those breaking the law? Why are the offenders with multiple prior and outstanding offences usually released on bail. They often have little or no family life, support or role models to return to, to assist in breaking the cycle of their crime addiction.

In the past month, trespass and crime on rural properties surrounding our local town has escalated alarmingly. Vehicles, workshop equipment and guns have been stolen night after night. A tiny outlying rural school with 7 students had the principal's residence broken into (a completely terrifying experience for the young, female resident who was alone at the time) apparently the school mini bus was the target of that excursion. These offences on rural properties located 'out of town' are virtually unheard of and represent a frightening escalation in the crime in our border region. Land holders and Farmers may be soft targets due to the nature of feeling secure through our rural location, our limited ability to lock up sheds, workshops and having a more relaxed approached to securing gates, ramps and others entrances onto our land.

The community members on both sides of the border/river (NSW & Qld) are frightened, this situation is completely out of control. Please look at this developing situation urgently, before a victim or an offender is seriously injured or killed.

Please feel free to contact me for any further information or to arrange meetings or to visit this region.

Nicola Littlewood

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