

**Submission  
No 30**

## **COMMUNITY SAFETY IN REGIONAL AND RURAL COMMUNITIES**

**Name:** Mr John Hamparsum

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## **Submission to the NSW Committee on L/a/ and Safety inquiry into Community safety in regional and rural communities -**

I provide this submission- 18/04/2024, as a victim of crime perpetrated by indigenous youths from my local community of Gunnedah NSW.

On the afternoon of Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2022, I had just returned to my home, on our rural property which is 32 km South East of Gunnedah, and got into the shower after a day's work on our farm. I heard our dogs barking and assumed that someone had arrived at our house, the dogs were locked up at the time. I got out of the shower to investigate and looking out the window I saw a new looking Black Mitsubishi Triton Utility (which I later found out had been stolen earlier in the day from a caravan park in Gunnedah) parked in our driveway. I assumed that we had an unexpected visitor and quickly dried myself and slipped on a t-shirt and shorts to see who was there. When I opened our house front door, I saw my White Ford Ranger utility leave my garage with rear wheels spinning and the black Mitsubishi Triton quickly following it. I quickly came to the conclusion that my ute had just been stolen and I ran to my daughter's car and chased the thieves for approximately 10 minutes on the dirt/gravel roads until we reached the township of Carroll and the stolen car turned north onto the Oxley Highway heading towards Gunnedah at high speed.

At this point I stopped chasing the thieves as I didn't wish to put the public at risk on a busy road. Unfortunately, in my haste to chase these thieves I had not grabbed my mobile phone off the charger before taking chase, I therefore had to flag down a motorist on the Oxley Highway to ask if I could use their phone to call the police, explaining that my car had been stolen.

Dialling 000, I spoke to the operator, explained the situation and said that if she was quick, she could get the Gunnedah police to stop the vehicle on the highway before it got into the town of Gunnedah. Sadly the 000 operator took way too long to act and by the time Police were notified my vehicle had already got to Gunnedah (normally a 14-minute drive from Carroll to Gunnedah).

My stolen vehicle then proceeded to race around Gunnedah for over three hours before the youths finally skidded into a gutter and tore the rear tyre off the rim, they then jumped out of the vehicle and ran away.

What is most concerning about this story is that during the three plus hours that they drove around Gunnedah, the youths did the following:

- Crashed into a friend of mine's car, they were driving home after being at the local Show. My friends had a six-month-old baby in the rear (baby) seat, the damage to her car was in excess of \$4,000. This young couple had seen the vehicle approaching at speed behind them (without any lights on) and saw the flashing police car's lights behind it, so they pulled over to the left hand side of the road, whereupon the thieves driving my car decided to overtake them on the left side, jumping onto the gutter and crashing into the side of my friends car, it was like the thieves thought they were in a game like Grand Theft Auto where no road rules applied to them.
- The Annual Gunnedah Show was on at the time and after the Show Fireworks finished there was a large number of cars leaving the Showground, the thieves decided it would be fun to drive laps around the block where the Showground is whilst people were trying to leave the Show, an extremely dangerous situation. During this time, I was being sent videos on Facebook

Messenger, from people in Gunnedah, of my car being chased (not at high speed) by the Police Highway Patrol car, around and around the block. I had put a notice on the local community notice board asking people to keep an eye out for my stolen White Ford ranger ute, I was inundated with reports of sightings.

- The police called off the chase numerous times due to dangerous speeds and behaviour by the thieves. However, when the police stopped chasing them, these thieves would then drive down to outside the police station, drop the clutch on the ute and roar off, goading the police to chase them again, I understand this happened a few times that night.
- These thieves decided to then pick up a number of their mates to take them on joy rides around the town and up to the town lookout, where the next day some bush walkers found items from my vehicle thrown into the bushes.
- After the thieves got sick of this, the thieves then decided to do racing laps around Bando and Herbert Streets in Gunnedah, so much so that the local residents started to throw rocks and logs at the stolen car to try to stop them, I am told this went on for some time and no police were present even though they had been called. It was during these high-speed laps that the vehicle skidded into a cement gutter and the rear tyre blew off the rim, the youths then abandoned the car and ran with local residents chasing them on foot, still no police present.
- Locals notified me where my car had ended up and I notified the police where it was, I could not speak to our local police as the police station was unmanned by this time of the night and my call had been redirected to the Tamworth police station.

There are a number of pertinent points that must be made at this stage:

- The behaviour of the police in this situation is to be commended, at no stage did the police continue to chase these youths if their behaviour got dangerous or speeds excessive. It would have been extremely frustrating for the police not being able to stop this vehicle. A vehicle that was being driven by thirteen and fourteen year old youths, around a town with elevated numbers people on the streets due to the local show on at the time. I believe that once the police worked out that these thieves were youths and were wanting the police to chase them, the police called off further pursuit to prevent further inflaming the situation.
- These were kids driving my car! Police investigators from Sydney (Operation Raptor?) discovered finger prints of known offenders in my car and also the inbuilt vehicle's safety feature had downloaded the phone numbers of all that rode in the vehicle during that night and were later identified by the investigators. They were all young kids! When my car was recovered they found that the driver's seat was pulled all the way forward so that these kids could reach the accelerator, clutch and brake pedals.
- My car is one of hundreds that have been stolen in and around Gunnedah in the last five years. It is only a matter of time before this dangerous driving by these youths will cause a fatality or serious injury to an innocent bystander. In this particular incident my friends and their baby were extremely lucky that they were not injured or killed when my stolen car crashed into them.
- These kids were trying to get the police to chase them, they had no fear of the consequences of their behaviour, in fact they relished in the excitement.
- The indifference these kids exhibited by driving at racing speeds around and around a residential street block demonstrates a complete disregard of other people's safety.

I must mention here that I personally nearly lost my life as a direct result of this incident. Two days after the theft, on Monday 4th April 2022, I had a heart attack and went by ambulance to Gunnedah Hospital and then transferred to Tamworth Base Hospital. The heart attack was diagnosed with Takotsubo cardiomyopathy which is a temporary heart condition that develops in response to an intense emotional or physical experience, in many incidences it can be fatal. Fortunately, in my case it was not! The cardiologists told me the cause of the heart attack was a direct result of the car theft experience.

I have lived on our farm outside of Gunnedah my entire life, I am 57 years old, up until this incident we have never locked our house or removed keys from our vehicles at night. Obviously, this has all changed now, we lock our house and all keys are removed from the vehicles, our trust in our community has been smashed!

I am a member (Deputy Captain) of our local Rural Fire Service, the Piallaway Brigade and unfortunately we are being called out to burning stolen car fires more and more frequently. Mostly these call outs are in the early hours of the morning, after mid-night, which is a huge inconvenience to our volunteer brigade members and also the risk these fires place on local farms. These thieves do not care that the car fire they started, to destroy any fingerprint evidence, could completely burn out some farmers crop or pasture grazing paddock, ruining the farmers' livelihood.

They don't care about the inconvenience they have placed upon the person that they stole the car from, in my case I was without a vehicle for over three months and I had a large insurance excess to pay. Our local RFS Brigade Captain had his ute stolen, unfortunately he couldn't afford insurance for the vehicle so his loss was much higher than mine.

In my local community nearly everyone I know or a member of their family has had a car stolen, their house broken into (my mother's house in Tamworth was broken into by indigenous youths recently) or been robbed in recent times. Previously these incidents were very rare in rural communities and clearly something in the fabric of our society has changed and not for the good!

Unfortunately, in our local community it is predominantly Aboriginal kids and young Aboriginal adults that are continually committing these crimes, it reflects very badly on our local indigenous people whom are mostly very good community members. The legal system seems to have a "catch and release" system which is allowing the same perpetrators to continually commit the crimes and it must be very demoralising for our local police to continually catch the same people only to see them out on the street a week later committing the same crimes.

I don't have the solution to this recent issue of youth crime; however, I do know it is caused by what is happening in their own homes. Their parents are part of the problem and maybe this is where to start addressing the issue, trying to treat the symptom of youth crime is only putting a temporary Band-Aid on the issue. Sometimes these kids feel safer on the streets, committing crimes hoping that they will be incarcerated so they can be in a safe place, have a roof over their heads and be fed a decent meal, being locked up is not a threat to them.

I hope the inquiry develops some meaningful long-term solutions and in the short term provide our police and community workers with the resources needed to battle this crime wave.

Your sincerely, John Hamparsum, [REDACTED]