

**Submission
No 44**

COMMUNITY SAFETY IN REGIONAL AND RURAL COMMUNITIES

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From the outset, this is a problem that has existed during the tenure of both sides of politics. The former 12 year old NSW Coalition govt was just as soft as the new government. They talked tough in opposition prior to 2011 but were weak in government, indolent, achieved nothing in that space but cut programs and privatised resources. No one has a desire to address the problems suffered by country and metropolitan people.

In my region around Tamworth, there is a disconnect between the police and judiciary. The latter has no desire to reward the actions of police and gaol offenders, many who are overly represented by one ethnic minority. It's the elephant in the room, our courts have no desire to protect our communities by incarcerating offenders in our gaols or providing a modicum of tough love to offenders or their families to make them behave. The system seems to teach them that they're the victims, not the residents of my region, some who are well into their 80's subject to horrific home invasions.

Sadly these incidents aren't promulgated by the media who act in concert with the courts to keep offenders free.

There are programmes that could be utilised to help, but the legacy of decades of funding to a myriad of programmes still delivers little to rural people impacted by young miscreants. Many of them carry knives too, without concern of being caught because they know the courts will let them go.

No wonder morale in the police force has collapsed. A police force that operates on 1970's numbers. I'm dubious that this inquiry will achieve anything except give a platform for The Nationals to big note themselves to long suffering rural constituencies, particularly rural National party mayors who were largely mute about this problem during the coalition era. Now Labor is in, they've all grown a set of nuts. How surprising.

However if nothing is done about this problem shortly, Imagine if members of the community are obliged to take matters into their own hands and out of the hands of weak magistrates abiding by failed dogma and incarceration statistics.

I know BOCSAR statistics show relative stability, I think my community is largely frustrated that offenders are let off and then what's the point of complaining if nothing happens. Interestingly I had a parcel stolen a year and a half ago from my front porch. The security cameras could clearly see the offenders who happened to be Aboriginal, they were then quickly identified by frustrated Aboriginal community members, I provided the image and names to the police. The police (one is a relative) advised they knew the offenders. Then after months nothing happened. I rang the investigating police officer to see where the investigation was at. I was told they couldn't confirm the identity of the offender and they couldn't use the word of the community members that identified the offenders so nothing happened.

This is repeated time and again because it is a concern that members of one ethnic group are largely untouchable. Those that commit more serious offences are caught and processed by police but then released by the courts back into the community because there isn't any significant programs for them and they can't countenance the statistics of having that particular ethnic group overly represented in the gaols. The young offenders are largely from broken families with parents afflicted by drugs and alcohol and so in their minds they feel safer out on the streets with their friends committing crime than in an unsafe environment at home.

The previous government woefully underinvested in these kids in terms of programs so I find it bemusing that they now want a parliamentary inquiry for an issue that we already know the answers to.

The other problem is no one wants to mention another elephant in the room and call out offences. We had an 80 year old plus resident home invasion to steal his Mercedes Benz from a Hillvue (South Tamworth), not a mention in the local media. Social media will mention spikes in crime but the authorities and local political leaders go to ground. We've come a long way as a community. In 1788 and onwards you were transported for life to the NSW colony for stealing a loaf of bread, now there's all but no punishment for doing the wrong thing.

Rural areas don't have enough police and any new recruits don't keep pace with attrition, leave and there are many long term police absences.

A group of random thoughts that have been shared with me.