

COMMUNITY SAFETY IN REGIONAL AND RURAL COMMUNITIES

Organisation: Coolamon Shire Council

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The Chair

The Legislative Assembly Committee on Law and Safety

Parliament House

Macquarie Street, Sydney NSW 2000

RE: INQUIRY INTO COMMUNITY SAFETY IN REGIONAL AND RURAL COMMUNITIES

Coolamon Shire Council is pleased to be able to provide a submission to the inquiry into Community Safety in Regional and Rural Communities.

The biggest difference we see in regard to community safety is a direct Police presence being provided in our communities. We are thankful that we have three single manned Police Stations in our Local Government Area, in the Townships of Ardlethan, Coolamon and Ganmain.

The difficulties we see with this model is that very rarely do we have all three Stations permanently manned. We do currently have this situation and we are thankful, however we seem to have lengthy periods where staffing numbers are not adequate. This can be for several reasons:

- Trouble finding suitable candidates to replace vacant positions in rural areas
- Offices being seconded to the larger centre to cover short-falls in these areas
- Lengthy periods of staff on sick leave with no real return to work prospect
- The condition of the Station and associated housing

These areas need to be addressed to encourage front line policing in Rural areas is maintained.

The importance of a manned police station and the visible presence of a Police Officer in Rural and Regional Communities gives comfort to the community and allows for more immediate response times to incidents.

This form of Policing is pro-active and does not rely on a spike in incidents to trigger action from law enforcement. Being visible and embedded within the community is a different style of policing to the cities, which creates a huge deterrent to minor incidents, eventually escalating into bigger problems.

The current method appears to wait for incidents to be reported (statistically based) and therefore waits for situations to get out of hand before action is required.

This is a counter productive method that encourages bad behaviour by allowing it to escalate, rather than undertaking pro-active patrols and interviews to establish a level of acceptable safety.

The frustrations from communities that we have heard in the past is that for workforce management reasons, replacements cannot be made and a community must go without a presence due to the health of an officer. We wonder if there is a possibility that these positions can be temporarily backfilled until the situation is resolved to ensure that communities are not without a police presence for extensive periods of time.

When talking to the local police and discussing issues that can affect their availability, it becomes apparent that the officers are becoming more and more drawn into social work and health/welfare work when being called to incidents. We believe there needs to be a clearer role and transfer of responsibilities from the police into the health and welfare component of care. Whilst some of these situations are obviously tragic and harrowing there needs to be a point where the policeman has performed his duty and handed over the responsibility of further care.

The establishment of the Rural Taskforce that focuses on farm crime was welcomed at the time of establishment and continues to work in our region to reduce and/or investigate specific farm related concerns. We would like to see this component of policing continue.

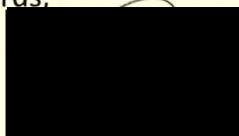
Council would encourage NSW Police developing a training course designed to develop the skills needed to effectively operate in a single unit or rural policing environment. Such training has been raised previously with NSW Police both internally and externally but not progressed. Policing in Rural Communities should be viewed as a specialised skill which requires specific training in the same way police receive training for duties in Highway Patrol or investigations. Such training could include rural crime issues and developing community relationships.

In the past Council has become aware that some Officers appointed to Single Unit Stations, who lack the skills to integrate into their community often feel isolated and will remove themselves from their community which ultimately results in a breakdown of trust and community confidence in policing.

This Council works collaboratively with the local and regional police through regular meetings with the Mayor and Senior Staff. We currently have all positions filled in our Local Government Area and hope to continue our good working relationship with all involved.

Thank you for your consideration.

Regards,



Tony Donoghue
General Manager