

**Submission
No 84**

COMMUNITY SAFETY IN REGIONAL AND RURAL COMMUNITIES

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To Regional Crime Inquiry Committee

Re Crime in Regional NSW (Macleay Valley)

I am writing a submission today regarding the high crime activity happening with my LGA (Kempsey Shire) and surrounds. This is a situation which has reached a critical point and the serious nature of the crime epidemic needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

Our local Chamber of Commerce recently held a meeting for locals to attend specifically around the recent spike in crime here which was attended by Micheal Kemp, Pat Conaghan, members of our local police command, Indigenous groups and the community. Stories of horrific home invasions, attacks on residents and theft were really upsetting and we all agreed this was not a situation that can continue.

I live in a smaller coastal town with a population of around 5,500 people. The demographic of this area contains a high proportion of retirees, many of whom live alone. We are fortunate here to have a strong community focus where people support each other, share information openly and generally keep an eye on each other. Many of these people are now living in fear as they have either had to face these criminals or have heard them around their homes.

Another disturbing statistic is that most of these crimes are perpetrated by juveniles aging from 8 to 16 years old! These are children! Most of them are of Aboriginal descent and the sad truth is that they likely come from places of violence and neglect. Children who are out at night without supervision clearly have a reason for not wanting to return home or likely their carers do not care.

The nature of these crimes is not petty. They are breaking into houses, they are armed with knives and machetes, they are stealing wallets and vehicles, and finally using these vehicles for entertainment by speeding around neighbourhoods then either crashing them or setting them on fire. These incidents are also being filmed and posted on social media as an act of pride in the crimes they are committing.

We have a police station in our town which is never manned as our local police command is so short staffed, they are often required elsewhere. Kempsey is our closest larger town and police must travel 30 minutes to get here. This is not good enough, people are being threatened with physical violence in their homes and these wait times will result in a possible assault or death. These victims are also being left with mental scars and ongoing fear and feelings of vulnerability.

The perpetrators, or should I say "kids", are often released back into our society with only a caution or if old enough are being bailed to only re-offend again. They blatantly flaunt this

amongst us and laugh at us if we threaten to call police. There are just no consequences for them. No-one is being held accountable for their actions and crimes against us.

So where will this end up – people will start to take the law into their own hands as the system meant to support them is failing and they will be called the criminals, people will be seriously injured physically ruining their lives, someone will get killed, people will develop mental health problems putting more pressure on an already overwhelmed mental health system, children will remain free to roam the streets breaking the law as no-one is taking care and responsibility for them, the police will face more harm than they already do as they are forced to attend these violent instances alone as there are not enough resources to assist them, racism will increase and communities will lose their moral fibre, children will never know what it means to be responsible for their actions, etc, etc....

I implore our government to address this terrible situation immediately before it creates even further torment within our towns. Man our police stations, get more police into the force, walk the streets at night and begin a better process for accountability within these children and their families. We are all facing difficult times now with the cost of living soaring beyond many vulnerable people's means which is not helping with this current crime wave.

ACT NOW.....PLEASE!!