

**Submission
No 90**

COMMUNITY SAFETY IN REGIONAL AND RURAL COMMUNITIES

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Submission to Parliamentary Inquiry on Community Safety

I have lived in Armidale since 1973 and have observed over all those years that from time to time local youth crime and community safety come to the fore in media attention, get discussed, some 'pilot' programs are funded, but few major changes are made, and then the issue subsides.

However, I welcome this Inquiry, and hope that it will result in substantial change.

As an 82 year old I generally feel safe in this community, though I am aware of a level of offending, and the disruption and harm this brings to victims. Everyone wants the offending to stop or reduce, but the punitive regime and high levels of incarceration are failed responses.

In the 1980s I was a regional public servant in the NSW Department of Family & Community Services, which then had the carriage of Juvenile Justice, and we had a regional focus on keeping local young offenders with their families and not in cells in their teenage years. This meant that the young people were not placed 24/7 with other offenders. I note that the current pattern is of a high proportion of adult jail inmates having 'graduated' from juvenile detention.

Increasing rates of imprisonment run parallel with, or even more rapidly than, increased rates of offending. I sincerely believe that imprisonment, particularly for youngsters on remand, results in increased offending, and increased severity of offending.

Well-documented research shows that 'Jailing is Failing' and that among comparable nations, Australia stands out with high levels of incarceration. I strongly support radical state budgeting to divert funds via Justice Reinvestment.

Private prisons operate on a business model that supports high levels of incarceration – how would they 'survive' i.e. be profitable if there was not a continued flow of inmates?

Restorative justice programs have been shown to work, and are hugely cheaper on the public purse than prisons, though local Members find it hard to field sound arguments against the cry of 'lock 'em up and throw away the key' voices, especially at election times. More emphasis on public education on the proven benefits of alternatives to incarceration would be a good thing.

I trust that your Inquiry will give attention to these points.

Barbara Finch OAM