

**Submission
No 120**

COMMUNITY SAFETY IN REGIONAL AND RURAL COMMUNITIES

Organisation: Texas and District Crime Watch

Date Received: 30 May 2024

Texas and District Crime Watch is a group of 102 members on a Whats App group, situated on both sides of the NSW and Queensland border, reaching from Yetman and Yelarbon up the Dumaresq River as far as Mingoola, the Traprock area, and the Mole River. It was formed in June 2023, after a number of property thefts and trespasses took place, as a way of collecting information for police, as well as sharing advice on incidents, and how to protect property and maintain personal safety on farms. The group shares information on incidents, as well as anything they notice which is unusual. The group has the support of other community organisations such Bonshaw CWA, Bonshaw Hall Committee, Bonshaw Resilience Group, Texas and District Drought Support Group, NSW Farmers Association Tenterfield Branch, and Mingoola Progress Association. The group is a peaceful one, just wishing to share information so that offenders can be prosecuted. We also provide ongoing training for our members in property and personal protection.

One of the major problems in our area is the cross-border issues, which make it difficult for police to make arrests. As a community we regard ourselves as one community, regardless of the border, and it is a continual source of frustration that services such as police services are unable to service both sides.

The sorts of crime experienced in this area are stock theft, vehicle theft, house break-ins, machinery theft, gun thefts, fuel theft, trespass and unauthorized hunting and fishing. The drivers behind the majority of the crimes committed seems to have been around drugs and drug debts. Our communities are at a loss as to how to protect our youth from becoming involved in drugs and drug related offences. Our elderly community members are very anxious about their safety. We have noted that that re-offending is a common pattern amongst those offenders who have been convicted, and feel that prison time is not a deterrent. Courts have frequently given offenders suspended sentences, and immediate parole, without rehabilitation, back into our community, and the offenders have immediately re-offended.

The rise in crime in our area is a matter of great concern, which is why we formed this group, and it has been a great support mechanism for the elderly, and those living alone. It has also led to some convictions. However, our group is not solving the problem of crime, it is simply acting as a deterrent.

Behind the scenes, Texas Crime Watch has facilitated the support of victims of crime. We have tried to mentor and support these victims in their recovery, which is very difficult for them since they have lived safely for so long on their properties. The lack of services to support victims of crime is a real concern, because the mental health issues affecting these people is very real and concerning to us as a community.

The victims also need feedback from the prosecution teams to assist them in gaining closure from the terrifying incidents they have had to endure.

We wonder if the education system may be at fault in not catering to the bored and disaffected students within the system. We commend the Back Track program as an effective way to change lives.

Some in our community feel that it isn't worthwhile to make complaints to police, and that when they do, they do not seem to get a rapid response, even when a crime is being committed in real time.

We understand that staffing levels for police officers are an issue, and that police need support to improve services, especially those related to mental health, and violence. There is a huge need for more and better mental health services, as well as services for the aged, unwell, and for perpetrators and victims of domestic violence. Improved services in other areas (not policing) in rural and remote areas may allow the police force to address crime issues more rapidly. Police officers so often have to deal with such a wide spectrum of problems, including

traffic offences, accidents, fires and natural disasters, that it is difficult to cover all areas at once. We believe that the police force is under-resourced, which leads to difficulty in providing an adequate service.

We have heard of instances where even police officers in remote areas cannot get back up, even when their own personal safety is at risk. For instance, last year there was an incident with the Yetman Police Officer who was the sole officer for Yetman, who could not get backup, (despite pleading with Inverell), in the face of a group of offenders, which has led to the Yetman Police Station not currently having an officer.