

**Submission
No 125**

COMMUNITY SAFETY IN REGIONAL AND RURAL COMMUNITIES

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Partially
Confidential

Thank you for this opportunity to voice our concerns. Although I have not been a direct victim of a crime, I wish to bring to the Committee's attention what we have witnessed throughout the past eight months since moving to Kempsey. When we purchased the house we were relatively unaware of the issues with crime that is affecting residents of the Macleay community.

As the house needed a complete update from its 1960's condition, we initially lived full time in my motorhome parked on the driveway. From this vantage point, we quickly became aware of the unusual events happening around our neighbourhood, especially at night and in the very early morning. Most notably, we regularly saw young people on motorcycles riding around between 2 and 4am, with no lights and sometimes four riders on one bike. We witnessed them quietly leave the bike in the park near our house and walk off in different directions, presumably scoping the neighbourhood for potential houses to break into. At first we didn't see it for what it was, as I've never lived anywhere that I felt the need to lock my house, but a short while later we learned that several houses had been broken into in our street and the surrounding area.

This is not an isolated incident and we watched this occur every weekend for at least a month. We regularly see young people riding motorbikes at all hours, at speed, with no lights and no helmets. We have seen motorbikes left in the park, presumably stolen and dumped. It is also apparent from watching local behaviours that Kempsey has considerable issues with drugs. Within weeks of buying the house we noticed that there were a considerable number of people on different occasions entering the untenanted house behind ours, sometimes trying to enter by the back door and consequently climbing in through a window on finding the door locked. Sometimes we'd see someone run up onto the back deck only to leave a package and run off again. After watching this for a couple of weeks, and actually confronting one of the young men we saw entering via the window who boldly told us to mind our own business, I contacted [REDACTED] (the local social housing organisation which owns the property in question) to inform them of what we had seen as we assumed it was being used as a drug drop and collection point. Again, this is not an isolated incident although I will refrain from going into further detail as I do not feel elaborating on what has been noticed would be of any use the Commission.

We also witnessed a mum of two young children who lives nearby being severely harassed by a group of 4 or 5 teenagers after she confronted them for chasing another young family out of the children's playground in the park opposite her house. This young mum came over to speak with us to bring what had occurred to our attention, and said that the teenagers had threatened to burn her house down. Following this, we saw this group of young people verbally hassling her outside her house on repeated occasions. I am aware that she eventually reported this to the police but I believe it had been a problem for many weeks by that time.

Never before have I felt a need to have security cameras installed at my home but it seems that this is the norm in Kempsey. So many of the locals I speak to say they do not feel safe in their homes, and many of them have had their house broken into more than once. I have regularly heard local people say that it's no use reporting anything to the police as they are either not willing or, in the instance of dealing with minors, not able to do anything. Personally, I do not believe this to be true but that is the general sentiment of the community. My own feeling is that it's extremely difficult to know when to contact the police with anything that's been noticed... until a crime actually takes place it's nothing more than a suspicion. And yet, we have young people breaking into people's homes, videoing their actions and proudly posting these videos online. I have heard a young high school student remark to his

friends that "the only way to make money as a 16 year old in Kempsey is to sell drugs". The vulnerability of this community is being strongly felt on so many levels.

My intention in writing this submission is only in support of those who have been victimised and also those most vulnerable members of our community who are unable to speak for themselves such as our elderly and those with disabilities or other health issues. If I have noticed so very much in a few short months simply by spending time surveying the surroundings of my own home, it's confronting to think what's going completely unnoticed or unreported.

Thanks once again to the Committee for hearing our stories and for taking action in an effort to make our community a safer place.