

**Submission
No 139**

COMMUNITY SAFETY IN REGIONAL AND RURAL COMMUNITIES

Organisation: Tweed Shire Council
Date Received: 31 May 2024

Partially
Confidential

31 May 2024



Committee on Law and Safety
Legislative Assembly
Parliament of New South Wales
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Submission to NSW Legislative Assembly Committee parliamentary inquiry into community safety in regional and rural communities

Tweed Shire Council ("Council") thank the Committee on Law and Safety for the opportunity to make a submission to the NSW Parliamentary inquiry into community safety in regional and rural communities ("inquiry").

Council makes this submission representing the interests and concerns of our community members, staff, and stakeholders who are affected by escalating security incidents within our shire. We commend the NSW Government on this inquiry for a whole of region community issue which is posing significant safety and wellbeing risks to our residents, visitors, and the dedicated individuals who serve our community.

The Tweed is located in NSW North Coast on Bundjalung Country. It is the gateway between Northern NSW and Southeast Queensland. The current population is 98,954 and is forecast to grow to 112,244 by 2041 (NSW Population Projections). 4.5% of Tweed's population identify as Aboriginal and / or Torres Strait Islander. 13.1% of Tweed's population are young people (ages 12-24).

Within this submission, Council's feedback and experiences is linked to the focus areas with the Inquiry's [Terms of Reference](#) ("ToR").

[Appendix A](#) of this submission provides case examples of recent safety and security incidents.

Drivers of crime in the Tweed. ToR reference (a)

Over recent months, Council has witnessed a troubling increase in domestic violence and incidents involving individuals who are sleeping rough, experiencing acute mental health issues, and/or are under the influence of drugs and alcohol and displaying antisocial and dangerous behaviour. These circumstances have resulted in a surge of property damage, threats to personal safety, and confrontations that jeopardise the well-being of our constituents. Further there have been multiple incidents where Council and other business staff have been assaulted including a growing trend in knife related threats/ assaults including in high traffic areas such as local shopping centres and central parks. The financial ramifications extend beyond the direct costs incurred by Council, impacting ratepayers, local businesses, and individuals alike. This has broader implications to the local tourism industry and economy in general. Coupled with being visually unappealing, members of the public have raised concerns with council that they don't feel safe. Furthermore, these incidents impede the efficient operation of Council services, hindering our ability to fulfill our obligations to the community effectively.

Housing affordability is a significant issue facing the region with Tweed having the additional complexity of being a border region. People at risk of homelessness or currently sleeping rough are moving across borders to secure a safe place to stay, further burdening the housing system in a region that does not have enough social housing or wraparound services in place for its existing population. These pressures on individual and family circumstances are presenting through increasingly unsafe behaviour.

The Tweed Shire community have experienced two significant collective trauma events within the last four years. COVID 19 and the 2022 NSW catastrophic flood event. The long-term effects of these events, particularly on young people is still being understood, and evidence suggests that the psychosocial impacts from such events can have long term effects. This can manifest in different ways, including through anti-social behaviours.

These issues are directly impacting community, for example, people who rely on public transport, live with disability or our seniors. They are concerned for their safety on public transport, around shopping centres and when attending key services they need to access. Our community are starting to opt out of using public transport which can lead to isolation and impact social participation and inclusion.

While there is a negative community perception on incidents such as theft, which is to be expected, many of the young people committing offences have a positive perception of their actions. Their rationale for this is that they have secured something they needed even if they were caught. Addressing needs such as securing food and other items through crime, regardless of the consequence, motivated by their survival or self-preservation instinct.

It is imperative that the root causes that are key drivers of crime are effectively identified and mitigated.

Aboriginal young people. ToR reference (a) and (c)

In addition to COVID 19 and the NSW flood event, Aboriginal communities have experienced a third trauma event through the Voice referendum no vote outcome. Community is feeling disempowered to be heard on issues that affect them directly. This inquiry must hear from Aboriginal community to educate and inform approaches to support and empower young Aboriginal people.

The floods experienced in 2022 has influenced movement of populations from other regions where they have been displaced. This is particularly prevalent with Aboriginal families and young people.

The local Aboriginal community have practices in place for addressing issues with their young people, however many of the emerging issues with Aboriginal youth are from non-local youth who have moved to the region due to a range of life circumstances. The 2022 floods, escaping domestic and family violence and the cost and availability of housing are some of the key reasons. A big issue is that the young Aboriginal people in these transient populations locating themselves within the Tweed are not acknowledging local practices or respecting Lore of the local clans in this area of Bundjalung Country.

In terms of youth matters specifically, interagency groups and other Aboriginal community have raised concerns around:

- Aboriginal Youth being off country and disconnected to community.
- Lacking respect for local Aboriginal Elders, who in turn would be the ones to bring them into line.
- Local Aboriginal youth disconnected from original cultural significant sites.
- Lack of cultural learnings in the bush i.e. Cultural burning, Fishing, hunting and bush tucker
- Lack of Elders carrying out Cultural teachings and events on Country.
- High cost of living.
- High costs to access camping grounds situated in NPWS, plus access to areas close by.
- Disengaging from education and participation in employment pathway programs.
- Living in unsupportive and unsafe home/family environments and needing to escape domestic and family violence situations.

Resourcing. ToR reference/s (b)

Support services.

The Department of Communities and Justice Assertive Outreach program has been a critical resource and government response to the growing crime by linking people in need to appropriate support services. Sadly, the lack of available social housing in the Northern Rivers which sits well below the State average means that the often people in need cannot be linked to the most basic need of accommodation. It is Council's view and resolved position that investment in facilities such as Common Ground or Youth Foyer would proactively manage and reduce crime by ensuring people's most basic needs are met, reducing the opportunity of crime and anti-social behaviour. Council would also like to see the State Government commit recurring funding to the Assertive Outreach Program as it currently is a year-to-year program. Until adequate investment is made to address to critical shortage of social houses, the need for Assertive Outreach will remain a vital safety net.

Council engages with multiple government and non-government agencies and service providers that interact with youth for various needs. Council also supports several Advisory Committees and networks where discussion has increasingly been on rising youth issues. Our position in the community means we interact with individual community members, community groups through to macro government and institutional organisations and networks.

From a resourcing perspective, our networks are telling us that given their capacity, the focus is on immediate support for those young people that are extremely high risk. This means that they do not have capacity to effectively collect data to inform a more strategic approach for early intervention and case management. For example:

- Developing capabilities for families and peer support: networks and services focusing on youth struggle with capacity to educate parents and carers to monitor risks in young people and get them involved in youth support programs.
- Incident tracking: people on the ground do not have capacity to track all these incidents. They are often not reported and therefore there is insufficient statistical data to support and identify needs.

NSW Police

Council is committed to collaborating with local law enforcement agencies, including direct engagement with the local Police. Council enjoys a positive relationship with the local area command and all officers. However, it is evident at times the local area command's resources are stretched or limited to address the growing demands and complexities of local crime. Further investment of Police Officers specifically dedicated to sectors i.e., aboriginal, youth, homelessness could prove advantageous in meeting some current challenges. To be fair however, Police are limited in what they can do, if there is not a corresponding State authority such as Housing or dedicated Mental Health help where people in need can be referred to. For example, Police have limited powers regarding the growing homelessness issue if they have no ability to refer people to housing.

On occasions, Council staff have been compelled to resort to emergency measures, including calls to 000 for immediate police assistance, only to be met with non-attendance, delays or insufficient response due to Police resource constraints.

The NSW Government needs to also be mindful of the unique cross border challenges that exist in localities such as Tweed to law and order and the additional administrative processes that this places on local police. Further locals who may wish to pursue a career as a Police Officer are attracted to the QLD Police Force, due to better work entitlements and often ability to find cheaper accommodation (both rent and purchase). To this end, the NSW Police may need to look to supported accommodation to attract and retain police officers to localities with high housing costs.

It is evident that without sufficient police resources dedicated to the Tweed, the safety and security of our community will be compromised. Enhanced police visibility and proactive engagement will not only deter potential criminal activities but also provide reassurance to our residents and businesses, fostering a sense of security and confidence in the enforcement of law and order.

In April 2024, Council and the NSW Police engaged in joint operations as part of high visibility foot patrols in targeted locations in the community to address a range of anti-social behaviours and illegal camping. Other deterrent strategies being explored include mobile CCTV camera's to be situated at key sites throughout the Tweed and coastal areas to be rotated to locations as need is identified. Whilst the impacts at the time were positive, and there are future initiatives planned at key times of the year, these are not enough.

We stand ready to collaborate closely with the New South Wales Police Force in collaboration with other government and non-government services to develop and implement strategies that address the challenges facing our community. Through improved resourcing and working together, we can effectively mitigate risks, safeguard the well-being of our community members, and uphold the principles of public safety and security that are fundamental to our shared mission.

Holistic approach to crime prevention. ToR reference/s (b), (c) and (d)

Through Council's customer facing staff and across the various service networks we identified some of the below gaps in support for our young people:

- Programs and services that not all practitioners or community know about.
- Programs or services not provided or no longer funded in the Tweed.

- Insufficient or un-sustained programs or frameworks for identifying and holistically case managing those young people already at risk and/or with complex needs.
- Limited support for or ways to effectively engage those young people that are most at risk. How do you engage young people who won't engage?
- The urgent need for a Youth Foyer facility in the LGA.

Council would encourage a holistic model for collectively supporting young people from early intervention through to complex management of high-risk cases. Focusing on ways to address the root causes of anti-social behaviour, interventions to mitigate risks of anti-social behaviour and crime, and approaches to support and effectively manage at-risk and highly complex cases to reduce incarceration rates, mental health and suicide risk and foster the growth of our young people to thrive in adulthood.

Early intervention strategies need to be in parallel with addressing current issues, need to be relevant to the region and need to be made visible and accessible for service providers and community to work together on. For regions like the Tweed who have experienced recent trauma events, trauma intervention principles should be part of any framework to alleviate the current distress and support recovery. With physical, psychosocial and perceived safety the first and foremost priority.

There needs to be consideration for the various social domains including family dynamics, accommodation arrangements, education, financial circumstances, health characteristics and social participation (including online). Council is hearing that whatever positive impact service providers have on the young person, if they are going back to a home environment with no capacity to support them, this compounds the issues.

Case management and referral models need to be flexible depending on the regional context, and influencing social domains, and the young person needs to feel they have a voice in the process to achieve better outcomes.

Stakeholder involvement in this inquiry and design and implementation of approaches

Any model should be informed by a broad range of stakeholders and experts across all areas that young people interact with. We note the Committees seven-person membership has only three regional representatives and no young people or identified Aboriginal members. As such we seek assurances that this inquiry hears from a range of regional rural voices, most importantly young people and Aboriginal people who are most affected by the outcomes of this inquiry.

As Council does not have visibility on the experts and stakeholders that will be invited to participate in this inquiry, we would like to highlight some key stakeholders we strongly encourage the Committee to engage with.

- Aboriginal community representatives from areas across regional NSW, including Elders and young people.
- Families and young people with lived experiences.
- Regional educators and support staff across all levels of schooling from early childhood through to tertiary education. Including alternative education schools.
- Community groups and sporting organisations.

- Regional youth specific networks and networks across other domains that affect young people (E.g. disability networks).
- Regionally focused Government and Non-Government agencies and service providers, including Department of Communities and Justice.
- Providers of peer programs and other programs working with young people. E.g. Headspace and PCYC
- Public transport providers
- Local businesses
- Other services or organisations that young people interact with.

Should there be further opportunities to engage in this inquiry and contribute to the outcomes, Council would be pleased to participate to explore meaningful solutions that serve the best interests of ours and all regional and rural communities.

Yours sincerely



Troy Green PSM
General Manager

Encl. Appendix A

Appendix A: Examples of recent Council safety and security incidents

Date	Police Event #	Location	Comments
6/6/2023	██████████	Jack Evans Boat Harbour (JEBH), Tweed Heads	Physical attack on staff and public. Police attended. Unfortunately, JEBH is a 'Hotspot' for inappropriate and illegal behaviour and our staff members responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of the area are subject to regular abuse. Regrettably, on 3 separate occasions 000 emergency number was called with no police response, presumably due to lack of resources.
25/7/2023	██████████	Murwillumbah Railway Station Platform	AED Defibrillator \$3k value stolen: Police report lodged online, have not yet received a Police response or enquiry. CCTV footage available.
22/8/2023	██████████	Tweed Heads Auditorium and Library	Following an ongoing security issue with a known person spanning a number of years, a Council contractor called Police to report the location of a person who Police were waiting to issue a Banning Notice to following a series of recent physical and verbal altercations and threats on Council contractors. Police advised that due to resourcing they were unable to attend.
27/10/2023	Not known	Tweed Heads Auditorium and Library	At 9.52am two individuals became verbally abusive and threatening to the Librarian and as she tried to return to the library they started to follow her and intimidate her. Soon after a male defecated by the wall of the cafe then spread it on the wall, then headed to the library where there was a baby time session in progress. Police were called, however did not attend. A Supervisor visited Tweed Heads Police Station in person to follow up, make a statement and detail the ongoing safety risks presented to staff and patrons over the last 3 months in particular and the incidents and banning notices that have reported to date.
10/01/2023	██████████	Buckley Park, Murwillumbah	6:50am Outdoor Cleaner was physically assaulted by a rough sleeper whose identity is known. The cleaner was knocked out from a 'King Hit Punch' by this person who then proceeded to 'Lay the Boot' into him while he was spread unconscious on the ground. A Supervisor immediately called immediately

Date	Police Event #	Location	Comments
			<p>Tweed Heads police to report the incident/event. After more than an hour, the Supervisor followed up with Police who advised they would not have the resources to attend for some time. Police followed up to take a statement on 11/1/23. After no further contact, Council staff followed up again 24/1 and were advised that Police had not yet located the identified male and a request was made for Council staff to 'keep an eye out for him'. Staff did so and immediately reported a sighting at 8am in Knox Park, Murwillumbah. The responsible officer was not at work and advised staff to contact Tweed Heads Police Station. Staff called both Tweed Heads and Murwillumbah Stations but received no response. On 9/2 staff again notified Police of a sighting with no answer. At the time of writing still no action has been taken on the man in question. As a result of the injuries from this assault our staff member is now on restricted work duties and will visit a specialist who will advise if he needs surgery on his shoulder in coming weeks.</p>
18/01/2024	Emergency 000 call	Jack Evans Boat Harbour, Tweed Heads	<p>A Council staff member was confronted by a rough sleeper at 850am in an aggressive manner with his hand in a bag looking as though he had some type of weapon he was reaching for. He verbally threatened to 'cave your head in' The staff member immediately called 000 which caused the rough sleeper to run off. The staff member waited on site for a further 40 minutes without the police arriving or making contact Staff visited Tweed Heads Police Station at 2pm to check in on the matter after having no police response to the 000 call. The Duty Officer explained it could take up to 3 days for a Police response to the 000 call due to lack of resources. Regrettably the staff member is yet to be contacted regarding the emergency 000 he made.</p>
31/1/2024	██████████	Tweed Heads Auditorium and Library	<p>At 7:15am an aggressive male apparently drug affected or experiencing a mental health episode shouted threats and repeatedly punched the glass at the rear entry doors to the</p>

Date	Police Event #	Location	Comments
			Auditorium and Library. Council contractors were onsite and when the male person punched a hole through the glass, staff locked themselves in the Switchboard cupboard and called 000. Police did not respond. A Supervisor visited the Tweed Heads Police Station at approximately 10:15am to formally report the incident and was informed that lack of Police resources meant that Police were unable to respond.
5/2/2024	Not known	Murwillumbah Civic Centre	Staff member verbally assaulted by a rough sleeper who was reported to police approx. 3wks prior for a physical assault on Outdoor Cleaner (detailed below). The Supervisor then called Murwillumbah Police Station to report, with no answer. Tweed Heads Police Station were then called and they apologised stating a lack of resources prevented officers from attending.
Additional examples			
Rail Trail Sabotage / Vandalism: Tacks/Wood Beams installed across bridges and most recently oil and attempted burnt tyre on the trail outside Hulls Rd tunnel. Police took some of the enquiries for the tacks following numerous and ongoing incidents but due to resourcing issues it was not a priority for prompt action. No action or arrests from these incidents.			
Rough sleeping has escalated significantly around Murwillumbah Railway station including squatters in the Barracks causing security concerns for Rail Trail users. On 2-3 occasions Council staff have emailed Police and sought a CPTED site tour and audit, this has still not occurred or been responded to due to lack of Police resources.			
Following repeated personal safety and security concerns, a break-in, damage to property and a fire at CWA in Murwillumbah, Council staff approached Police on 9/2/24 to discuss on-going issues with rough sleepers camping on site, conduct a CPTED to identify problematic areas and recommend improvements to CWA and Council. Unfortunately due to resourcing constraints this has not yet happened.			
Tweed Heads Holiday Park has experienced escalating incidents including theft and issues caused by rough sleeping. Local Police have informed staff that due to resource constraints, these are not a priority. Examples include: 14/12/23 – Bike stolen 26/12/23 – iPhone stolen 30/12/23 – Police called trespassers with a knife. 19/1/24 – scooter stolen 3/2/24 – 2 paddleboards stolen 6/2/24 – 2 bikes stolen			