

**Submission  
No 149**

## **COMMUNITY SAFETY IN REGIONAL AND RURAL COMMUNITIES**

**Organisation:** Shoalhaven City Council

**Date Received:** 31 May 2024

Council Reference: 40237E (D24/228339)  
Your Reference:

31/05/2024

Attention: Legislative Assembly Committee

Dear Sir or Madam,

**Legislative Assembly Committee Inquiry on Community Safety in  
Regional and Rural Communities**

Please see following, Shoalhaven City Councils submission to the Legislative Assembly Committee Inquiry on Community Safety in Regional and Rural Communities.

If you need further information about this matter, please contact Michael Paine, City Lifestyles on [REDACTED]. Please quote Council's reference 40237E (D24/228339).

Yours faithfully

[REDACTED]

**Michael Paine**  
Community Connections Manager

## Submission to Inquiry

### Parliament of New South Wales – Legislative Assembly Committee on Community safety in regional and rural communities

#### Shoalhaven City Council Recommendations Summary

In summary the proposed submission by Shoalhaven City Council calls on the Legislative Assembly to consider the following:

1. Increased State and Federal Government funding support to the community service sector, particularly youth services to:
  - Provide alternative transport options for young people, for instance to support the Nowra Youth Centre in bringing back the Night Patrol Program,
  - Address the gap in the provision and access to mental health and wellbeing services for those living in the Shoalhaven, particularly for young people,
  - Provide programs that support disengaged youth to return to school through meantime supervision activities and school link programs with community youth services while a young person is not attending school,
  - Extend hours and provide free programming to provide safe spaces for young people to go during and after school hours.
2. Increased State and Federal Government funding support to local Councils to:
  - Establish and maintain a dedicated community safety officer position within Council,
  - Support Council's in developing and delivering on Community Safety Plans,
  - Provide funding opportunities for the installation and maintenance of CCTV and associated infrastructure in the public domain.

#### Shoalhaven City Council Submission

Shoalhaven City Council welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback into the inquiry into community safety in regional and rural communities. In response to the Terms of Reference set out in the Inquiry, Shoalhaven City Council requests the Legislative Assembly Committee consider the following:

- a) ***the drivers of youth crime across regional and rural NSW, particularly since the COVID pandemic;***

To understand the drivers of crime requires consideration of the social and environmental contexts that influence crime and create a cycle of generational involvement. Commonly there is a correlation between crime and social and economic disadvantage. Research from Griffith University identifies, Crime clusters often occur in demographic, family, economic, social, and environmental patterns, which over time reinforce disadvantage and inequality in those communities.

This reflected across the Shoalhaven clearly when comparing the Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage against the BOCSAR NSW Crime Tool, where both mapping functions identify where there is

a high density of disadvantage there is direct correlation with crime hotspots, for example in Nowra, Bomaderry, and Sanctuary Point.

Young people can experience crime and violence as victims, witnesses, or offenders, both at home and in the community. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare found that young offenders often have lower educational attainment, social participation, and interpersonal skills, increasing their risk of reoffending and continuing the cycle of crime. Studies show that youth crime in Australia is often linked to adverse childhood experiences. James Cook University describes these as traumatic events before age 18, including household dysfunction and various forms of abuse and neglect.

A survey by the Youth Parole Board found that key drivers for young offenders included that the young person had:

- Been a victim of abuse, trauma, or neglect as a child (72% of young offenders surveyed).
- Experienced family violence (50%)
- Been diagnosed with a mental illness and were accessing support (62%)
- A history of use or misuse of alcohol (66%)
- A history of use or misuse of drugs (87%)

The information shared with Shoalhaven City Council regarding the experiences of young people in the Shoalhaven reflect the findings above.

Locally, frontline services have emphasized the need for more funding and support for early intervention programs to break down social barriers and prevent crime among young people in target areas. Since COVID-19, women's and homelessness services in the Shoalhaven have seen increased demand, particularly due to rising family violence incidents, cost-of-living pressures, and natural disasters. These issues affect young people and are expected to lead to an increase in crime in the region.

**The community services sector in the Shoalhaven is calling for the State and Federal Government to increase funding support to the sector to address these social and community drivers of crime. This support will mitigate the potential for young people to become offenders.**

***b) how a whole of government approach can reduce the drivers and root causes of youth crime in regional and rural NSW;***

Whole of government approach

A whole of government approach and the inclusion of local councils in addressing the drivers and root causes of youth crime, will require funding support from State and Federal Government to resource community safety and youth focused staff and programs.

While Shoalhaven City Council is committed to building safer communities, it is not currently able to join a whole-of-government approach to address crime without financial assistance from the State and Federal Governments.

Council supports the consideration of achieving success in working together with all levels of government and can leverage off its strong relationships with frontline services to support community-led programs and sustainable safety planning.

**Shoalhaven City Council does not have a dedicated community safety officer and it is not in a position where resourcing such a position is either financially sustainable or is able to absorb this work into the existing team. To enable a whole of government approach funding support for Council would be required.**

Regional NSW councils face financial sustainability and recruitment challenges. State and Federal Government support is crucial for whole-of-government solutions. Many councils, especially rural ones,

struggle due to high costs, maintenance obligations, and limited revenue. The Australian Local Government Association notes issues with recruiting and retaining staff, worsened by attrition and an aging workforce.

This has been evidenced in Shoalhaven City Council's independent review into Council's financial position in 2023, which highlighted the need to boost revenue and cut costs to sustain current and future programs. Factors like the COVID pandemic and 13 consecutive natural disasters in the LGA have worsened the council's financial situation and raised community living costs.

### Strategic Planning

Shoalhaven City Council is well placed to both hear community safety concerns directly from the local community and support our community service sector in responding. Shoalhaven City Council has previously held a Crime Prevention Plan 2018-2023 which was supported with \$6,000 annually to deliver programs that responded to the two main identified areas of need in 2018: domestic violence and theft from retail.

Short-term safety initiatives that were provided during this time included the Shoalhaven community safety booklet design and launch and support for staff to undertake Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) Training. This plan and its associated funding has now finished.

**There is opportunity for the State and Federal Government to provide resourcing support for Shoalhaven City Council to develop a Community Safety Plan to identify ongoing community needs and relevant sustainable and strategic actions.**

The community has raised concerns with Council on many occasions regarding youth related crime incidences which included young people using unregistered motorcycles on Council owned reserves and parks and malicious damage to property in Council owned car parks. Often in incidences like these community members call for improved infrastructure, including implementing CCTV.

**A future Community Safety Plan will support in guiding Council to respond appropriately to concerns such as these and to support the community to understand crime prevention initiatives. Grant programs to support Council's in developing and delivering on Community Safety Plans should be a key funding consideration for State and Federal Government to support Council's.**

An example of this is where the community have called on Council to install more CCTV in public spaces. However, CCTV isn't always the most effective prevention method. A community-wide approach, like strategic partnerships and the proposed Shoalhaven Community Safety Plan, would improve safety outcomes in Nowra and Bomaderry. This view is supported by the South Coast Police District. While CCTV can help prevent crime, it's costly and should be considered as part of a broader safety strategy. If deemed the best option, Council would need State or Federal funding to implement it.

### Placemaking

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Generation Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) has emphasised four key concepts that build community safety: social cohesion, community connectivity, community culture and threshold capacity. An element of reducing crime by CPTED interventions is through improving social conditions and building social capital to be able to improve community's quality of life and reduce crime.

Shoalhaven City Council has undertaken projects in line with these concepts. For instance, the Sanctuary Point Mural Project addressed community concerns about antisocial behaviour at the skatepark. The project aimed to enhance safety, empower young people, and foster community ownership of the space. Council collaborated with local young people and community groups to design the project, engaging young people in creating the mural. Professional street artists were hired to execute the design. A public launch event was run, to celebrate the mural and promote community pride in the area.

Frontline services support and partnership:

**Shoalhaven City Council has long called for improvements to the public transport network in the LGA. Where young people have been left without safe travel options, we have seen increases in opportunistic crime being taken by young people.**

A program that was successful in addressing these issues was the Safe Aboriginal Youth Program (SAYP) run through Habitat Personnel in partnership with the Nowra Youth Centre. The program was known as the Night Patrol program and offered free and safe transport to young people on Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings and following public events and festivals.

The South Coast Police district worked closely with the Night Patrol to ensure young people that were at risk of offending were instead redirected to the Nowra Youth Centre programs and could take the Night Patrol bus home.

The program was finalised prior to COVID19. Since then, there has been an increase in youth related crime offences. This presents an opportunity to relaunch this program.

Shoalhaven City Council has a strong relationship with the Nowra Youth Centre and already provides annual funding support for their Youthie Bus.

**If State or Federal Government were able to provide long term additional funding to the centre for staffing and program costs, the Nowra Youth Centre could look to work again with local police to run the Night Patrol program.**

Community Networks

Shoalhaven City Council is engaged in several local community networks that have a focus on young people and on community safety. These include:

- Shoalhaven Youth Network
- Southern Shoalhaven Youth Interagency
- Shoalhaven Antipoverty Committee
- Shoalhaven Safety Liaison Network
- Community Drug Action Teams
- Shoalhaven Domestic and Family Violence Committee
- Shoalhaven Homelessness Interagency

Attending these network meetings gives Council the opportunity to hear directly from local service providers on emerging topics of concern and supports Council to identify key areas of need in the community that can be taken as priority focus areas for community safety planning and intervention.

***c) the wraparound and diversionary services available for youth and families in the regions and rural areas and how they can be better matched to individuals, measured, improved and integrated into a coordinated approach to divert youth from crime, having regard to the NSW Government's commitment to working in partnership with Aboriginal people;***

Shoalhaven City Council welcomes the **Community Safety in Regional and Rural Communities** Legislative Assembly Committee prioritising consideration on the impact of wrap around service opportunities in the community in supporting young people.

Shoalhaven City Council's Youth Advisory Committee (YAC) has been established to support young people to discuss issues of concern with Council. In 2024 the YAC identified priority areas of concern for young people in the Shoalhaven. Of these three key priorities would support in community safety planning:

- Youth mental health and wellbeing

- Education support for young people
- Safe spaces for young people

### Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing

Young people continue to raise the challenges faced in accessing relevant mental health services in the Shoalhaven, and often speak about the detrimental impact of COVID19 and the natural disasters in the community on their self-confidence and mental wellbeing.

According to Beyond Blue, mental health conditions are experienced by one in seven young people aged four to 17 years in any given year. Half of all the mental health conditions we experience at some point in our lives will have started by age 14 and over 75% of mental health problems occur before the age of 25.

This indicates that this is a target cohort for intervention service support and yet young people in regional areas consistently report barriers to accessing mental health services. The Office for Regional Youth's Youth Insights Report and Mission Australia's Youth Survey both identified that mental health support was one of the top priorities of concern for young people in the Shoalhaven, particularly the need to increase the availability and reach of mental health support.

A significant proportion of young offenders identify that they are experiencing mental illness, and that mental illness is often a driver of crime. Youth mental health rehabilitation and diversion programs have had proven success in preventing crime.

**Shoalhaven City Council is calling on the State and Federal Government to work together on a new approach to addressing the gap in the provision and access to mental health and wellbeing services for those living in the Shoalhaven, particularly for young people.**

### Education support for young people

Discussions in youth network meetings highlight rising disengagement rates among primary and secondary students in the region since COVID-19. Research from Public Defenders NSW links interrupted schooling to entry into the criminal justice system. Incomplete schooling and interrupted attendance can lead to negative outcomes like lower education and employment prospects. Exclusion from school supervision can worsen feelings of marginalisation, especially for students facing other challenges.

Absence of supervision can also be a catalyst for an increase in antisocial behaviour and offending due to increased contact with antisocial peers and the vulnerability of young people to contact with police while unsupervised in public spaces. Diminished educational outcomes are also a predictor for future contact with the criminal justice system.

**Council call on the State and Federal Government to consider funding programs that support disengaged youth to return to school through meantime supervision activities and school link programs with community youth services while a young person is not attending school.**

### Safe Spaces for Young People

It has been raised by the Youth Advisory Committee and the youth sector that young people don't have safe spaces, or aren't aware of places, where they can go that are supervised both during school hours for those who are disengaged from school or after school hours. Home is not always considered a safe place to go for young people and often young people seek out connection with other young people during these times.

When there are no safe places available, we see young people engaging in antisocial behaviour and opportunistic crime taking place.

**To prevent this Council is calling on the State and Federal Government to consider funding youth services to extend hours and provide free programming in these times.**

There are already existing resources in the community that with a boost in funding and awareness support could engage further with these young people through extended programs, providing safe spaces and outreach support. These include:

- Nowra (northern area of the LGA): The Nowra Youth Centre – The Youthie and the PCYC Nowra
- Bay & Basin (central area of the LGA): Firefly Bay & Basin and BCR Communities
- Ulladulla (southern area of the LGA): Mission Australia Ulladulla Youth Centre and Dunn Lewis Centre

**Council would encourage the Legislative Assembly Committee on Community Safety in Regional and Rural Communities to consider engaging directly with young people on the issues outlined in this inquiry to better understand their needs and seek solutions that young people would respond well to.**

**d) any other related matter.**

This Inquiry is titled “Community Safety in Regional and Rural Communities”, however the Terms of Reference focus solely on youth related crime.

It is important to note that youth crime is not the only priority area of focus for community safety in the Shoalhaven. The table below identifies that only a small percentage of crime is undertaken by a young person (where a young person is someone 17 years and under).

This emphasises the need for broader community safety planning which can both seek opportunities for early intervention with young people to halt the cycle of crime and reoffending, but also crime prevention planning that considers all priority offence types to improve community safety as a whole, including in the home environment.

Offence type	Rate per 100,000 population Jan - Dec 2023	LGA Rank Jan - Dec 2023	Compare to NSW Average	2-year trend and annual percent change (Jan 2022-Dec 2023)	5-year trend and average annual percent change (Jan 2019-Dec 2023)	YOUNG PEOPLE - Rate per 100,000 population in Jan - Dec 2023	YOUNG PEOPLE - compared to NSW Average	Percent of Offence Type Committed by Young People
Malicious damage to property	889.4	44	Above	Stable	Up 6.6%	362.4	Above	35 incidences out of 965 = 3.6%
Intimidation, stalking and harassment	647.0	58	Above	Stable	Up 5.7%	269.2	Below	26 incidences out of 702 = 3.7%
Breach bail conditions	546.6	61	Below	Stable	Up 1.8%	196.7	Below	19 incidences out of 593 = 3.2%
Non-domestic violence related assault	483.9	47	Above/ Comparable	Stable	Up 6.4%	538.4	Above	52 incidences out of 525 = 9.9%
Breach Apprehended Violence Order	480.2	40	Above	Stable	Up 17.4%	165.7	Above	16 incidences out of 521 = 3.1%
Steal from retail store	467.3	18	Above	Up 108.6%	Stable	248.5	Above	24 incidences out of 507 = 4.7%
Fraud	429.5	81	Below	Stable	Stable	20.7	Below	(1-4) incidences out of 466 = 0.2 - 0.9%
Domestic violence related assault	424.9	68	Above/ Comparable	Stable	Stable	207.1	Below	20 incidences out of 461 = 4.3%



<b>Steal from motor vehicle</b>	357.6	52	Below	<b>Up 68.0%</b>	<b>Down 3.7%</b>	51.8	Below	5 incidences out of 388 = 1.3%
<b>Break and enter dwelling</b>	251.6	56	Above	<b>Up 19.2%</b>	Stable	72.5	Below	7 Incidences of 273 = 2.6%

The offence types highlighted exemplify exactly what this submission has detailed so far, that:

- Crime committed by young people in public places is often due to the young person feeling that they are not able to be at home and that they do not have a safe place to go, and
- The impact of COVID19, natural disasters and the cost-of-living crisis has further impacted the socio-economic disadvantage experienced by our community which in turn increases the drivers of crime.

**Council calls on the Legislative Assembly Committee on Community Safety in Regional and Rural Communities to seek opportunities to address the root causes of crime across the whole of the community, as this will go a long way in preventing youth related crime and improving community safety.**

If you need further information about this matter, please contact Michael Paine Manager Community Connections on [REDACTED] or via [REDACTED]