

**Submission
No 191**

COMMUNITY SAFETY IN REGIONAL AND RURAL COMMUNITIES

Name: Mr Andre Els

Date Received: 27 June 2024

[REDACTED]
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Re: Community Safety in Regional and Rural Communities.

Dear Sir,

My Profile

My name is Andre Els. I am a retired N.S.W. Police officer living in Goonellabah N.S.W. and I am also the spokes person (Constituent) for the "WE WATCH" community of the Lismore, Goonellabah, Ballina and Northern New South Wales area, where we represent over Eight Thousand People who are now part of our Orange "WE WATCH App, that we introduced to the community on the 3rd March 2024, and has been a great tool for preventative crime and safety in our area.

I have several former N.S.W. Police on my team including former N.S.W. Detective Damian Loone from the Australian True Crime series and primary detective of the Lynette Dawson Murder case, which drew huge publicity during this investigation.

We have as a team, formed a group to address the community at several past meetings including, Goonellabah, Ballina, Coraki and as far north as the Lockyer Valley in Qld, where I was requested to address a public meeting on Sunday 26th May 2024.

Since our initial meeting in March 2024, we have managed to minimise the crime in our areas by making people aware of their security, and generally, making it more difficult for the Criminals to commit these repeat offences.

We have gone as far as helping elderly community members, to instal video surveillance cameras in their homes, and I have now been requested by CR. Rod Bruem to run for Ballina

Council in an effort to help with the growing crime rate in these areas.

THE DRIVERS OF YOUTH CRIME:

After several meetings with Lismore and Ballina Police, we have managed to identify several criminals, with the help of the community and it seems that there are pockets of the same indigenous youth, and some Caucasian criminals, who habitually commit the same crimes of, breaking into homes, businesses and stealing cars, and as well as disrupting and sometimes terrorising the community, it seems they have none, or very little empathy or respect for the community.

The Police have stated that many of these offenders are now incarcerated, and the new bail laws have certainly helped the community in quelling some of these crimes, but we realise that this is only a band aid fix, and these criminals will shortly be released for another onslaught on the community.

We also believe that perhaps the new laws of carrying offensive weapons like knives and sharp objects may have been watered down in the new legislation, and really need to be more powerful for the Police to deal with these criminals, because they are mainly young strong people who sometimes get around in groups of up to 15 people at any one time, and this sets a very dangerous precedent, because in number they feel and are very powerful, and should not be allowed to get around in large dangerous group. E.G. In one instance in Goonellabah, and on Australia Day, A group of Aboriginal youths were going from house to house, threatening to stab people if they did not take down the Australian Flags which they were flying at their homes. The community were very intimidated by this action.

I have several examples of what has happened and happenings in our area since I have become involved in our area which I will outline at the end on my communication.

GOVERNMENT APPROACHES TO REDUCE YOUTH CRIME

The Government is currently working well in Legislative changes to help reduce youth crime by amending the current bail laws, Police Powers of search for Offensive Weapons but much more needs to be done.

One major problem I see is in "Police and Community Respect."

The Police are requesting that the community work with them and respect them. The Police Force is a job like any other job and we have Committed Police and Police who are not that committed. Just like any other job where we have great employees and others who are not so committed and do not work as a team.

I, along with my colleagues and general public have all experienced this in the past and unfortunately, Police are not trained well in communication skills and Public Relations, and I can also give you many examples of this from the community.

Every Policeman is different as we all are, but I see part of the Police communication skills with the community as being vitally important. To give an example. If you have a business, and you don't answer the phone, you are not going to stay in business for very long.

Same with the Police, when the community calls for Police Assistance or to report an incident, they don't want to be fobbed off which is the case in many circumstances, and again to give you an example. One of our team was being bashed by three aboriginal youths and on the Phone to the Police, and our team member was told to call 000.

Another community member saw a car being broken into, called the Police and was told that the car had not yet been reported stolen so the Police were not going to take action.

I see this as bad communication and obviously bad training or perhaps, just members of the Police that just don't care, and Police should be going back to the public, thanking them for their report and getting back to the person after the fact. This is the only way Police will obtain respect and help from the community.

I also believe that in the case of these offenders, steps may be taken in rehabilitation to try and get them some help in finding a job or some interest, which may just help in the rehabilitation process but unfortunately, this is not going to work in every case, especially if these people are habitual criminals, which many of them are, but the Government is currently throwing billions of dollars at this problem, and it just does not seem to be working.

Most of the time when they, the criminals, become free, sometimes report once a week to a Government Assistant, but it seems that there may be very little help offered to the criminal for rehabilitation but in these cases, I believe that perhaps there should be some consequences if the criminals do not comply to try and rehabilitate, rather than just left to their own devices.

DIVERSIONARY SERVICES FOR YOUTH & FAMILIES AND INTERGRATION FROM CRIME

I understand that there are numerous Government measures already in place for the diversion from youth crime, but I believe that the various departments are not coordinating this in a remedial way and with very little results.

Even though the Government Departments are trying to remedy the situation of helping these criminals, unless there are consequences for these people when they don't comply, the situation will remain dormant with nil results.

I have experienced good rehabilitation measures with youth in the past, where the Police had a camp in the Blue Mountains called Camp Mackay, where uncontrollable youth were put in buses of a weekend about once a month, and would spend the

weekend socialising, learning various skills, sports and communicating with Police, and as well as finding this very rewarding, it seemed to have turned communications skills and comradery around for many of the youth and in many cases, I saw good results. It did not work in all cases, but it got the youth off the street and gave them an interest and experience, which they did not previously have.

In many of the cases that I have seen in the past six months, I have experienced many circumstances where youth have absolutely no chance and where the parents are drug addicts and drunks and have no control over the household.

The children actually run the household. These are really difficult situations but now common place in our area and a difficult fix.

STAFFING LEVELS & WORK FORCE ISSUES INCLUDING POLICE

I think most of us know that this is a really difficult area to address, because in our day and age, every business including the Police, are having staffing issues, and it seems that more Police are leaving the service than joining.

Discipline and respect is a huge part of Policing which is gained in the upbringing of youth and the respect and change in culture has been waning over the past few decades.

Our military, as much as we need them, are trained in these aspects and should be exploited when a member decides to leave the military, and be offered incentives to join the Police Force. They will also bring with them, several skills that they have in their occupation, during their time in the service.

I also believe that regional Police should also be encouraged, to participate in several community services and be taught to have good communication skills with their community, so to be seen as part of the community, rather than just be seen as being there to adjudicate and only participate in Law & Order.

Since being involved in the crime wave which seems to have become more prevalent since about November 2023, and being able to work in conjunction and with the support of the regional Police, we have found their response times to have improved dramatically, but Police staffing is still a big issue and will remain to be until this problem is remedied.

RECIDIVISM RATES AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

When criminals are habitual they tend to stay in a life of crime and they are very hard to rehabilitate, and many of them will choose not to, and will stay on that path for the rest of their lives. Rehabilitation will always be tried, at much cost, but in most cases will fail. They will tend to stay incarcerated for most of their lives with very little change from their life of crime. Unfortunately, with changes in our culture, it is becoming more and more prevalent and more difficult for the Law to deal with as they do cause so much irreparable damage along the way.

MENTAL HEALTH ASSISTANCE PERFORMED BY POLICE.

Fortunately, Police have always had good training and communication skills in this area, and are very conversant in mental health patients and how to deal with them. There are also many departments now catering for this including N.D.I.S. and agencies to assist the youth welfare to support the Police.

THE PRESS.

I have found the press to be very supportive of crime issues and regularly report to the communities in country and regional areas and I have been lucky enough to put our community issues across several television interviews in support of the regional community and supporting the police.

SOME COMMUNITY ISSUES EXPERIENCED IN OUR AREA.

- A. Many of our community have experienced their homes being broken into during the night, and day, whilst they are out shopping or asleep, and by youths as young as 10 years old sometimes assisted by older people and older

youths. Their main aim is to find the car keys and handbags or wallets, then steal their cars. In many cases, their cars are burned or, unrepairable.

REMEDY:

We have encouraged people to become more vigilant and closing and locking their garage doors, their windows, their motor vehicles, purchasing Security Lights and "EUFY" surveillance cameras, obtaining the contact details of their neighbours, and not to confront the perpetrators but to call 000 if there is an incident, and then report it on the "WE WATCH" app which notifies the residents within 1 Klm of their home, with a map of where the incident is happening, and to warn the community, that there is something happening in their area.

As previously mentioned, we now have over 8000 members on the **WE WATCH** App and it seems to be working very well in notifying the community and keeping them vigilant and safe.

Thanking you for your cooperation in this matter.

Yours faithfully.

Andre Els.