



**Legislative Council
Standing Committee on Social Issues**

**INQUIRY INTO PUBLIC DISTURBANCES AT
MACQUARIE FIELDS**

REPORT TABLED

The Legislative Council's Standing Committee on Social Issues has released its report on the public disturbances at Macquarie Fields. The terms of reference of the Inquiry required the Committee to examine a number of issues, including policing resources and strategies at the time of the disturbances, the underlying causes and problems that contributed to the disturbances and the government and non-government services that are provided in the Macquarie Fields area.

The Chair of the Social Issues Committee, Jan Burnswoods MLC, said "The Committee is very concerned about the many complex social issues that affect Macquarie Fields and other disadvantaged areas throughout NSW. The Committee heard that the available services in Macquarie Fields struggle to meet the level of demand and the Committee makes recommendations to assist agencies in providing those services and to ensure that there is some measure of the real costs to the government and the community of preventive action to address social disadvantage, versus later remedial action".

"The Committee also examined key issues relating to policing strategies that arose during the disturbances and policing in the local area before and after the disturbances". Ms Burnswoods continued, "The Committee met with local young people and residents to discuss areas of concern to them, including the relationship between the police and the community, and encourages the police to continue to develop and strengthen those relationships".

"This report also highlights the need for appropriate and adequate facilities to meet the needs of the local young people and the Committee makes recommendations in that respect" Ms Burnswoods commented.

"On behalf of the Committee, I thank all of the participants in this Inquiry, particularly the local residents and young people, for their time and contributions", Ms Burnswoods said.

The Executive summary and list of the Committee's recommendations is attached. The report can be obtained via the Committee's website at www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/socialissues or be obtained from the Committee Secretariat on 02 9230 3078.

*For further comment please contact Jan Burnswoods MLC, Committee Chair,
on 9230 2488 or 0419 412 154*

Executive Summary

Chapter 1 – Conduct of the inquiry

The Inquiry addresses issues arising out of public order incidents that occurred in Macquarie Fields in February 2005. It was referred to the Committee by the Minister for Police in March 2005. The Committee was, however, instructed by the House to delay the commencement of the Inquiry until internal police reviews into the public disturbances were completed. The Committee consequently commenced its inquiry in September 2005.

The Committee received 23 submissions to the Inquiry and conducted four hearings, at which it heard evidence from 45 witnesses, including government departments such as Premier's, Police, Housing, Education and Training and Community Services, and non-government agencies such as NCOSS, UnitingCare Burnside, the Salvation Army, Mission Australia and the St Vincent de Paul Society. The Committee also heard evidence from local government and non-government service providers, local schools, residents and young people.

Chapter 2 – Underlying causes of the disturbances

This chapter provides a demographic profile of the Macquarie Fields area, a brief history of the district and examines social issues affecting certain areas in Macquarie Fields.

Macquarie Fields suffers from social disadvantage in a number of key areas that are considered in this chapter including unemployment, social isolation, a high proportion of public housing, limited educational opportunities, family issues and health issues. This Chapter also examines specific factors that contributed to the disturbances, including grief caused by the death of the two young men in the original incident and the exacerbation of the situation by the media. The Committee particularly notes that the social issues raised in the Chapter are not exclusive to Macquarie Fields and affect many other similar areas throughout NSW.

Chapter 3 – Services and programs

This chapter provides a brief overview of services and programs provided in Macquarie Fields, covering both government and non-government provisions, and examines the key issues facing those service providers.

Many issues similar to those arising from the Committee's Redfern/Waterloo inquiry were identified as affecting service providers in Macquarie Fields, including the ability to provide services sufficient to meet the high level of demand, and problems related to coordinating and adequately resourcing and funding the wide range of programs in the area.

The Committee makes eight recommendations in this chapter, to address the issues faced in Macquarie Fields via a place-based approach, as set out in the Macquarie Fields Community Action Plan of 2005-2007, and to ensure that the Plan is effectively implemented. The recommendations also cover the issues of coordination and adequate funding, the means of addressing the needs of the local young people, and the need for some measure of the real costs to the government and the community of preventive action to address social disadvantage, versus later remedial action.

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Chapter 4 – Policing in the Macquarie Fields area

This chapter firstly addresses the Macquarie Fields Local Area Command, the nature of the crimes in the area, the Command's staffing levels and the availability of specialist officers.

Policing strategies in Macquarie Fields are also examined, particularly the relationship with the community during and since the disturbances, the relationship with local young people, factors contributing to the disturbances arising out of the local community's relationship with the police, and the outcomes of the trial of a community conferencing scheme for young adult offenders. The Committee makes a recommendation that the police continue to develop and strengthen relationships with the local young people.

Police resources in Macquarie Fields during the disturbances are also examined, particularly in the light of the internal police review report, '*Final report into Macquarie Fields Public Order Management Incidents*' of June 2005 and its recommendations. Key issues which the Committee examined included the training of police in public incident management at the time of the disturbances and thereafter, and related issues that arose during the disturbances with respect to equipment and communication.

The Committee also reviews the adequacy of procedures and strategies that have been implemented since the Committee's Redfern/Waterloo Inquiry, the police Coburn Report (July 2004) relating to the Redfern/Waterloo disturbances of February 2004, and the police review report of the Macquarie Fields disturbances.

The Committee makes three recommendations in this Chapter relating to police training and strategies, particularly the need to liaise with a local community in the event of public order incidents such as those occurring in Macquarie Fields.

Summary of recommendations

Recommendation 1

That the NSW Government adequately fund and resource the Macquarie Fields Community Action Plan 2005-2006, and investigate the continuation of the Plan beyond 2006.

Recommendation 2

That the implementation of the Community Action Plan in Macquarie Fields involve a strategy to ensure adequate consultation with the community and involvement of the community in decision making processes.

Recommendation 3

That the Macquarie Fields Community Action Plan review and develop community development strategies, the primary focus of which is community members and groups.

Recommendation 4

That the NSW Government, through the Macquarie Fields Community Action Plan and the Campbelltown Coordination Group, take all possible steps to achieve genuine partnerships between government agencies at all levels of government.

Recommendation 5

That the NSW Government, in liaison with non-government organisations in Macquarie Fields, recognise and resource a local body to act as the focal point in the planning and coordination of programs and funding in Macquarie Fields.

Recommendation 6

That all levels of government work together, through the Macquarie Fields Community Action Plan Implementation Groups, to ensure appropriate facilities are available for the local young people.

Recommendation 7

That the short-term nature of funding programs be reviewed with a view to ensuring that successful programs continue to be funded in Macquarie Fields and other communities throughout NSW.

Recommendation 8

That the NSW Government urge the Federal Government to take all possible steps to achieve coordination with State and local Governments, and local non-government organisations, in providing and funding programs in Macquarie Fields and other communities throughout NSW.

Recommendation 9

That research be undertaken to establish the real costs to the government and the community of preventive action to address social disadvantage, versus later remedial action.

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Recommendation 10

That the NSW Government and police continue to develop, support and adequately resource initiatives to strengthen relationships with local young people.

Recommendation 11

That in any public order incident a strategy be implemented to ensure adequate liaison with and dissemination of information to the community.

Recommendation 12

That NSW Police provide continuing training to officers to heighten awareness of the cultural and social issues faced in disadvantaged communities.

Recommendation 13

That the NSW Government and Police ensure the ongoing review of policing resources and strategy.

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