



THE COUNTRY MAYORS ASSOCIATION OF NSW INC

"What we want is nothing more than equity"

MEDIA RELEASE

19 October 2023

Joint call for Parliamentary Inquiry to address crime in regional NSW

The Country Mayors Association of New South Wales has joined forces with the Police Association of New South Wales and NSW Farmers to call for a Parliamentary Inquiry into crime, law and order in rural and regional New South Wales.

CMA Chairman, Mayor Jamie Chaffey said statistics showed residents of rural, regional and remote New South Wales were more likely to be sexually assaulted, more likely to have their cars stolen, more likely to have their homes broken into and more likely to be impacted by domestic violence. And when these crimes did occur, the police response was delayed due to the resources available.

"It is estimated one-third of New South Wales' population live outside metropolitan areas," Mayor Chaffey said. "But we are still second-class citizens when it comes to the safety of our communities.

"For the first time, our CMA annual survey has revealed that crime, law and order is now in the top five emerging issues for New South Wales local governments.

"We knew crime was increasing, but we looked to the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR) data to clarify the situation. We were shocked to learn that as well as the alarming incident counts in regional New South Wales, the rate of incidents per 100,000 people was, in some cases, horrifying when compared to metropolitan figures. Up to 90% of crimes including vehicle theft, breaking and entering, sexual assault and domestic assault are happening here, in our regional communities.

"We also have significantly fewer police than our city cousins, and as a whole, New South Wales has less police per head of population than Queensland, Victoria and South Australia. Our police officers are already facing an incredible workload, with only one police officer per 467 NSW residents.

"We have not been heard by our state leaders, and our people - particularly the elderly and the vulnerable - are scared. They need to feel safe. They deserve to feel safe.

"In this Country Mayors Association of New South Wales report endorsed by the Police Association of New South Wales and NSW Farmers, we are calling for change. The report paints a very clear picture of a law and order crisis in regional communities. Our already-stretched police officers cannot continue to try to address this impossible challenge.



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"Following the success of the Parliamentary Inquiry into health outcomes and access to health services in regional New South Wales that was established in 2020, we know the only way forward is to seek the bipartisan support of our state members of parliament to commit to this inquiry.

"The health inquiry saw 15 public hearings across New South Wales, and heard one heart-breaking story after another about the level of inequity and the lack of care for our regional communities. It came up with 22 findings and 44 recommendations to bring about the changes needed.

"This is what we need to make a difference in crime, law and order. We need a bold, hard look at everything from police numbers to the experiences of people who have suffered at the hands of this inequity. We need a clear way forward."

PANSW President Kevin Morton said the report showed that additional police resources were needed to manage crime rates and ensure that communities could be effectively serviced.

"Our regional police officers are expected to be the 24/7 problem solvers. Police in these regional and remote locations are required to attend emergency situations that cover huge geographical areas with limited staff and resources with little to no back up. When they do call for assistance, it can be an hour away or more."

Mr. Morton said that staffing levels and resources needed to be re-evaluated to reflect contemporary requirements for policing in regional and remote areas.

"Minimum staffing levels must be improved in regional and remote areas where police stations do not operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

"In locations with police stations operating 24/7, the outdated model of rostering police officers based on one car per job per hour needs to be updated. This model doesn't reflect the distance travelling to and from emergency call outs in regional areas, including the time it takes to deal with the matter when you arrive on the scene."

Mr. Morton said that police officers were required to pick up the workload of other government departments, which also needed to be scrutinized.

"Police officers are spending hours transporting prisoners hundreds of kilometres across remote areas to correctional facilities, while other government departments close their doors once business hours are over and shift the workload onto our already stretched frontline workers. This is not our job and is taking police officers away from serving their communities."

NSW Farmers CEO Annabel Johnson said while their primary concern was crimes against farming businesses, this report revealed an opportunity to do more to protect everyone in the rural landscape.

"This report is concerning and we would absolutely support a proper review of where police resources are allocated to protect every community and business regardless of where they are in the state," Ms Johnson said.



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"A 2020 survey of farmers found that 81 per cent reported being a victim of farm crime – theft of livestock and equipment, trespass, break and enter, and illegal hunting, and this is a significant risk to safety.

"More concerning is that 64 per cent were worried about crime in general due to repeated victimisation – and while the establishment of the Rural Crime Prevention Team by NSW Police is positive, there needs to be more resources available."

For further information, contact

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