



# THE COUNTRY MAYORS ASSOCIATION OF NSW INC

*"What we want is nothing more than equity"*

## COMMUNIQUÉ

### Country Mayors Association of NSW – General Meeting 22 March 2024

The Country Mayors Association of NSW held our General Meeting in the Theatrette in NSW Parliament House on Friday, 22 March 2024. There was a great roll up of NSW Councils and associate organisations represented by 93 attendees. The theme for the meeting was 'Regional Crime'. This was timely following the NSW Government's announcement of a Parliamentary Inquiry into Community Safety in Regional and Rural Communities, and the meeting delivered a wealth of relevant speakers for members. The CMA has been advocating for a parliamentary inquiry into regional crime for close to a year. We have garnered significant media exposure and while the inquiry falls short of what we had hoped for, it is a very welcome step in the right direction. Country NSW crime figures are alarmingly worse than Sydney and we are heartened to see the Government finally recognise this fact and act upon it.



For further information, contact Cr Jamie Chaffey on 0467 402 412

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First to speak to our members at the meeting was **The Hon Yasmin Catley MP, Minister for Police and Counter Terrorism**, who spoke for 15 minutes without time for questions before leaving.

The Minister began by describing her contact and travels in the regions and the great work of NSW Police Service. The Minister said she would never support an inquiry into policing in NSW, stating that the NSW Police do a great job.

The Minister said we needed to focus on the entrenched, complex drivers behind crime, adding that the \$26.2m regional crime package that includes Moree may be expanded in six months.

The Minister said that Regional Operation Mongoose had been getting real results, and YAMS and safe transport of youth at night programs will be expanded. As leaders in their communities, the Minister said Local Government could help in the planning of crime prevention activities. She acknowledged the varying capacities of councils. Surveillance (CCTV) and youth events could help.

'We can't arrest our way out of the current situation' was the point emphasised by the Minister.

**Leader of the NSW Nationals Dugald Saunders** added his congratulations to the CMA for the regional crime inquiry announcement, advising that the deadline was 31 May 2024. His praise for the CMA was echoed by **Shadow Minister for Police, The Hon Paul Toole MP**, who said "The CMA has affected change in this State".

The Shadow Minister said submissions for the Inquiry were needed from regional and rural areas. He also called for an interim report, rather than wait 18 months for an outcome from the inquiry. He thanked our police and CMA members, for what we do in our communities.



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It was valuable for members to hear of the work of **NSW Productivity Commissioner - Peter Achterstraat AM** on water utility funding models. He highlighted how much water utilities varied across NSW, with some council systems having less than 2000 connections, whereas Sydney Water has two million. Mr Achterstraat commended country Councils for the collaboration in Local Government that results in viable economies of scale. He told the meeting that he was looking into Government funding; how much effort was required and the success rate.



Unfortunately, **NSW Premier the Hon. Chris Minns** could not make it to the meeting, but the fact that he went to the effort to record a video message, which was played on the big screen, showed the respect the Country Mayors Association has.

**President of the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) Linda Scott** gave a broad report. She stated that the Federal Government had announced an inquiry into Local Government Financial Sustainability, with submissions due by 3 May 2024.

**Local Government NSW (LGNSW) President Darriea Turley AM** congratulated us for the Crime Inquiry announcement and Linda Scott for the Sustainability Inquiry, stating that the 1% funding from the Federal Government fight has been long running.

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We introduced our new CMA Secretariat Gary Fry from Regional Development Australia Northern Inland in Armidale.

We were delighted to welcome Brewarrina Shire Council as a new member and Wollongong City Council as an Associate Member of the Association.



We had a detailed presentation from **Executive Director NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, Jackie Fitzgerald**. Our recently updated Regional Crime, Law and Order Report utilised the data from BOCSAR and it was great to hear Jackie describe the crime statistic trends in person.

It was also good to hear from **Deputy NSW Police Commissioner Paul Pisanos APM**.

The Deputy Commissioner provided insights into regional policing and crime. He spoke with conviction, and we really felt his appreciation for the work of police officers in remote locations, where a single officer does much more than policing for a community.



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His thoughts about keeping police on the job of policing were supported by our next speaker, **President-Elect of the Police Association of NSW Mr. Kevin Morton, who said** police being used for prisoner transport was a source of frustration. He said that in our country communities, NSW Police hold the line because they are there on the front line when other departments or agencies are not.

We agreed to advocate that the NSW Government honour its obligations to fund country councils in their costly battle with weeds. We are at the grassroots on weed management and must be engaged with in program or policy development.

We agreed to support Nationals Member for Northern Tablelands Adam Marshall's call for an independent investigation into Hunter New England Health.

We also agreed to collate financial data from our members councils to show how funding from competitive grant programs has reduced over time.

Our final speaker was the **Chief Executive Officer at Royal Far West, Jacqueline Emery**. This is a vital paediatric referral service that fills a massive gap in regional NSW. In regard to youth crime, she said that early intervention through supporting developmentally delayed kids was key and those supports were lacking in our regions. Royal Far West is the only philanthropic assessment service, but funding has not increased, and they are seeking an additional \$5-6m in Government funding per year. We agreed to support their submission for additional funding.



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