

## Submission 61

Please find attached submission on behalf of Inverell Shire Council.

Our Ref: 3.16.2 Pt 1 JL:jlf

9th August 2002

Committee Secretary

House of Representatives Standing Committee on

Legal and Constitutional Affairs

Parliament House

**CANBERRA ACT 2600**

Dear Sir/Madam

On behalf of Council, I thank you for this opportunity to provide the following comments by way of submission to the Committee's *"Inquiry into Crime in the community: victims, offenders, and fear of crime."*

Council, at its Ordinary Meeting held on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2002, resolved to adopt the recommendations of its Planning and Community Committee, recommending that a submission be made to the inquiry, reflecting the concerns and experiences of Council with respect to the issue of crime in the community.

As the Committee will no doubt be aware, the perception of crime within the community is predominantly driven by the media who have a tremendous impact in terms of how crime is generally perceived and ultimately defined in society.

According to the media, in both fictional and factual types of reportage, crime tends to be defined as 'street crime', which is thus associated with personal terror in which fear and violence are seen as central. This has significant implications for the fear of crime within certain sections of the community.

To a degree rural communities tend to see themselves as more removed from the possibility of violent crimes and thus the impact of crime reportage in the national media may be regarded as less influential in driving community definitions and perceptions of crime. Local media, both electronic and print, however continue to play a significant role in this regard.

The skewed focus on 'street crime' and bizarre events whilst instrumental in defining a community's perception of crime, nevertheless needs to be separated from the realities of crime. In this regard the following observations are intended to reflect both community perceptions of crime, its perpetrators and victims as well as referring to the 'facts' of crime as evidenced by statistical information collated by the New England Local Area Command of the NSW Police Service. The information presented also draws on the information reported in Council's Social Plan, which, being a product of both community consultation and detailed demographic analysis, offers some assistance, in the present context, in identifying particular issues of concern.

### Types of Crime

The statistics outlined in Attachment 1 have been provided by the New England Local Area Command of the NSW Police Service and highlight the types of crime typically committed against both property and the individual as 'reported' during the financial years ending 30<sup>th</sup> June 2001 and 30<sup>th</sup> June 2002.

The most prevalent type of crime committed is that of Malicious Damage (Non Graffiti) during both periods, with Break and Enters recording the second highest level of criminal activity in the Inverell Shire. This is then followed by crimes against the person with Assault showing an increase in the period ending 30<sup>th</sup> June 2002 with over 261 recorded incidents in Inverell alone.

### Perpetrators of Crime and Motives

Council does not have any specific data available on the perpetrators of crime nor their motives. Council has however on various occasions been appraised by private individuals and public agencies in respect of this matter, with Council's position generally reflecting the community's attitude as evidenced by anecdotal information. This information would tend to confirm media reportage, suggesting that the perpetrators of crime predominately come from a disadvantaged socioeconomic background, with perpetrators often involving marginalised young people.

### Fear of Crime in the Community

Fear of crime in the community is largely felt and expressed by the elderly and women even though these groups are less likely to become victims of crime. The media's portrayal of women and the elderly as victims of crime tends to skew the community's impression of crime and its likely victims in a manner disproportionate to actual statistical evidence. Data that is available, would tend to indicate that males are in fact more likely to be involved as both victims and perpetrators of crimes against the individual and as perpetrators of malicious damage and crimes against property.

Whilst the fear of crime is most often expressed by the elderly and by women, this fear appears to be disproportionately felt by these groups when compared to actual "reported" crime statistics.

### Impact of being a Victim of Crime and Fear of Crime

The impact, particularly on the elderly and on women as a result of the fear of crime is reflected largely in a social context, in as far as the fear of crime serves to become socially debilitating. In order to overcome concerns over fear issues such as street lighting, "vital call" and agency identification were raised with Council in its social planning consultation.

### Strategies to support victims and reduce crime

Council recognises that there are a number of strategies in place at a State level in order to support the victims of crime as well as to reduce the incidence of crime. Some of these strategies have been implemented within Inverell Shire, including Youth Justice Conference Convening; support groups for the victims of crime as well as other strategies targeting criminal behaviour such as the State's Safer in Design initiative, promoting a partnership between Local Government and the NSW Police in assessing significant development applications to ensure consideration of design issues impacting on community safety.

### Apprehension Rates

Council recognises that apprehension rates are directly related to the level of policing that exists within the community.

It is Council's understanding that since Inverell's police numbers have been strengthened that the police have been more successful in apprehending criminals. Council's concerns therefore relate to ensuring the dedication of sufficient police resources.

### Sentencing

Sentencing continues to be a matter of some concern for Council. Whilst Council is not familiar with the background to the vast majority of judicial decisions, Council has been particularly concerned with what appear to be somewhat lenient sentences being handed out, for crimes seemingly deserving of harsher penalties. There exists a perceived imbalance between harsh sentences given to some members of the community for seemingly less serious crimes when compared to lenient sentences handed out for more serious crimes. There is a concern that the judiciary does not reflect community attitudes towards the seriousness of some crimes as evidenced by the sentences applied to both serious and minor crimes.

### Community Safety and Policing

It is Council's firm view that community safety is directly related to the level of policing that a community receives. Inverell has had insufficient police numbers over a period of time - a matter that was further exacerbated by police resources being directed towards the transportation of prisoners. This matter, whilst it now appears to have been resolved as a result of increased police numbers and a review of police responsibilities will continue to receive Council's ongoing attention.

I trust that the above responses provide some indication of the experience of Council in this area and again thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission to the Committee.

Yours faithfully

P J HENRY

GENERAL MANAGER

SENDER:

Joerg Liermann

Management Executive Officer

Inverell Shire Council

PO Box 138

INVERELL NSW 2360

PH: 02 67 288 288

Fax: 02 67 288 277

## ATTACHMENT 1

### NEW ENGLAND LOCAL AREA COMMAND

#### STATISTICS FOR INVERELL SHIRE COUNCIL

1<sup>st</sup> July 2000 to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2002

<b>Crime Category</b>	<b>Ashford</b>	<b>Bonshaw</b>	<b>Delungra</b>	<b>Inverell</b>	<b>Total</b>
Assault	32	1	8	231	272
Break and Enter	16	3	11	292	322
Malicious Damage (Non Graffiti)	28	0	11	342	381
Malicious Damage (Graffiti)	4	0	1	17	22
Steal from Motor Vehicle	4	0	1	87	92
Steal from Person	0	0	0	4	4
Homicide	0	0	0	1	1
Robbery	0	0	0	5	5
Drug Offences	1	2	0	54	57
Drug Related Crime	1	2	1	74	78
Sex Offences	8	0	1	31	40

1<sup>st</sup> July 2002 to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2002

<b>Crime Category</b>	<b>Ashford</b>	<b>Bonshaw</b>	<b>Delungra</b>	<b>Inverell</b>	<b>Total</b>
Assault	16	1	7	261	285
Break and Enter	7	1	6	283	297
Malicious Damage (Non Graffiti)	10	1	3	361	375
Malicious Damage (Graffiti)	1	0	1	6	8
Steal from Motor Vehicle	5	0	1	80	86

Steal from Person	0	0	0	11	11
Homicide	0	0	0	0	0
Robbery	0	0	0	6	6
Drug Offences	2	0	1	51	54
Drug Related Crime	3	0	1	72	76
Sex Offences	4	0	0	14	18

Notes relating to statistics:

- Drug offences relate to those incidents where police have normally seized drugs or equipment or tools used in the administration or preparation of prohibited drugs.
- Drug related crime involves those incidents where either the victim or offender was under the influence of a drug at the time of the offence. This data set is recorded by the police officer who attends the scene and is based on his/her opinion based on the behaviour of involved parties.
- Yetman has only recently become an area which is governed by New England Local Area Command after the restructure and therefore no specific statistics are held at this location. Suffice it to say that reported incidents within Yetman are very few.