

**Submission
No 14**

COMMUNITY SAFETY IN REGIONAL AND RURAL COMMUNITIES

Name: Mr Andrew Johns

Date Received: 3 April 2024

My name is Andrew Johns and I live with my wife and two children in Gunnedah. I am also a Deputy Captain with Fire and Rescue NSW and have been employed in the brigade for more than 15 years.

On 28 August 2023, in the early hours of the morning, my son (who is also Retained Firefighter with FRNSW) and I, were paged to "car fire". We both ran out the front door to find that my car was not where I'd left it. I identified where the fire was and rushed to the scene in another vehicle to find that it was another car that had been set alight by thieves. In all, three cars were stolen and burnt that night with my car being the final one.

My car was used to ferry thieves around the town and miners who were on their way to work and stopped to attempt to put out the fire in the first car were held up by the thieves with knives and machetes. They stole the miners' vehicle, drove it to another location and burnt it. My car was used to pick up the thieves from the location of this fire and they then took my car to the location where it was ultimately burnt.

The thieves were able to access my vehicle by breaking in to my house and taking the keys. Many, many cars had been stolen and burnt in 2023 (and 2022 and 2024), most in the dark of night/early morning. A large proportion of these cars were Toyota Prados like mine, which I understand are desirable among the thieves of our town. This takes a toll on emergency workers who were called to each of these incidents.

This incident left my family shaken and there is now a ritual of checking that all

windows and doors are locked when we are away from home or are asleep. This is not something I've ever had to do in 40 years of living in regional NSW. My wife is also very nervous being home alone with my younger son if my older son and I get called out to FRNSW incidents during the night which happens multiple times a week.

Crime in parts of NSW, including Gunnedah, is as bad as it has ever been and it's had a significant detrimental impact on the emotional wellbeing of all residents of the town, not just those who have had a break in or a car stolen. Further, it is clear that regional NSW does not have the allied health services to deal with the fallout of these impacts on residents.