

## **Inquiry into scrap metal theft**

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11 September 2023

Committee Secretary  
Transport and Resources Committee  
Parliament House  
George Street  
Brisbane Qld 4000

Via e-mail: [trc@parliament.qld.gov.au](mailto:trc@parliament.qld.gov.au)

Dear Sir/Madam

### **SUBMISSION - PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO SCRAP METAL THEFT**

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Transport and Resource's Committee's inquiry into scrap metal theft.

The City of Moreton Bay is grateful to the Queensland Government for acting swiftly and establishing this inquiry in response to Council calling for urgent action on this issue in July 2023.

Moreton Bay's call for action was prompted by a spike in copper theft from new housing estates, energy infrastructure and local sports clubs around South East Queensland.

In March 2023, Queensland energy providers reported that thefts and attempted thefts of copper from the state-wide energy infrastructure network had nearly tripled between 2020 and 2022. This is supported by Queensland Police Service (QPS) data that also shows a sharp rise in copper theft over the past two years.

These thefts place pressure on local community organisations, sporting clubs and local governments to provide support in terms of replacement infrastructure and the use of alternative materials where appropriate.

In addition to the expense of replacing copper wire, there is also the significant public safety risk, with thieves exposing themselves and the public to live electrical wires.

While this is a statewide issue, City of Moreton Bay has seen a spike in copper thefts at project sites like sporting field upgrades and street lighting projects.

In July 2023, parts of the North Lakes Street lighting network were subject to blackouts due to copper theft. A North Lakes school also had its cabling removed from lighting poles on its grounds and sporting fields earlier this year.

In April 2023, over 320 metres of copper cable was stolen from the Narangba Demons Baseball. This has left the club's 17 teams and 200 players unable to train in the evenings, its primary training time.

#### Customer Service Contacts

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Similarly, in 2022, the adjacent Narangba Eagles Soccer Club, which has over 700 members, had copper cabling stolen from its fields three times within six months, leaving its 60 teams from across all age groups unable to train.

Evidence suggests the growth in copper theft is driven primarily by the limited regulatory requirements for scrap metal industry recycling (i.e. use of cash for transactions), the relative ease in theft due to copper accessibility (e.g. sports field lighting) and escalating metal prices.

A legislative response is required to limit this form of criminal activity, which can be achieved through similar approaches undertaken in other jurisdictions.

New South Wales, for example, has seen great success with changes to the *Scrap Metal Industry Act 2016 (NSW)*, by requiring scrap metal traders to be registered, prohibiting cash payments for scrap metal, forcing traders to record all transactions and record the details of the person selling the scrap metal so police can track them down if need be.

Queensland is the only state on the eastern seaboard that does not have these measures in place.

Presently, there is no requirement under the *Second-hand Dealers and Pawnbrokers Act 2003* to require sellers to pay via electronic transaction. The use of a cash payment to a second-hand dealer undermines the application and consistency of a transactions register, which is a requirement under the Act (Section 37(1)).

A legislative solution that effectively ends the resale market for stolen copper immediately will be much more effective than any amount of CCTV, deterrent devices or stretching the resources of police, Energex and councils even further.

Support for a relevant and targeted communications campaign, which highlights the severe risks and dangers of copper theft, not only for thieves but for at risk members of our community, should also strongly be considered by the Queensland Government alongside any legislative and law and order response.

City of Moreton Bay has submitted a motion to the Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) Annual Conference, to be held in October 2023, about the need for legislative amendments to mitigate the rise of copper theft. If supported by Queensland local governments, this motion will add great weight to our call for State Government action.

Recommendation:

That the Committee call on the State Government to update all relevant legislation, including the *Second-hand Dealers and Pawnbrokers Act 2003*, to mitigate the rise of copper theft in Queensland.

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Updated legislation should:

- prohibit scrap metal from being sold to businesses other than registered scrap metal dealers;
- prohibit scrap metal dealers from paying cash for scrap metal;
- require scrap metal dealers to report suspicious transactions to the police;
- require scrap metal dealers to keep and maintain corresponding records of transactions for buying scrap metal, including details of the person selling the scrap metal; and
- reflect contemporary comparable legislation in other jurisdictions (i.e. *Scrap Metal Industry Act 2016 (NSW)*).

I trust this information will assist the Committee with this inquiry.

Yours sincerely



**PETER FLANNERY**  
Mayor

Our ref: 