




Speech By
Bryson Head

MEMBER FOR CALLIDE

Record of Proceedings, 1 May 2024

TRANSPORT AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Report, Motion to Take Note

 **Mr HEAD** (Callide—LNP) (2.45 pm): I rise to speak on the committee report into its inquiry into scrap metal theft. This was certainly a very interesting inquiry and I learned a bit along the way when attending site visits and the hearings that we conducted. I note that this report was tabled in November 2023. The interim response from the Attorney-General said that the final government response to the recommendations in the report would be provided within six months of the original tabling of the report. Six months is nearly up and still we have not seen that response. I am looking forward to all of the details of that response coming forward.

We certainly support the intent of the inquiry recommendations and any genuine effort to reduce crime and make Queensland a safer place to live and work. We know that under the Miles Labor government crime rates have soared and I know that across Callide police numbers have been cut. Ultimately, this inquiry provides another in a long list of examples where the government's actions are too little, too late for many victims of crime. It must be called out that, despite another inquiry, years of inaction have left the community vulnerable to this type of crime. Scrap metal theft has become increasingly prevalent in recent years and costs government, businesses and organisations thousands, if not millions, of dollars. We certainly heard that in some of the hearings and in some of the submissions.

Correspondence from GrainCorp highlights some of the costs and the challenges posed to business. When GrainCorp depots are down it creates significant burden on primary producers, as they must then cart their grain to other depots further afield. When this is due to targeted copper theft, communities are left even more frustrated because of the crime crisis that continues to grip Queensland. I am sure the grain producers that use one particular GrainCorp depot on the Darling Downs, which had been targeted previously, are now also very concerned about not only scrap metal theft but also the fire ants that are at their back door, such are the failures of this Labor government.

Of course, copper theft comes with severe danger to not only the offenders committing the offence but also the personnel in the area at the time or those who next attend the site. Substantial risks could result in a fatality through live wires being left exposed and grounding cables being cut off and removed. Acts of copper theft make it incredibly difficult, and in some situations impossible, for businesses to provide a safe workplace for their employees.

Incidents of theft of catalytic converters have also grown substantially. Offenders have taken to incredibly brazen tactics, including cutting converters out of vehicles in public and in broad daylight. That is what is happening here in Queensland under a Labor government. That sort of behaviour highlights key government failures. The government is taking too long to crack down on scrap metal theft activities and crime in general. It shows a society where offenders have more rights than victims.

It is important that the government response in the form of any legislative or regulatory change following this inquiry involves a whole-of-government approach with relevant agencies and government departments all doing their bit to reduce the burden of an already stretched Police Service. We know that police numbers have fallen. I prepared this speech some time ago. It takes a while because the government does not give us as elected representatives enough time to debate issues in this House and things keep getting pushed out. Ultimately, police numbers have fallen—

Honourable members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hart): Pause the clock. I cannot hear the member for Callide. He has a strong voice and I cannot hear him from up here. Keep the noise down, please.

Mr HEAD: Thank you, Deputy Speaker. Ultimately, the government cannot put more pressure on these officers without giving them the necessary support and resources to tackle this problem. We must ensure any changes that are made do not add to the regulatory burden for law-abiding businesses, which is a critical thing. There is so much red tape in this state. Businesses are strangled by it; they are held up by it. The red tape they have to deal with slows up the economy. If members talk to any small business owner they will give them multiple examples of the disgusting red tape that they have to face in this state. Any changes to fix this problem must not add to their burden and make it harder for them to make a crust.