




Speech By
James Lister

MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS

Record of Proceedings, 22 May 2024

TRANSPORT AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Report, Motion to Take Note

 **Mr LISTER** (Southern Downs—LNP) (2.05 pm): I rise to speak on this committee report regarding scrap metal theft. I thought I might give a particularly authentic view of the people of Pampas in the north-west corner of my electorate, just on the border with the electorate of my honourable friend the member for Condamine. The Pampas Neighbourhood Watch asked me to visit them recently. Its members are mostly primary producers, producers of grain, cotton and so forth—broadacre properties where a lot of money is invested. One of the difficulties they have expressed to me surrounding scrap metal theft is that it is not just a question of the cost of repairing the infrastructure which is damaged when felons go in and steal copper from their electric motors, their augers, their machinery and so forth; it also means that, when that machinery is needed, it is not available.

To give members an indication, there are irrigators there—that is, farmers who produce crops with water that they are entitled to draw from the Condamine River, but they are only entitled to draw at certain periods of time. There has to be a certain amount of flow or height in the river for them to be able to do that. When that happens, they go in like Jack Robinson. They want to start pumping the water that they are entitled to, but then they find out that the motor is stuffed, that the copper has been taken from it. The water that they miss out on can be several orders of magnitude more in value than the cost of repairing the infrastructure involved. It is not just the electric motors and so forth; it is machinery on the property—headers and so forth. Again, when a sorghum crop is ready to go, it is ready to go. It is the same with wheat or cotton. If the farmers get there and discover that the machinery they need is unavailable because thieves have taken copper or parts from the vehicle, that costs an enormous amount. The costs can run into the hundreds of thousands, perhaps even millions, of dollars. We are talking about sums of that kind of value. I have placed a question on notice upon the table of the House to the police minister asking for statistics concerning rural crime in that part of my electorate because I want to make a campaign of public awareness and awareness to the government of the impacts and the costs to jobs and productivity that this theft of copper and other scrap metals from primary producers in my electorate occasions.

I want to stress that the theft of copper and scrap metal is something that ought to have been investigated, and I am glad that that has been done, but we need to bear in mind that the opportunity cost of the theft in terms of lost productivity, lost ability to pump water into storages and lost ability to handle grain or harvest at the right time is astronomical. I say to the members of Pampas Neighbourhood Watch that I have heard you. I am speaking in this place on your behalf and I look forward to discussing with you further the response that I get from the police minister regarding the crime stats there and what we can do to improve security and safety for everybody not only in Pampas but also throughout my electorate of Southern Downs.