




Speech By
Patrick Weir

MEMBER FOR CONDAMINE

Record of Proceedings, 1 May 2024

TRANSPORT AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Report, Motion to Take Note

 **Mr WEIR** (Condamine—LNP) (2.50 pm): Whilst I was not on the committee at the time it did this inquiry, I have written to police ministers and attorneys on this issue over a period of time. In regional Queensland, as the member for Gregory said, we are not immune to this issue. We have talked to landowners who are having their sheds stripped completely bare of copper wire. One landowner I was talking to said that he was harvesting until 11 o'clock one night and he had to be back at five o'clock the next morning to load the truck. When he got there at five o'clock the next morning, he went to turn the lights on in the shed and there were no lights on and no wiring. In that period of time, they had come in and stripped it out.

I spoke to another landowner who had the same issue of sheds being stripped out. He rewired that shed four times—it was stripped out four times. We hear of the cables being snipped off electric grain augers and underground submersible pumps being dragged out of the bores and the long power cable that feeds the power to the pump being cut off and taken away. If people drive out through regional Queensland, they will see the big concrete grain silos. Out on the downs, a lot of those have no copper left in them; they are stripped bare. One of them in the Norwin area was redone. It cost in the vicinity of \$250,000 to rewire that grain silo.

At the time I wondered how to address the situation. I talked to the rural crime squad, which has a base in Drayton in the electorate of Condamine. I asked what we could do to make the public more aware of it and what landowners could do to try and help protect themselves. We had a forum out in the Nangwee area that was put together by the stock squad and my office. The staff in my office work closely with both the rural stock squad, the police and Neighbourhood Watch. We all came together at a shed meeting and the stories just kept coming from different people who had had the same thing happen.

There had been a significant arrest made recently which slowed things down, but it has gained pace again. I was talking to an electrician from Pittsworth about two weeks ago. He had a phone call to go out to a job on a water pump that pumps water out of the Condamine River during a high-flow event. This landowner went down to turn his pumps on and there was no wire. It had been stripped out completely. This pump was about two kilometres off the road. So somebody had found that pump, driven in and stripped it bare at a time when he needed to pump water. This was his opportunity. That is a significant loss. It cost \$30,000 to rewire that pump but the loss was much worse than that.

We heard some of the committee members talking about the underworld being mixed up in this. That does not surprise me at all. Whenever there is a cash commodity that sort of organised crime becomes involved. The fact remains that these people are selling this product somewhere. We are hearing of Ergon sites where they store their wire for projects and they put high fences around it. They come out and cut it and rolls of wire are taken. We are hearing of compressors on gas wells in the Western Downs that they have put chains around that have been taken completely off the well and then

stripped bare of copper. This is happening on a widespread scale. When someone is turning up with a truckload of copper on a semi-regular basis, surely there has to be some questions asked as to where they got this material, how they accessed it and the legitimacy of it. There are definitely ways that this problem can be slowed and controlled. A cash market always makes it hard but this is having a significant impact on regional Queensland. It is of huge concern to them and we need to take action on this for the security of regional Queensland.