



Speech By  
**Tony Perrett**

**MEMBER FOR GYMPIE**

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Record of Proceedings, 22 May 2024

**TRANSPORT AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

**Report, Motion to Take Note**

Resumed from 1 May (see p. 1407), on motion of Mr King—

That the House take note of the Transport and Resources Committee Report No. 45, 57th Parliament, *Inquiry into scrap metal theft*, tabled on 24 November 2023.

 **Mr PERRETT** (Gympie—LNP) (2.00 pm): I rise to speak on the committee report titled *Inquiry into scrap metal theft*. This inquiry originated from increasing reports about thieves stripping metal, particularly copper, from critical infrastructure, from community infrastructure, from rural properties, from agricultural industry sites and from housing estates. Scrap metal is one of the most recycled materials globally. Sourcing the easy-picking metal and copper has become a lucrative enterprise for thieves. The metal is stripped and sold to scrap metal markets for export. The Australian Energy Producers advised the committee that, unlike precious metals such as gold and silver, metals like copper, brass and aluminium contain no intrinsic value. The value is realised when they are sold to scrap metal dealers who arrange for the metal to be melted and reshaped for other uses.

The inquiry found that the list of victims is extensive. It includes critical infrastructure assets of electricity, water and telecommunication providers, housing estates, private businesses, sporting and community organisations, road projects, transport infrastructure and the mining industry. That is effectively the whole state. It affects everyone and almost everything required in our modern world from streetlighting, electricity grids, air-conditioning units, water pumps on rural properties, switchboards, lighting for sporting grounds, generators, electronic message signs and silo complexes. The committee also learned that thieves are targeting metal parts from cars, with examples of cars being stripped of catalytic converters while they are parked in shopping centre car parks. A report on the weekend showed that charging cables in EV charging stations in California are now being targeted and stripped of copper wires.

Scrap metal theft seems to be just an example of the growing crime crisis in this state. It adds to the cost-of-living crisis, with increased insurance costs and replacement costs. Community organisations and sporting groups which raise funds to build infrastructure have to start again and raise even more funds. When thieves attacked the network in Virginia, it meant that the Arnott's biscuit factory lost supply for 36 hours. Workers were sent home and production stopped.

Since 2015, theft of copper wire and fittings has been a significant issue for GrainCorp and the communities in which it operates. Sites in Kupunn, Brookstead East, Macalister, Warra, Malu and Miles have been targeted. In a six-month period from December 2022 to June last year, three separate incidents occurred at its silo complex at Kupunn on the Darling Downs. Repairs are estimated to be \$180,000. In December 2022, thieves damaged the free-standing grain storage bins and stripped the copper wiring. As of November last year, the bins remained inoperative due to the cost of repair. At another location in the Kupunn complex, last May thieves knocked down the switchboard, stole all of the cables and cut livewires at the mains. Consequently, GrainCorp was unable to open that location

for grain growers for the 2023-24 financial year. Growers had to either deliver to Dalby, which is another 25 kilometres away, or go to GrainCorp's competitors. This has caused an ongoing commercial impact to GrainCorp and put additional strain on its Dalby assets.

In the third incident, thieves stripped a silo complex of copper wiring and pulled out all cables. The mains were still out of order because of the theft at the second location. The third incident occurred where all of the grain had been stored. GrainCorp had to remove the stored grain so the electricians could attend the site and power the sample stand weighbridge. It has warned that, because of the high cost of repairs and the additional security, the loss of business means the future of this site is under consideration. A closure will have a major impact on local growers who will be forced to travel further to deliver grain and it places more pressure on the regional road network.

I note that the committee has made several recommendations to empower police and to track the extent of the crime. Many regional places such as my electorate of Gympie are being impacted by police who are being burnt out from excessive workloads and not enough staff. In the middle of a crime crisis, this will place an even greater burden on the police.