



Speech By  
**Trevor Watts**


**MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA NORTH**

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Record of Proceedings, 1 May 2024

**TRANSPORT AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

**Report, Motion to Take Note**

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (2.36 pm): I rise to make a brief contribution on the inquiry into scrap metal theft. As we have heard, this affects everybody—whether it is your streetlights or your local sporting club. This criminal activity is growing. It seems to be organised. It is difficult to enforce. There were a couple of recommendations relating to the police, and I will just go to one of those, which was that there be a review of the—

... Stolen Property Investigation and Recovery System (SPIRS) to determine if it is fit for purpose, including consideration of options for an improved system of tracking stolen second hand goods.

We need to empower the police here. It is difficult. With the crime crisis we have we know there are not enough police to do general duties, but this is really quite dangerous.

The member for Kurwongbah was a great chair. He was always very fair and balanced, and I would like to thank him for that. I did not understand some of the requirements of the electrical system and some of the earthing and everything else that goes on, and he was at pains trying to explain what that meant. I did not get it, apart from the fact that, if someone takes this particular cabling away, everybody who goes near it, including the people who have to repair it or stabilise that part of the grid, may well be in danger.

Powerlink noted that metal thieves were largely targeting earthing conductors of their operational, energised network. This is the network that we rely on—all small businesses, all households, everybody. This is how we are distributing power around the state. To have organised crime targeting metal that is used in making sure it is safe for everybody, including the workers who have to go and work in that environment, is critically important and should carry some serious penalties. One of the recommendations was that we add not just the fact that it is criminal to steal the metal and to take the copper and other metals but also create an additional offence that equates to recklessly engaging in conduct that places or may place another person in danger of injury or death due to exposure to live electricity infrastructure.

There was also a recommendation that the police establish a system where stolen metals are reported and notified. The idea is to try and get it as close as possible to real time. Once those materials are melted down or processed in any way, they become very difficult to track and trace. It is important that we get in early while the material is in the form that it was stolen in. Having a system that allows for some real-time reporting might help.

There are no silver bullets for this. We need to do all we can to stop people who are willing to risk their lives and the lives of others for profitable gain in a criminal activity. One critical part of that, I think, is recommendation 7, which is about an educational program so that people are on the lookout a little bit more and there is an awareness in the community of not only how dangerous this is but also how prevalent it is becoming. With the cost-of-living crisis and the crime crisis, we do not have the resources

that we might like to have from a policing perspective. People are under financial pressure, which makes these assets more tempting for them. It is important that we educate the general public and other users so that they are aware of what might be done and can report any activity they see that falls into this category. My time is very short. Banning cash for scrap was not seen to be working as well interstate as we might have thought.