

# Rural policing and reducing victimisation against Australian farmers

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**une**  
University of  
New England

## Centre for Rural Criminology



## VICTORIA

- **n = 906**
- **Male (70.75%);** Female (29.25%)
- Skewed older: over 55 years of age (69.4%) compared with 18-34 (4.0%) and 35-54 (26.6%)
- Respondents mostly have full time farming businesses (81.5%) compared with
  - part time (12.1%)
  - hobby farms (4.5%)
  - or retired and no longer producing (1.9%)

(Almost entirely paper-based responses)

## NEW SOUTH WALES (Preliminary)

- **n = 436**
- Male (46%); **Female (51%)**
- Over 45 years of age (65%) compared with 18-44 (35%)
- 54% of respondents have a full-time farming business, compared to 23% part time, 15% hobby farm and 3% retired

(Online only due to COVID)

# FARM CRIME SURVEYS

*Crimes that impact on pastoral, agricultural and aquacultural operations cost Australia millions of dollars each year and can have devastating financial, mental and physical impacts on our rural landowners and communities.*

*Surveys undertaken to build on empirical picture of FC across Australia; further academic and practitioner knowledge of farm crime; inform crime reduction and prevention measures*

# VICTIMISATION

## VICTORIA

- 61% of farmers report having been a victim of *theft* from their farm

## NEW SOUTH WALES

- **82% of farmers report having been a victim of farm crime**
  - 80% of farmers have been victimised more than once

VICTORIA	%	NSW	%
Equipment and tools	39.9	Trespass	49.9
Farm supplies and inputs	32.1	Illegal shooting/hunting	40.9
Livestock	31.8	Theft of livestock	39.2
Machinery	14.3	Break and enter	33.5
Thefts of money or personal items	8.7	Theft of equipment and tools	29.9

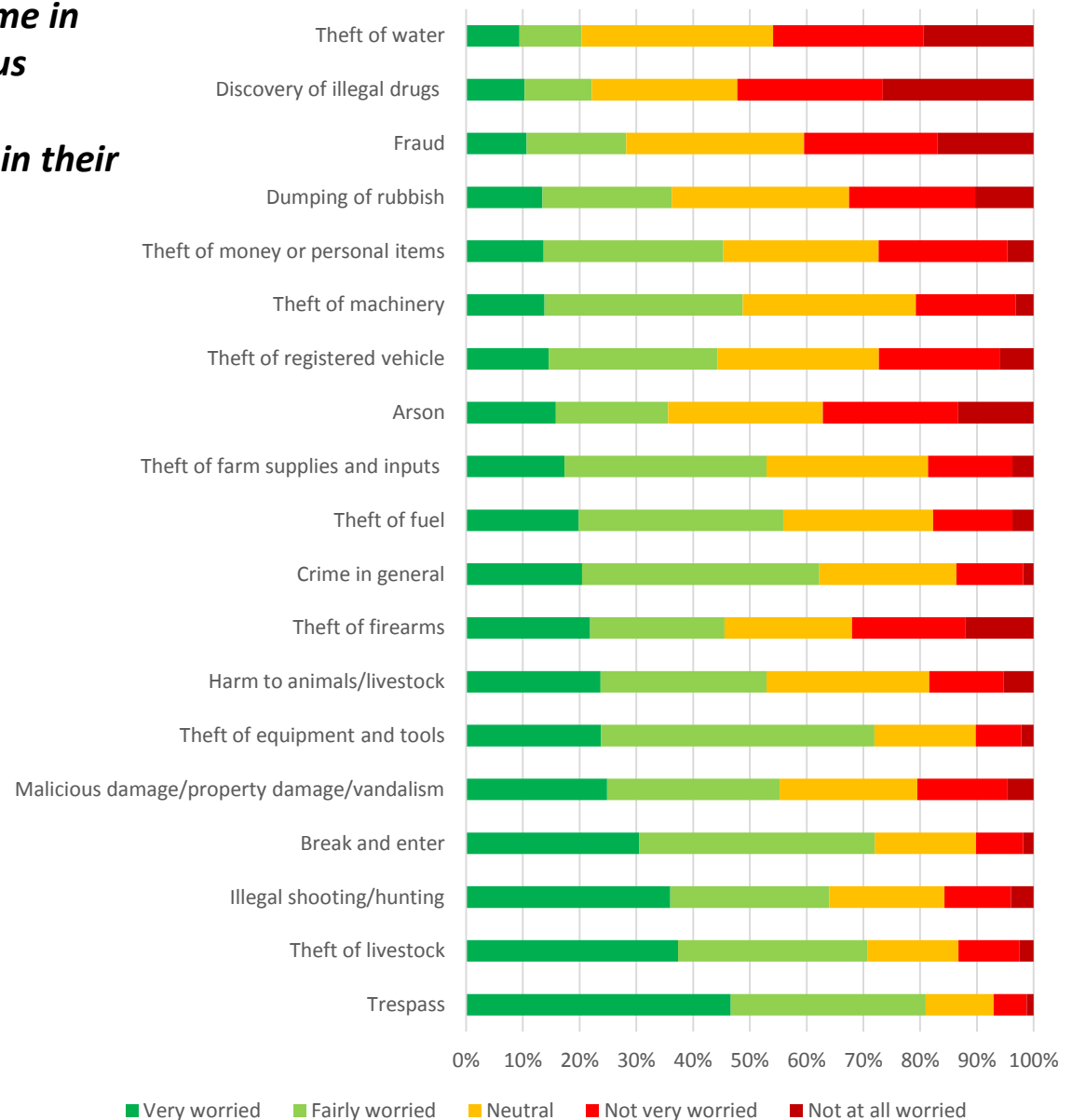
Farm crime offences most commonly reported include the theft of livestock, produce, tools, machinery and equipment, vehicles, fuel and other farm inputs, and incidences of vandalism, arson, trespassing, illegal hunting, and sabotage.

# Perceptions ("worry") and fear of crime (NSW)

***59.0% of Victoria farmers classify crime in their local area as serious/very serious***

***69.3% of NSW farmers classify crime in their local area as serious/very serious***

VICTORIA	Very worried	Fairly worried
having your home broken into and something stolen	13.73%	37.07%
having things stolen from outside your farm house (e.g. from sheds, paddocks)	23.15%	46.75%
having things stolen from your car or other vehicle	9.04%	30.13%
being physically attacked by strangers	5.56%	13.43%
having your personal items stolen from you while you are out and about	8.92%	25.03%



# RELUCTANCE IN REPORTING

Question	All of the time	Most of the time	Occasionally / Sometimes	Rarely	Never
"I would report crime which has occurred on the farm to the police."	39.6%	28.8%	19.82%	9.91%	1.8%
"I would report any theft from my farm to the police."	67.5%	14.7%	15.1%		2.7%

## Reporting varies significantly by offence type

VICTORIA	%	NSW	%
A belief there is not enough evidence for police to proceed	52.4%	The police would do nothing about it	52.9%
It may be difficult to tell if a crime has occurred	49.1%	Lack of proof/evidence	52.3%
A belief police would do nothing about it	39.9%	Worry about revenge/retaliation	39.8%
A belief that it is not serious enough to report	32.8%	Discovered crime too late	36.5%
Cost of loss is less than the insurance excess	21.1%	Police lack knowledge/expertise	26.4%

**Reluctance of farmers to report crime centers on police ability/capacity and the absence of evidence to proceed against offenders**

# PERSPECTIVES OF POLICE IN LOCAL AREA

	Agree / Strongly agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree / Strongly disagree	
THOUGHTS ON POLICE IN LOCAL AREA	Vic	NSW	Vic	NSW	Vic	NSW
The police in this area are dealing with the things that matter to people in this community.	<b>64.5</b>	<b>48.0</b>	27.6	29.8	7.95	23.2
The police in my area can be relied on to be there when you need them.	54	40.3	28.6	25.7	17.3	34.1
The police in this area treat everyone fairly regardless of who they are.	<b>61.5</b>	<b>44.9</b>	33.3	35.6	5.3	19.5
Local police are well resourced.	19.2	13.4	38.3	32.5	<b>42.5</b>	<b>53.6</b>
I have a high level of trust in police to deal with farm crime.	43.1	31.3	35.9	26.0	21.0	42.7
Overall, how satisfied are you with the standard of policing in your local area?	53.7	38.4	30.3	30.7	15.9	31

-**ve**: Lack of resourcing for rural police is a significant issue for farmers in both states  
**+ve**: police focused on things that matter and treat people fairly

# WHAT CAN POLICE DO DIFFERENTLY?

What should police do differently to tackle farm crime (Vic)	Count (Vic)	What should police do differently to tackle farm crime (NSW)	Count (NSW)
Take stronger action on property theft	485	Take stronger action against farm crime	190
More random patrols/physical presence	462	Invest in a police unit that specialises in rural crime	188
Work harder on bringing offenders to court	348	Engage with farmers in person more often	186
Engage with farmers in person more often	347	More random patrols/physical presence	171
Provide better education to rural communities about crime prevention ideas	305	Educate and train all police to deal with rural crime	162
Develop state-wide strategies	271	Work harder on bringing offenders to court	119
Engage with farmers by social media	114	Be more proactive about preventing crime	116
		Provide better education to rural communities about crime prevention	109
		Develop state-wide strategies	101

**Farmers show strong support for several measures to tackle farm crime, including taking strong action against offenders, investing in a specialist rural crime unit, more proactive models of policing and educating police on issues in rural crime.**

# THE “VERY THIN BLUE LINE”: VICTORIA’S AGRICULTURAL LIAISON OFFICERS

- Perform role in addition to other general policing/detective duties)
- Investigation and education role
- Provide more detailed analysis, assessment and review of rural crime
- But can’t provide exhaustive face-to-face communications!  
(e.g tyranny of distance; resourcing constraints)

66.9% of farmers were not aware of AGLOs

**BUT... People who were aware of AGLOs had a slightly better opinion/thoughts on police**



# A dedicated blue line: NSWPF Rural Crime Prevention Team

- 67.21% of respondents were aware that the NSWPF RCPT provides assistance and advice to rural crime victims, and investigates rural crime.



Question	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
The creation of the Rural Crime Prevention Team has been a positive development in the fight against rural crime	49%	44%	7%
I am more inclined to report crime since the creation of the Rural Crime Prevention Team	41%	48%	11%

- The **Rural Crime Prevention Team** was created in late 2017 to strengthen the **NSW Police Force's** focus on **rural crime**.
- The **team** has since grown to 52 specialised officers dedicated to investigating **rural crime**, located at 26 non-metropolitan locations within **NSW**.

- Those who had **direct encounters** with the RCPT were:
  - **Highly satisfied with the RCPT (75%)**
  - **Significantly more satisfied with policing overall**
  - **Significantly more likely to report crime**
  - **No significant difference with crime concern/fear of crime**

# POLICING THE RURAL

- Primary reasons behind non-reporting relate to institutional and evidence aspects of police capacity
- Farmers indicate relatively levels of confidence/satisfaction in police (especially in NSW)
- Trust gap the product of poor interactions (e.g. untrained officers) but also due to differing expectations of farmers and the police which are very much shaped by locational context and cultural geography
- **High levels of victimisation and fear need to be addressed.**
  - Public confidence in the CJS (as a whole) closely related to fear of crime; regard those institutions as not having fulfilled their responsibility to do something about crime
  - The lack of institutional confidence creates political pressures toward more punitive means to respond to crime
- Evidence suggests a desire for prevention and, specifically, for police with skill/expertise to police the rural
  - e.g. In NSW 89% agreed “there should be a team of police officers trained to deal with rural crime specifically”
  - Data indicates both higher levels of satisfaction (and reporting in NSW) when dealing with police trained/focused on rural policing

# CREATING SAFER, MORE SECURE FARMING COMMUNITIES

- Recognition that the dark figure of farm crime exists
- More resourcing, including:
  - Training for general duties police in regional and rural areas
  - Establishment of dedicated Rural Crime Department
  - Improvements to provision of essential investigative tools (such as fit-for-purpose vehicles)
- Acknowledging the importance of farmers being heard and understood

“Soft Policing” (Wooff 2016); Community Policing; Reassurance Policing

+ Partnerships (with residents, insurers, local government, other policing/crime prevention services): close cooperation between all parties

= improved public confidence in police and smarter, more focussed policing

*Leading to enhanced faith and trust in police; partnerships; community cohesiveness; deterrence; increased reporting*

And because no presentation on policing would be complete without Sir Robert Peel ...



1. “The principal object to be attained is **“the prevention of crime”**. To this great end every effort of the Police is to be directed.”

2. “The ability of the police to perform their duties is dependent upon **public approval of police actions.**”

Robert Peel, 1829. Sanctions of Establishment of Police. No 8 Augmentation. Home Office, London.

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## **Upcoming event:**

The International Society for the Study of Rural Crime is hosting an online roundtable with four rural policing panellists on 20 October 2020 on “Policing Rural Communities”

Details and registration at [www.issrc.net/roundtables](http://www.issrc.net/roundtables)



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