



Greg Piper MP

Member for Lake Macquarie



MEDIA RELEASE

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MORE POLICE NEEDED FOR LAKE MACQUARIE

Greg Piper, Member for Lake Macquarie, last night called on the Government to provide the Lake Macquarie Local Area Command with an equitable level of staffing.

According to Mr Piper, Lake Macquarie has less than half the NSW average of police *per capita*, yet it is one of the most challenging areas to service.

“The Lake Macquarie Command is 2½ times the average size, yet the police to population ratio of 1:448 is less than half of the state average,” Mr Piper said. “The state has 15,556 police officers and Lake Macquarie’s 213 police are not enough.”

“This understaffing is inequitable and Lake Macquarie residents are suffering high crime rates to subsidise the above-average police numbers in other areas.”

According to Mr Piper, the Bureau of Crime Statistics lists Lake Macquarie among the top 50 of 140 local government areas for four of the fourteen categories of crime.

“The Government should not be satisfied with this,” Mr Piper added. “Lake Macquarie residents and our understaffed, overworked police deserve a more equitable deal.”

- **The Text of Mr Piper’s speech of last night follows.**
- **Mr Col Roach, President of Bonnells Bay Progress Association can be contacted at 0412 401533 to talk about a coordinated community request for greater Police numbers.**

LAKE MACQUARIE POLICING

Mr GREG PIPER (Lake Macquarie) [6.24 p.m.]: Police working in the Lake Macquarie Local Area Command are weighed down by an excessive workload caused by an inadequate authorised strength, an even smaller number of officers effectively working, a challenging geographic area, and inadequate facilities. The residents of Lake Macquarie do not receive the police staffing to which they believe they are entitled. I have brought these matters to the House before, particularly in regard to the poor level of staffing, and yet the situation remains much as I first described in May 2007.

The Lake Macquarie local area command covers the local government area of Lake Macquarie, now the third most populous local government area in New South Wales, with an adjusted estimated population of over 200,000. The current authorised strength of the Lake Macquarie Local Area Command is 213 officers, but the actual strength is only 210. This level of staffing is greatly eroded by the fact that there is an effective operational strength of only 177 when absences for leave and other reasons are taken into account. There are 79 local area commands serving the State's population of almost seven million people; therefore the average population per command is 88,000.

Lake Macquarie local area command serves a population 2½ times the State average and faces logistical challenges to service the 92 suburbs and villages spread around much of Lake Macquarie's 175 kilometres of shoreline. Clearly, managing the local area command is a major undertaking, one that must be adequately and equitably resourced. The Minister for Police advises that the New South Wales Police Force has an authorised strength of 15,556. With a State population of 6,980,000, I calculate that the police to population ratio is 1:448.

Lake Macquarie Local Area Command, with an authorised strength of 213 for a population of 200,000, has a police to population ratio of 1:938, less than half the State average. This is utterly inequitable and is a situation the Lake Macquarie community is completely dissatisfied with, as the Government should be. This lack of adequate police numbers accounts for much of the concern felt by residents and, most importantly, it accounts for much of the unreasonable work stress felt by serving officers. I am told by serving police that being effectively understaffed by 36 officers is making a difficult job even harder, with all remaining staff left to carry an increased workload. It is understandable that this shortage of staff and poor working conditions is affecting staff morale.

Yesterday I asked the Minister for Police whether he supports an increase in numbers for the Lake Macquarie Local Area Command. The Minister responded that it was the Government's job to resource the Police Force but not to interfere in the running of it. I respect and support the view that a Minister should not interfere in the running of departments, but I believe there is a moral obligation to ensure they are operated efficiently and equitably. The area covered by the Lake Macquarie local area command corresponds exactly with the City of Lake Macquarie, which is the third-largest of 142 local government areas in New South Wales. The latest data from the Bureau of Crime Statistics shows that this area is in the top 50 local government areas for four of the 14 categories of crime.

Understandably, Lake Macquarie residents who are victims of the offences of motor vehicle theft, break and enter non-dwelling, stealing from a motor vehicle or stealing from a retail store could conclude that they are suffering these crimes to subsidise the higher police presence in other areas. The New South Wales Police Force's website describes local area commands as "...the backbone of the NSW Police Force ... your local police". Whilst this can be easily accepted as a valid statement of the Police Force's organisation, it calls into question the provision of a less than equitable level of staffing for the Lake Macquarie Local Area Command. I have previously called on the Government to provide greater numbers of police for the area. Following the Minister's recent visit, I now repeat that call and specifically ask the Minister to champion the cause of an equitable provision of police numbers for Lake Macquarie with the Commissioner of Police.

There is no valid reason for the Lake Macquarie local area command to continue to be understaffed. The Government, while deferring to the commissioner on day-to-day operational matters, cannot escape the fact that the Government and the Minister are ultimately responsible for the provision and deployment of police resources. Lake Macquarie residents will not give up on this matter, and I hope that all local Members of Parliament work together to secure a better deal for local police and residents. In closing, I acknowledge and thank the hardworking members of the Lake Macquarie Local Area Command who, despite a lack of numbers, poor facilities and a difficult geographic area to patrol, continue to provide excellent service to the residents under their protection.