



Tackling Copper and Scrap Metal Theft in South Australia



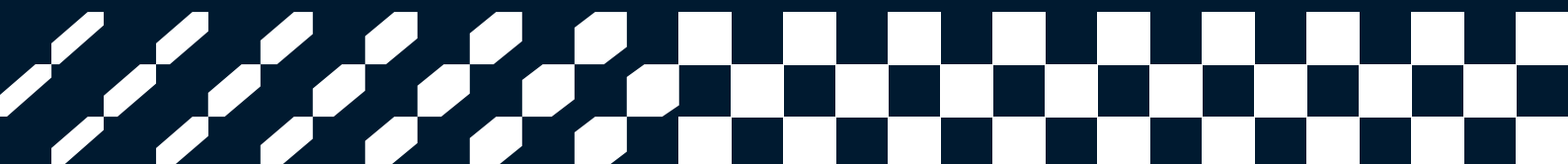
yourSAy Consultation Report
September 2025



SOUTH AUSTRALIA POLICE
SAFER COMMUNITIES



Government
of South Australia



Executive summary

The South Australian Government is committed to addressing the issue of copper and other scrap metal theft in South Australia. In line with this, the government is considering potential reform to the state's laws aiming to prevent and reduce this type of theft.

The government consulted on proposed 'standalone' legislation to prevent scrap metal theft to make it more difficult for criminals to sell stolen scrap metal.

The proposed legislation would focus on providing mechanisms for the effective regulation of the scrap metal industry.

Who we heard from

The discussion paper was published on yourSAy for a three-week public and stakeholder engagement process from 4 - 25 March 2025. The yourSAy page received 975 visits and 17 comments, with a further 10 written submissions provided directly to South Australia Police.

Responses were received from community members, scrap metal and building industry members, recyclers and government agencies.

Key themes from the consultation

Feedback strongly supported:

- scrap metal industry legislation and regulation
- seller verification
- traceable payment methods
- recording transactions.

Concerns were raised about:

- impositions on scrap metal businesses
- licensing fees
- prohibition on cash transactions.

Feedback identified some areas requiring consideration in the development of any proposed Bill. These areas include:

- clear definitions relating to scrap metal
- enforcement of legislation and responsible agency.

Some feedback received during the consultation was beyond the scope of any proposed Bill but has been captured and will be considered during future policy and regulation development.

Looking forward

Overall, respondents were supportive of the proposed reform outlined within the discussion paper and the development of legislation and regulation of the scrap metal industry.

Introduction

Background

Theft of scrap metal, in particular copper and catalytic converters, across the South Australian community has an ongoing and significant impact on the state, causing extensive damage, widescale interruptions to community services, risks to community safety, and substantial repair costs.

Data suggests that instances of scrap metal theft continue to rise, severely impacting the ability of providers to deliver on commitments to consumers. This type of theft is reportedly costing some businesses tens of thousands of dollars a week in both replacement and preventative measures – this is without considering costs associated with delays to construction caused by theft, and the resources required to coordinate remediation. This cost is exacerbated by a high level of under-reporting within the community, as the value of the metal stolen per incident can often be relatively low preventing any viable financial recovery through an insurance policy. As well as cost, the theft of scrap metal can create significant safety issues with thieves leaving live wires exposed on construction sites.

The lack of legislation and regulation of the scrap metal industry within South Australia has made scrap metal an easy target for theft. As it stands there is no requirement for dealers or sellers to verify where scrap metal has been obtained, therefore providing little deterrent to its theft. Transactions involving scrap metal are largely anonymous due to the lack of verification and cash-based operations.

How we engaged

The discussion paper was published on yourSAy for a three-week public and stakeholder engagement which ran from 4 to 25 March 2025. Visitors to the 'Tackling Copper and Scrap Metal Theft in South Australia' yourSAy site were invited to read the discussion paper available on the site and provide feedback to help inform the Government's decision whether to create laws and regulation relating to the scrap metal industry.

The consultation was open for contributions for three weeks and 975 visits, 17 comments to yourSAy, and 10 written submissions were recorded.

Responses were received from South Australian community members, scrap metal dealers and recyclers of varying sizes and locations across the state, and members of the building industry in metropolitan and regional locations in South Australia.

Responses were published on the yourSAy page for public viewing unless the author nominated to remain anonymous, instead opting to email the South Australia Police Licensing Enforcement Branch directly.

What we heard

Overarching comments

Stakeholders from the scrap metal and building industry, as well as South Australian community members, generally agree that legislated regulation is required to provide increased controls on trading in scrap metal in South Australia to reduce theft and associated illegal activities.

As anticipated, there was mixed support across the contributions received and a variety of perspectives on the reform proposed within the discussion paper. Overall, public feedback was supportive of the development of standalone legislation to help prevent scrap metal theft and make it more difficult for criminals to sell stolen scrap metal.

Feedback from the scrap metal industry was mostly supportive of the development of legislated regulation within the industry. Stakeholders reported obstacles faced in New South Wales and Queensland when scrap metal laws were enacted and provided suggestions to overcome these hurdles.

Concerns were raised in relation to impositions on scrap metal dealers with respect to prohibition on the use of cash and cheques and the requirement for scrap metal dealers to upload transaction details to a digital portal within a specified timeframe.

Builders and community members were overwhelmingly in favour of the development of legislated regulation. It was evident this was because of the cost associated with the theft of scrap metal and related damage it causes.

A variety of suggestions from individuals and stakeholder entities were made, including recommendations on:

- recording transactions on digital systems
- a review of compliance across the industry
- an appropriate enforcement agency.

Looking forward

Overall, respondents were supportive of the proposed reform outlined within the discussion paper and the development of standalone legislation to prevent scrap metal theft and make it more difficult for criminals to sell stolen scrap metal. The feedback provided through stakeholder correspondence and public consultation has provided insight into the elements required within any proposed scrap metal legislation and corresponding regulations to assist in tackling the theft of scrap metal.

It is anticipated further consultation will take place to ensure that any proposed legislation is fit for purpose and properly considers the needs of the community, the scrap metal industry, and those responsible for ensuring compliance.

