

## Editorial

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I am privileged to introduce the first volume of the *International Journal of Rural Crime*. The journal, which will be produced annually, includes refereed articles and book reviews and, it is anticipated, in future volumes will provide a forum for policy makers and practitioners to showcase rural crime and disorder issues and responses.

This first volume incorporates papers first given at the *International Conference on Rural Crime*, sponsored by the Centre for Rural Crime, University of New England, Australia, which was convened in November 2006 in Armidale. At that conference, academics from around the world debated a wide range of law and order issues facing rural communities. It may, then, seem surprising that so little academic attention has been devoted to crime in rural areas. As Donnermeyer argues, the Chicago school of criminologists identified crime with urban living, as a problem arising as societies transformed from *gemeinschaft* to *gessellschaft*. Yet, as he goes on to evidence, there are a multiplicity of ruralities, varying in cohesion and their capacities for generating social capital, and even where *gemeinschaft* operates it can have its dark side (see Barclay, Donnermeyer and Jobes 2004). Australia is a classic example of a country where rural crime rates are often above those in the cities (Hogg and Carrington 2006). However, elsewhere where average rates are lower there are considerable variations, with crime hotspots in some types of rural area, as demonstrated by Mawby.

Crime and disorder problems in some rural areas mirror those in the cities. In other cases, such as farm crime or theft of endangered species, offence types may be moulded by the rural environment. In either case, crime prevention issues may be qualitatively different from those facing criminal justice agencies in the cities. Byrne's paper on the threat of agroterrorism provides a neat illustration of this. In a rather different context, Baker's discussion of policing industrial disputes in rural Australia highlights the divided loyalties of local police officers and hints at the problematic legitimacy of the police in following years, a point echoing that raised in the aftermath of the British miners' strike in industrial villages and small towns. Steels' paper at first sight hold rather less international parallels, focusing as it does on crime and disorder problems among Australia's still largely rural disadvantaged indigenous population. However, in arguing for a restorative justice programme that is both community based and inclusive, Steels raises issues that are immediately relevant to urban justice systems across the world.

This indeed encapsulates the main *raison d'être* of this journal. The nature of rural crime and policy responses has been largely ignored by urban criminologists, and therefore warrants its own international voice. At the same time, the issues raised are not exclusive to the rural but provide wider lessons for urban criminology, policing and penology.

## References

Barclay, E., Donnermeyer, J.F. and P.C. Jobes. 2004. 'The Dark Side of *Gemeinschaft*'. *Crime Prevention and Community Safety: An International Journal* 6: 7-22.

Hogg, R., and K. Carrington. 2006. *Policing the Rural Crisis*. Sydney: The Federation Press.