

Graeme Prince
140 Tannis Road
LARPENT 3249

Ph/Fax: 03 52338295

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Executive Officer
Ms Kristen Murray
Rural & Regional Services & Development Committee
Level 8, 35 Spring Street
MELBOURNE 3000

Dear Ms Murray,

Inquiry into the cause of fatality and injury on Victorian farms

I make this submission to the Inquiry into the cause of Fatality and Injury on Victorian Farms.

I believe there are significant issues in relation to the causes of farm accidents which result in fatalities and injuries on Victorian farms. As a dairy farmer and user of a range of farm equipment for 40 years I believe my experience qualifies me well to make comment to this Inquiry.

➤ ATV's.

These vehicles were originally designed and made for recreational purposes, not Australian farm working conditions. I believe ATV engines are too powerful, up to 700cc's, for the design of the vehicles. The power available in relation to the present narrow wheel base width, and the height of the centre of gravity of the vehicle creates an unstable operating environment. This current design coupled with inexperienced operators is a major influence in farm accidents.

The use of the ATV's on Australian farms has expanded extensively. As well as extensive use in stock movement practices, farmers carry too much weight on them (eg spray tanks, tool boxes, towing of various equipment of differing sizes and weights etc) and the ATV design is inappropriate to accommodate such usage. Once again operators who have little or no experience or training in the use of ATV's and the equipment they use with them are a major influence in farm accidents.

A redesign of ATV's in relation to Australian working conditions would be considered an appropriate action to make them safer.

Vehicle maintenance and operator education and training is an important part in reducing farm accidents. However, convincing our farming community to take training courses is a challenge. I suggest that for first time ATV purchasers participation in an approved standardised training/education program be encouraged.

➤ Tractors.

The standard of some new tractors on the market today, I believe, need more attention to their design.

I believe some tractor designs are creating many accidents – these accidents include those which result in injuries and death.

Statistics indicate the major causes of deaths and injuries with tractor accidents is by run overs.

The present access steps and wheel covers on some tractors are poorly designed.

Cabin interior design and comfort is an area which needs addressing too. By this I mean seats, operating panels (gear levers, hydraulics etc) are poorly positioned and designed. They are inconvenient to use. Seat comfort is inadequate (arm rests are too low – creating back support problems, seat swivel is inadequate and seats are sometimes too bouncy).

PTO covers are generally poorly designed. In some cases PTO covers are not big enough to operate PTO shafts with clutches on them. Also, shafts cannot be serviced while still coupled to the tractor. This is one of the reasons PTO covers are removed and left off tractors, therefore exposing dangerous equipment and encouraging bad operator practise.

However, I believe that due long operating hours, operator fatigue is one of the biggest problems.

➤ Front-end Loader education and operator registration

Nearly every farm in Victoria would have a front-end loader on it.

At present there is in Victoria an accreditation compliance certificate available which is not Nationally accredited.

I believe front-end loader operator education should be linked to the current National front-end loader operator licensing system which would give an operators license to all users. This would then provide the flexibility for all license holders the qualification to operate a front-end loader in any State in Australia.

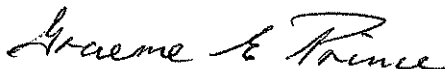
I also believe that all licence testers should have the same qualifications and give the same instructions, across Australia.

➤ Suicides and Farm Fatalities.

The most recent statistics* available for the years 1991 to 2001 show rural deaths recorded as suicides. I would like to see some research done to discover how many of the deaths recorded as farm fatalities are in fact suicides.

* Appendix 1

Yours faithfully,



Graeme Prince

Introduction

We are all aware of the devastating and traumatic effect of suicide on the families of people who take their lives. The sad fact is, despite so many endowments, Australia has one of the highest suicide levels of any nation in the world, particularly in non-metropolitan areas. There is no consistent reason why someone would take their own life, other than they feel they have reached the point of hopelessness.

The statistics contained within this report are stark, but the one statistic that brings home the problem of suicide in Australia is the comparison of road fatalities to suicides. The suicide totals of the last decade have far outstripped the total of road fatalities.

We all know of the heartbreak and trauma that road fatalities bring to families and local communities, particularly when it is a loss of young life. So often a rural community will feel the effects more, because everyone will know the family involved. Yet, exceeding this toll and bringing equal grief to family and communities is the suicide rate, which also, like the road toll, has its high periods during the year such as the Christmas holiday period.

Therefore, as much attention should be given to the tragedy of suicide as a serious social concern, as is given to the tragedy of the road toll.

This paper outlines the many support programmes already in place. Since 1997 the rate of suicide in Australia has fortunately decreased. This can be in some part attributed to the increase in support programmes provided by the Federal, State and Local Governments and private organisations. Many of these programmes are as much targeted towards the family and friends as they are towards people contemplating suicide.

The decrease in suicide rates since 1997, whilst too high on world comparisons, is still an encouraging sign that the tide can be turned on this social problem. However, much more needs to be done.

Senator Julian McGauran
National Party, Victoria

FINDINGS

- Table one illustrates that Victoria constitutes approximately 25% of all suicides in Australia over the 1991-2001 period. The highest year for suicide in Victoria within the ten-year period was in 1991 with 26% of the Australian total.
- Table two shows that rural Victoria constitutes approximately 25% of all suicides over the specified ten-year period in Victoria. The highest year for suicide in rural Victoria was 2000 with 35% of the Victorian state total.
- Table three demonstrates the number of suicides between 1991-2001 in Australia. The percentage of suicides per year in Australia is approximately 9-10% of the total 10 year figure for Australia (the ten year period being 100%). The highest year was 1998 with 10.2%.
- Tables four and five illustrate the suicide rates as they relate to gender both in Australia from 1991-2001 and Victoria. The tables show that both nationally and state based, the male suicide rate is approximately 60% higher than females. The highest total for males in one year is 81% and for females 25% (2000).
- Tables six, seven and eight look at the rate of suicide over the period 1991-2001 for the age group 15-24 years old. Table 6 looks at the percentage of young males and females across Australia as a percentage of the total. It shows that the rate is decreasing for both males and females, but males are still higher.
- Table 7 looks at the rate of suicide amongst the ages of 15-24 in Victoria. It demonstrates that the figure is decreasing to a percentage in the low twenties. The highest rate was in 1993 at 27% of the total Australia figure for the same age group.
- Table 8 illustrates the rates of suicide for 15-24 in rural Victoria. This figure is higher than the Australian and Victorian total, with percentages set at the high twenties.
- Table 9 provides a comparison of the national road toll statistics compared to national suicide rates. In all of the years included in the study (1991-2001) the number of suicides was higher than the number of people killed on Australian roads.
- Table 10 provides a comparison of the Victorian road toll statistics compared to the Victorian suicide rates. In all of the years included in the study (1991-2001) the number of suicides was higher than the number of people killed on Victorian roads.
- Table 11 is an international comparison of Australia and other countries, based on suicide rates per 100,000 from 1981-1993. It shows that Australia is relatively high, at number 5, placing Australia higher than America, England, Germany and several other large scale western countries.

SUICIDE RATES

Suicide Rates – Victoria 1991-2001

YEAR	TOTAL	%
1991	607	26%
1992	557	24%
1993	497	24%
1994	511	23%
1995	566	24%
1996	500	21%
1997	669	25%
1998	579	22%
1999	552	22%
2000	511	22%
2001	541	22%
TOTAL	6090	

Table 1 - % taken from Australian total for corresponding year

Suicide Rates – Rural Victoria 1991-2001

YEAR	TOTAL	%
1991	154	25%
1992	144	26%
1993	135	27%
1994	120	23%
1995	138	24%
1996	128	27%
1997	181	27%
1998	154	27%
1999	175	32%
2000	181	35%
2001	134	25%
TOTAL	1644	

Table 2 - % taken from Victorian total for corresponding year

Suicide Rates – Australia 1991-2001

YEAR	TOTAL	%
1991	2360	8.9%
1992	2294	8.6%
1993	2081	7.8%
1994	2258	8.5%
1995	2368	8.9%
1996	2393	9%
1997	2720	10.2%
1998	2683	10.1%
1999	2492	9.4%
2000	2363	8.9%
2001	2454	9.2%
TOTAL	26466	

Table 3 - % taken from Australia ten year total

GENDER RATES

Suicide Percentages – Gender Australia 1991-2001

Year	Male	Female
1991	78%	22%
1992	79%	21%
1993	81%	19%
1994	81%	19%
1995	79%	21%
1996	81%	19%
1997	79%	21%
1998	80%	20%
1999	80%	20%
2000	79%	21%
2001	79%	21%

Table 4 - % taken from person total for Australia

Suicide Percentages - Gender Victoria 1991 -2001

Year	Male	Female
1991	78%	22%
1992	80%	20%
1993	81%	19%
1994	78%	22%
1995	78%	22%
1996	78%	22%
1997	79%	21%
1998	77%	23%
1999	80%	20%
2000	75%	25%
2001	76%	24%

Table 5 - % taken from Victorian male/female totals

TEENAGE RATES – 15-24

Australia 1991-2001

Year	Male Total	Male %	Female Total	Female %
1991	376	20%	86	17%
1992	378	21%	77	16%
1993	345	20%	55	14%
1994	374	20%	57	13%
1995	350	19%	84	17%
1996	351	18%	56	12%
1997	416	19%	93	16%
1998	364	17%	82	15%
1999	309	15%	71	14%
2000	263	14%	75	15%
2001	276	14%	63	12%

Victoria 1991-2001

Year	Total	%
1991	114	25%
1992	115	25%
1993	109	27%
1994	102	24%
1995	104	24%
1996	95	23%
1997	99	19%
1998	103	23%
1999	75	20%
2000	80	24%
2001	65	19%

Table 7

Rural Victoria 1991-2001

Year	Total	%
1991	25	22%
1992	34	30%
1993	29	27%
1994	31	30%
1995	27	26%
1996	28	29%
1997	31	31%
1998	26	25%
1999	19	25%
2000	25	31%
2001	19	29%

Table 8

Road Fatalities – A Comparison

Australian Totals 1991-2001

Year	Road Fatality Total	Suicide Total
1991	2113	2360
1992	1974	2294
1993	1953	2081
1994	1928	2258
1995	2017	2368
1996	1970	2393
1997	1768	2720
1998	1755	2683
1999	1763	2492
2000	1822	2363
2001	1736	2454

Table 9

Victorian Totals 1991-2001

Year	Road Fatality Total	Suicide Total
1991	503	607
1992	396	557
1993	435	497
1994	377	511
1995	418	566
1996	417	500
1997	377	669
1998	390	579
1999	383	552
2000	407	511
2001	444	541

Table 10