

RESPONSE TO PETITION

Petition Number: 562
Petition Sponsored by: Wendy Lovell
Directed to: Hon Melissa Horne MP
Tabled on: 18 June 2024

Petition Grievance:

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council the anger and frustration felt by very large numbers of local residents and users of the Pyrenees Hwy between the Calder Fwy and Castlemaine because of a recent unexpected and unexplained reduction in the speed limit to 50km/h for nearly 7 kilometres before Castlemaine, including a section of nearly 2 kilometres where the speed limit has been reduced from 80kph to 50kph. The concerns and objections of the petitioners include the following.

- (1) The introduction of a 50kmh limit does not meet the requirements in almost every respect of the Department of Transport Speed Zoning Technical Guidelines.
- (2) There was virtually no community consultation by the Department, contrary to Section 2.4 of the Department's Speed Zoning Policy.
- (3) In 12 years, according to Victorian Road Crash Data, there have been only 2 accidents on that section, with no serious injuries recorded.
- (4) The new limit is causing alarming and dangerous levels of tail-gating, dangerous overtaking and abusive behaviour.
- (5) Noise has increased, especially use of loud air-brakes by heavy transport trucks supplying Castlemaine.
- (6) The 50km/h limit causes local people going about their work, business and family responsibilities enormous frustration to drive so slowly for kilometres through national forest and semi-rural properties for no apparent reason.
- (7) There are already signs of an economic impact on business in Castlemaine and Chewton as many residents of the region, particularly east of Castlemaine, shop elsewhere.
- (8) It is a cheap - and ineffective - solution to the 700m section of concern as the Pyrenees Hwy enters Castlemaine.
- (9) It is seriously anomalous - bordering on incomprehensible - in comparison to two other important highways into Castlemaine where the speed limit remains at 60kp/h through very much denser residential, school and business areas.

Petition Action:

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to immediately reinstate the speed limits in force before the change, but also to introduce sensible safety measures for pedestrians in the short section of the Hwy leading into Castlemaine.

Reply:

The recent lowering and rationalisation of the speed zone from east of Chewton to Castlemaine was undertaken to improve safety following several concerns raised by community.

In undertaking this review, the Department of Transport and Planning engaged with key stakeholders including local police, Council and a local advocacy group representing Wesley Hill and Chewton.

Speed zones are determined in accordance with the Speed Zoning Guidelines to provide an appropriate balance between safety and mobility, with consideration given to factors such as the safety record of the road, volumes of different road users, number of access points along the route, nature of the road environment, adjacent speed zones, and other characteristics of the road.

As was outlined when the speed changes were announced, there was a higher-than-expected reported crash history of 18 accidents over a five-year period. This included 1 fatality and 8 serious injuries. The accident types varied along the section of the Pyrenees Highway that has been subject to a speed zone change.

Anecdotal reporting from the community and key stakeholders also indicated that the crash history was much higher than the reported count that was kept through Departmental records. In addition, development, and number of access points east of Chewton were also key considerations.

The speed change adds around 90 seconds to the journey time.

The Department of Transport and Planning is continuing to monitor the 50km/h speed zone for effectiveness and compliance.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Melissa Horne', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Hon Melissa Horne MP

Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation

Minister for Local Government

Minister for Roads and Road Safety

Minister for Ports and Freight