

the residents of this State will appreciate the effect of the amendments to the Town and Country Planning Act which were agreed to by this Parliament in 1968.

*The sitting was suspended at 6.26 p.m. until 8.4 p.m.*

**The Hon. H. A. THOMAS** (Melbourne West Province).—I should like to draw the attention of the Legislative Council to a matter of public interest and of public safety. I refer to the compulsory wearing of seat belts by taxi drivers. Except where special circumstances warrant an exemption, I fully support the legislation for compulsory wearing of safety belts. Having regard to the evidence that has been produced in support of them, I do not think any responsible person would be opposed to the wearing of safety belts. The available evidence on the question certainly emphasizes that the practice is worth while.

For good reasons, the legislation relating to safety belts prescribes an exemption for certain categories of drivers, including milk carters. However, taxi drivers, who are professional motorists, are compelled to wear seat belts. I believe taxi drivers should be exempt from the requirements of the legislation. The Motor Transport Union, representing taxi drivers, has submitted to the Minister of Transport a case for exemption for taxi drivers from the wearing of seat belts. Having been associated with the taxi industry for more than twenty years, I do not speak lightly on this question. The experience that has been gained since the inception of seat belts has proven that taxi drivers represent an additional group of professional drivers who should be exempted from the Act. Taxi drivers, through their professional association, have advanced various reasons in support of their request for an exemption, and I shall not canvass this ground. However, from my experience in the industry over the years, I shall submit a few reasons why in the public interest and in the interests of safety the Government

should give favourable consideration to the request that taxi drivers should be exempt from the requirement to wear safety belts.

Honorable members should realize that taxi drivers, who drive motor vehicles constantly, both during the daytime and at night, become professional in their work. As professional drivers, they are conscious of the dangers of driving at excessive speed and they are familiar with the causes of accidents. It is interesting to note that the incidence of accidents, particularly fatal and serious accidents, is very low among taxi drivers because they realize that if as a result of an accident their vehicle is out of action they will be out of work. These matters are constantly borne in mind by taxi drivers who are also conscious of the fact that if they lose their driver's licence, perhaps because of an offence involving alcohol, their livelihood will be affected.

Taxi drivers who are wearing safety belts find it difficult to operate a two-way radio or the fares meter; it is also difficult for them to open doors for their passengers or to open the boot for articles of luggage. Although these reasons are important, there is a more compelling reason why taxi drivers seek an exemption from the wearing of seat belts. I refer to the fact that the wearing of a seat belt places a taxi driver in a position of disadvantage in the event of his being attacked. It is generally not realized by the public that many types of people travel in taxis. Apart from the decent citizens, other persons who are not so decent hire taxis. I have in mind criminal types of persons—the human vultures—who will wait for an opportune moment to attack a taxi driver. I do not raise this matter lightly, nor do I speak simply to be dramatic.

During the past few months, two Melbourne taxi drivers have been murdered. Twelve months ago in my province, a taxi driver was fortunate enough to be able to stop his car,

get out and run away in a zig-zag fashion while one of the passengers in his vehicle fired at him with a gun. If this driver had been wearing a safety belt, he could easily have lost his life. Taxi drivers claim, logically I believe, that if a person with evil intent is seated beside or behind a driver who is wearing a seat belt, he can grab the belt and thereby harness the driver to his seat. A person who intends to act in this manner has usually planned what he intends to do. If he is seated in the rear seat, he can hook his foot in the safety belt and harness the driver in position.

I received information, which may be well known to some honorable members, that the New South Wales Government intends to bring down legislation operative from 1st October next for the compulsory wearing of seat belts. The Chairman of the Metropolitan Transport Council of Sydney, Mr. Norman Lake, who authorized me to use his name, stated that taxi drivers and their passengers will be exempt from the requirements of the legislation. In an interesting article in the *Sydney Sun-Herald* of 17th January of this year, under the heading, "Taxis needn't fit seat belts", the writer states—

Taxi drivers and their passengers would be exempted from wearing car seat belts in New South Wales the Transport Minister, Mr. Morris, said yesterday.

In the interests of safety, I should like my plea to be referred to the Chief Secretary and Minister of Transport, who, I understand, are currently conferring with the Transport Regulation Board and the police on this question. I trust the honorable gentlemen will take into consideration what has been said on the subject in this Chamber tonight.

**The Hon. R. W. MAY** (Gippsland Province).—In participating in the debate on the motion for the adoption of an Address-in-Reply to the Speech of His Excellency the Governor, I should like to reaffirm my loyalty, and that of the constituents of the province which I have the honor to represent, to Her

Gracious Majesty the Queen. Before dealing with the various matters, I propose to express regret at the retirement of certain heads of Government instrumentalities in Victoria. I refer in particular to Mr. Ian O'Donnell, the former Chairman of the Country Roads Board, and Sir Willis Connelly, who for a long period of time was Chairman of the State Electricity Commission. While Mr. O'Donnell occupied his position as Chairman of the Country Roads Board, much splendid work was carried out throughout the State, and under Sir Willis Connelly's chairmanship, the State Electricity Commission linked the remote areas of the State with the electricity reticulation network. On behalf of my party, I wish these gentlemen well in their retirement and hope they enjoy good health.

Parts of Victoria are passing through a particularly trying time. The Government has seen fit to declare certain drought areas. In these districts in the past few years there was a drought, followed by bush fires and then abnormal rains which ceased in February of this year. Since then, drought conditions have prevailed. It is depressing to meet the people in these districts and see the ravages which the drought has wrought on the stock. These people have suffered great hardship. It is difficult to realize that Nature can define a pattern such as that which exists in Gippsland at present. The line of demarcation is so remarkable that it is almost unbelievable. In one area rain has fallen and there is luscious growth, but this tapers off into drought conditions.

I express my appreciation for the step which the Government took in declaring these areas to be drought areas and in extending certain concessions. Of course, the concessions are not nearly sufficient to meet the existing situation. One only has to visit the area to realize that in the Tambo Valley the drought has probably been most severe. The logical place to move stock from that area to pasture is over the Alps to the