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From: Inquiry into Overtaking Bicycles POV eSubmission Form
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Inquiry Name: Inquiry into the Road Safety Road Rules 2009 (Overtaking Bicycles) Bill 2015

Mr Peter Robinson
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SUBMISSION CONTENT:

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To the committee:

Thankyou for the opportunity to say something on such an important subject.

My interest in passing distance laws goes back to my experience of riding a bicycle in Sweden.

Much has been said, quite rightly, about the bicycle paths in that country. The extent of the paths in and around cities and towns is amazing and the quality to someone like myself who has also seen those of the Netherlands and Denmark is that the Swedish paths are generally superior. The Swedish have adhered to the twin approach of those three countries as to bicycle safety which are separated infrastructure and laws to restrain the behaviour of motorists. There is no emphasis on head protective devices. Sweden appears on many lists in these top three safest countries to cycle.

It is of my experience of the Swedish motorists which I want to describe.

The deferentiality of the motorists there to cyclists is quite astounding to Australians until one learns that it is possible to be refused a Swedish drivers licence even if already a competent driver if one has not shown "awareness and consideration for cyclists".

On several occasions I had found drivers would wait patiently even if I was not aware of them till they were sure of what I was intending to do. Going through town on paths all a cyclist would have to do approaching a crossing was make eye contact with a driver to indicate he/she was crossing and the driver would be compelled to stop. A certain priority is given to the bicycle user.

But it is what happens on the open roads there that is most relevant to us in this inquiry.

Drivers are required to pass cyclists carefully. In all road situations, where there is no separated lane, when the cyclist hears the driver approach from behind invariably the cyclist hears the sound of the engine speed lowering. If the road is wide and clear this is less pronounced as the driver goes to the other lane. But in all situations where the lane is shared the driver noticeably decreases speed.

The effect on the feeling of safety for the bicycle rider is profound. The rider is made completely aware that he/she has been seen by the driver.

One comes away from a long ride in the Swedish countryside feeling different about being a bike rider. A

ride on a country road becomes a much less daunting, frightening experience.

Contrast this to the experience of a friend of mine riding through similar country on a fundraiser ride here in Gippsland who was passed close and fast by a big 4wd with a boat trailer attached. He was able to confront the driver further up and was told, "Well, you dont pay rego!" as if that meant the rider was fair game. The driver was indicating he was oblivious to any sense, and definitely any law, that care needed to be taken around a vulnerable road user like a bicycle rider rightfully sharing the roadspace. Many of our drivers display this attitude including the younger ones who have more recently recieved driver training.

A passing distance law will go a long way to addressing such behaviour. In the safe bicycle riding countries of Europe such as I have experienced, a driver does not pass at speed unless appropriate clearance has been given.

This is the experience for Australian bicycle users which has to become normal - the sound of the engine lowering in an approaching vehicle in the same lane. And the expectation that the driver will pass at an appropriate distance.

This will go a long way to re-normalising cycling in Australia with the attendant health, environmental and financial benefits for the whole community.

Led by bike concious societies in Europe, passing distance laws are becoming commonplace throughout the world and other states of Australia and are getting statistical results.

Our policies regarding cycling have not all been all that good for many years. We have only emphasised head protection without a clear statistical benefit when separated infrastructure and laws to require drivers to take care are what makes the difference.

A passing distance law is a way to begin a real change for the better.

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File1:

File2:

File3: