Lowering the probationary driving age to 17 years and tackling transport and other barriers to youth employment and study

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Introduction

Victoria Police welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee (the Committee) on lowering the probationary driving age to seventeen.

The Legislative Council asked the Committee to review and table a report in Parliament on this matter by 30 November 2016.

The terms of reference of the review are as follows:

(1) the impacts of lowering the probationary driving age in Victoria to 17, including
   (a) reviewing the licence structures in other Australian States, particularly the probationary driving age;
   (b) assessing the links between the existing 18 year old probationary driving age and high youth unemployment in regional areas;
   (c) reviewing the impacts of separating the legal driving age and legal drinking age;
   (d) considering relevant international licensing models and the positive and negative impacts of such; and
   (e) assessing the correlation between a reduced probationary driving age and the road toll;

(2) the adequacy of current transport infrastructure and services available to people of non-driving age, particularly in regional Victoria;

(3) strategies to remove barriers for people of non-driving age to access employment, study and training.

Victoria Police and partner agencies have adopted the Safe System model for road safety\(^1\). This model recognises that road users will make mistakes, however road trauma should not be accepted as inevitable. Within the safe system model, the impact of a collision is severely reduced or negated by safer roads, safer vehicles, safer speeds and safer people. This holistic approach aims to achieve the vision of all road safety partners: no road deaths and serious injuries. It takes into account the interaction between roads, vehicles, speeds and road users.\(^2\)

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\(^2\) Ibid
Response to Terms of Reference:

Victoria Police welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Law Reform and Road and Community Safety Committee which has commenced an inquiry into lowering the probationary driving licence to 17 years. The following constitutes the Victoria Police submission to address the terms of reference, for sections 1(a)-(e).

1(a) Reviewing the licence structures in other Australian States, particularly the probationary driving age

Victoria introduced a new Graduated Licensing System (GLS) in 2007-08. Victoria is currently the only Australian State with an 18 year age limit for obtaining a Probationary licence and consequently has the highest age of 22 to obtain a full licence. All other jurisdictions, except the Northern Territory which has an age of 16 ½ years, have a minimum probationary licence age of 17 years with varying degrees of restrictions on peer passengers, night driving, minimal provisional period and supervised driving hour requirements.

Victorian annual road deaths of 7.8 per 100,000 population in the 15-24 age group is the lowest for comparable states, with the Australian median of 9.2.

Surveys conducted with learner and provisional drivers under the old (pre 2007) and the new Victorian GLS, was combined with an analysis of victim collision data to identify key trends in serious road trauma involving novice drivers before, during and after the introduction of the GLS. The study examined the collision involvements of drivers in their first year of provisional driving. It identified a reduction in the casualty collision involvement of drivers aged 18-20 in the first year of holding a provisional licence, and a significant reduction in fatal and serious injury collision involvement.

While a GLS is unique to each Australian jurisdiction, the framework of beginning with a learner permit period, followed by a provisional licence with restrictions, is the path followed by most states and territories. Restricting beginner drivers by using the new Victorian GLS and maintaining the current 18 year age limit for obtaining a

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3 Healy, D, Catchpole, J, Harrison, W., Victoria’s graduated licensing system evaluation interim report February 2012
4 South Australia’s Graduated Licensing Scheme (SAGLS) – Initiatives to Protect Young Drivers a Discussion Paper 2011 DPIT, 2011
5 Ibid
6 Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics (BITRE) (2013) Young Adult Road Safety – A Statistical Picture, Information Sheet 51, BITRE, Canberra
7 Healy, D, Catchpole, J, Harrison, W, Op Cit
8 Ibid
9 Australian Graduated Licensing Scheme Policy Framework (AGLSPF), 2014

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probationary licence complement each other in reducing road trauma.\textsuperscript{10} The introduction of GLS and longer minimum learner periods in New South Wales and Queensland have resulted in increases to the median age at which young people are licensed.\textsuperscript{11} The median age in New South Wales is now 18 years and 4 months. In Queensland, 49\% of Probationary P1 licence holders are 19 years or older.\textsuperscript{12}

1(b) Assessing the links between the existing 18 year old probationary driving age and high youth unemployment in regional areas

There are numerous factors contributing to youth unemployment rates in regional Victorian areas and whilst transportation has been identified as an issue, research has indicated this only plays a small part.\textsuperscript{13} A review undertaken in the United Kingdom identified that although many jurisdictions have implemented Graduated Driver Licensing, no evaluations have reported the employability of young people as being adversely affected.\textsuperscript{14}

It is recommended that further consultation should be sought with local stakeholders to remove transportation barriers that impact the employment opportunities of non-driving age youth in rural and regional areas.

1(c) Reviewing the impacts of separating the legal driving age and legal drinking age

There is currently a clear separation between the legal driving age and the legal drinking age due to the zero Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) restriction placed on Learner and Probationary licence holders. Even though these events coincide at 18 years, a new trend is emerging in Melbourne that indicates a changing demographic, in that young people are becoming less likely to hold a driver’s licence, and if they do hold a licence, they drive less. A journal publication by Alexa Delbosc and Graham Currie, explores empirical analysis on demographical data that indicates a link between young adult demographics and their living arrangements. Analysing travel survey data between 1994-2009 indicated that full-time employment and child-rearing are generally associated with higher levels of licensed young adult drivers.

\textsuperscript{10} Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, Highway Loss Data Institute. Licensing teenagers later reduces their crashes. 2008
\textsuperscript{11} AGLSPF, Op Cit
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid
\textsuperscript{13} Delbosc, A, Currie, G. Changing demographics and young adult driver license decline in Melbourne, Australia (1994-2009) (2014)

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The publication suggests that the current generation of youth are more likely to be undertaking part-time work and/or study whilst living at home. This now represents a decrease in licensed young adult drivers.\textsuperscript{15}

All Australian jurisdictions have zero BAC limits for learner and probationary licence holders. These have shown to be effective in significantly reducing alcohol related collisions. Table 1 below indicates the minimum age a young person can drive with up to 0.05 BAC, taking into consideration the varying lengths of provisional licenses and the minimum licensing ages across jurisdictions. \textsuperscript{16}

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\caption{Minimum age a young person can drive with 0.05 BAC}
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|}
\hline
State/Territory & Age \\
\hline
Western Australia & 19 years \\
Northern Territory & 19.5 years \\
New South Wales & 20 years \\
Queensland & 20 years \\
South Australia & 20 years \\
Tasmania & 20 years \\
Victoria & 22 years \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

(Source: AGLSPF 2014)

Tables 2 and 3 below indicate the number of evidential breath tests for ages 0-17 and 18 year old drivers over the past two years. Substantial decreases in the number of detections is clearly evident, however drivers in the solo driving age group are three times likely to provide a positive result.

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\caption{Evidential Breath Tests - Blood Alcohol Concentration (Age 0-17)}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
YEAR & EBT Result Groups & & &  & \\
& 0.020 to 0.049 & 0.050 to 0.099 & 0.100 + & Grand Total \\
\hline
2014 & 11 & 25 & 11 & 47 \\
2015 & 8 & 11 & 9 & 28 \\
\hline
Grand Totals & 19 & 36 & 20 & 75 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{15} Delbosc, A, Currie, G, Op Cit
\textsuperscript{16} Australian Graduated Licensing Scheme Policy Framework, 2014
Table 3

Evidential Breath Tests - Blood Alcohol Concentration (Age 18)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>0.020 to 0.049</th>
<th>0.050 to 0.099</th>
<th>0.100+</th>
<th>Grand Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Totals</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>292</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 & 3 statistics provided by Road Policing Drug & Alcohol Section (RPDAS), with data extracted from the Traffic Incident System (TIS) on 29 April 2016 and is subject to variation. The Chief Statistician has approved these statistics for external release on 3 May 2016. If you wish to obtain a quote or comment in relation to these statistics, please contact RPDAS on (03) 9380 7614.

1(d) Considering relevant international licensing models and the positive/negative impacts of such

The European Union's driver licensing guidelines recommend that licensing for independent driving should commence at 18 years. This is based on research from European countries showing that the risk of collision involvement during the first year of independent driving decreases as the driver's age increases. 17

In the United States, vehicle collisions are the leading cause of death among American teenagers, accounting for nearly 30% of all deaths of 16-19 year olds. Graduated licensing is assisting in reducing this toll by slowly introducing teens to more complex driving tasks as they mature and gain skills. Graduated licensing laws have reduced teenager collision rates in the United States, Canada and New Zealand. However all American states have graduated licensing laws with differing levels of stringency. 18 Most developed and developing countries have adopted, or aim to implement, a GLS in some form.

17 South Australia's Graduated Licensing Scheme — Initiatives to Protect Young Drivers a Discussion Paper 2011 DPTI, pp 7-11

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1(e) Assess the correlation between a reduced probationary driving age and the road toll

Research shows that complex cognitive abilities involving judgement, risk assessment and decision making that enable young drivers to drive safely, develops over significant time. Measures to encourage older age licensing should be implemented. 19 Maintaining the current minimum licensing age at 18 prioritises the safety of young people on Victorian roads in line with The Safe System. 20

VicRoads indicate several reasons young drivers are at higher collision risk, including:

- the nature of adolescent development which effects a young person’s cognitive and perceptual skills;
- lack of driving experience;
- poor ability to anticipate, perceive, identify and react to hazards;
- failure to recognise and assess risk as well as a propensity to take intentional risks; and
- propensity to be over-confident and over-estimate their driving ability. 21

During adolescence there is a complex interaction among physical, cognitive and psychosocial development processes culminating in greater risk taking and novelty seeking behaviours. 22 Risk perception is limited when the decision making environment is expanded to include motor vehicles, resulting in a vulnerability to injury. 23

Age-related and experience-related factors contribute to the over-representation of young drivers in road trauma. In their first years of driving solo, young drivers represent a high vulnerability to being involved in a collision. 24 The highest risk period to young drivers is immediately after licensing and continues up to the age of 24 years. 25 Over the last five years, over 1,600 people aged between 17-25 years

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22 Johnson, S., Jones, V. Adolescent development and risk of injury: using developmental science to improve interventions 2010
23 Ibid
24 Australian Graduated Licensing Scheme Policy Framework (AGLSPF), 2014
have been killed on Australian roads. It is noted that the fatality rate for this age group remained more than 50% higher than for all age groups in 2012. Collision evaluations identify youth as a risk factor and research shows that there are safety benefits in setting the age of solo driving at a higher age. Collision modelling undertaken by the Centre for Automotive Safety Research for the South Australian Graduated Licensing Scheme (SAGLS) Review predicted that increasing the licensing age from 17 to 18 would produce a 20% reduction in collisions among drivers in the 16-24 year age bracket.

While rates of road trauma have decreased for young Victorian drivers over recent years, they remain over represented, especially in the first years of obtaining a probationary licence (Figure 1).

Injury prevention strategies that focus on reducing the risk inexperienced young drivers face is likely to lower the rates of road trauma. The GLS is an ideal example of a developmentally-informed intervention to limit risk during vulnerable times. GLS

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26 AGLPF, Op Cit
27 Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics (BITRE) (2014) Road Deaths Australia, 2013 Statistical Summary BITRE Canberra ACT
28 Ibid
29 South Australia’s Graduated Licensing Scheme(SAGLS) – Initiatives to Protect Young Drivers A Discussion Paper 2011 DPTI, 2011
30 Australian Graduated Licensing Scheme Policy Framework (AGLSPF), 2014

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has consistently been found to have a major impact on reducing the collision rate among young drivers.  

The 0-17 age bracket, which consists primarily of supervised learner drivers in Victoria, has a reduced rate of traffic related offences in comparison to the solo driving age brackets (18 years or greater) as shown in table 4. Young drivers are less likely to commit a traffic offence, and are safer, driving with the assistance of a supervising driver.  

There is a substantial increase in traffic related offences (Table 4) and collision rates (Figure 1), as a driver progresses from supervised (0-17 yrs) to unsupervised (18 yrs) driving under a probationary P1 license in Victoria. From both sets of data available, it can be reasonably predicted that a reduction in the probationary driving age would see offending and collision rates rise in the 0-17 age bracket.

Table 4  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Offence Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2013/14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-17 years old</td>
<td>7,789</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 year old</td>
<td>13,472</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 18 years old</td>
<td>484,167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>24,631</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>530,059</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 – Statistics provided by Corporate Statistics Unit (CSU), with data extracted from the Fixed Penalty Payment Office (FPPO) on 29 April 2016 and is subject to variation. The Chief Statistician has approved Figure 1.3 for external release on 29 April 2016. If you wish to obtain a quote or comment in relation to these statistics, please contact CSU on (03) 9247 6703.

An analysis of collisions where speed was identified as a causal factor has indicated that male drivers aged 18-24 years accounted for the highest proportion of 'at fault' drivers when compared to other age groups.

32 Australian Graduated Licence Policy Framework (AGLPF), 2014  
34 Ibid  
Research suggests younger drivers are more likely to engage in high level speeding due to being willing to take risks while not fully understanding the consequences of their behaviour. Continuing to educate young drivers about safe road behaviour is essential to reducing their contribution to road trauma.

Young drivers in Victoria aged between 18 and 25 years, accounted for 21% of all drivers killed for the 2014 reporting period, however represented only 14% of all licence holders in the State. Reducing the probationary driving age would increase this risk.

VicRoads predicts that the existing GLS in Victoria, over the long term, will reduce youth vehicle fatalities by 12, whilst decreasing serious injuries by 192 and ‘other’ injuries by 596 on average each year.

The Australian Graduated Licensing Scheme Policy Framework (AGLSPF) supports the Victorian licensing age of 18 as an exemplar model and encourages other jurisdictions to have a licensing age of 18. The AGLSPF provides substantial evidence that demonstrates that the older a person is when licensed, the safer they are. Measures to encourage older age licensing should be implemented, either by increasing the minimum age or introducing new requirements which aid delaying driver licensing until substantial supervised driving experience is gained.

Conclusion

Graduated Licensing Schemes worldwide point to maintaining, or establishing, a minimum 18 year-old restriction on solo licensing, combined with a substantial period of supervised driving. Evidence discussed in this submission highlights that the older an individual is when licensed, the safer they will be. Educating and preventing high-risk behaviours by young drivers, as well as developing strategies to protect vulnerable road users, will assist in achieving the State Government's goal of reducing Victoria's road toll to fewer than 200 deaths by 2020 and reduce serious injuries by 15%.

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38 AGLSPF, Op Cit
39 Ibid
40 TAC, Young driver statistics, Op Cit

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Victoria Police appreciates the opportunity to provide a submission to this inquiry. As a leading road safety partner in the reduction of road trauma, the organisation looks forward to reviewing the outcomes of the inquiry. Should the opportunity present, Victoria Police requests the opportunity to respond to the Committee's recommendations in due course.

**Recommendation / Victoria Police position**

Victoria Police does not support the lowering of the probationary driving age to 17.