

Media Release

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Better regulations produce safer vehicles

The Road Safety Committee today tabled a report on the Australian Design Rules, the regulations which define the safety standards that must be met by all new motor vehicles sold in Australia.

The Committee found that there is an urgent need to update both the Australian Design Rules and the process by which they are made.

Mr John Eren, MLA, the Member for Lara and Chair of the Road Safety Committee said today: 'twenty years ago the Australian Design Rules were a major force in helping to drive advances in vehicle safety but they have since become an excuse for mediocrity and are compromising the safety of all road users.

'Ironically, the decline in the Australian Design Rules has coincided with a period of rapid technological change which has produced a quantum leap in the safety of many new vehicle models available today. The introduction of features such as multiple airbags, computer-assisted structural design and Electronic Stability Control has saved hundreds of lives and prevented many thousands of serious injuries in Victoria, not to mention tens of billions of dollars in savings for the Australian economy.

'Accordingly, the question is how many more deaths and serious injuries might have been prevented had the Australian Design Rules actually done their job as a regulatory tool during this time?

Mr Eren said: 'It is disappointing and frustrating that a number of proven and readily available life saving technologies are in fact not required to be fitted to many of the new vehicles currently sold in Australia. The Australian Design Rules have also delayed the fitment, across all new vehicles, of a number of the safety innovations that we now take for granted.

‘Access to proven safety technologies should not be restricted to those who can afford to purchase more expensive vehicles. It is well known that many of our more vulnerable drivers, including the young, the elderly and those of limited means, are more likely to drive less expensive vehicles which, given the minimal nature of the Australian Design Rules, are likely to be significantly less safe in the event of a crash.

There is also a risk of significant market penetration by relatively unsafe vehicles from emerging manufacturers under the Australian Design Rules. This risk was recently illustrated in dramatic fashion by the one star rating given to the Proton Jumbuck and the two star rating given to Great Wall’s SA220 and V240 models. It is very disappointing that the Australian Design Rules have failed to prevent the entry of these vehicles to the Australian market.

Mr Eren said: ‘The Road Safety Committee has made a number of recommendations that would significantly raise the standards of vehicle safety under the Australian Design Rules and create consultative arrangements to ensure that the standards are more responsive to technological advances in the future. Key to those changes is a greater role for the States and Territories in the development and amendment of the Australian Design Rules.

‘We have come so far in the field of road safety in recent decades. Technological advances, tough love legislation and a greater awareness of road safety within the community have all played their part. But it is time for the vehicle regulatory system to resume the role for which it was designed – ensuring that ongoing improvements in vehicle safety are made available to all and that they are made available as soon as possible.

We believe that the recommendations in this report would make a significant contribution to improved road safety for current and future generations of Victorians and for all Australians.’

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