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Subject: INQUIRY INTO MOTORCYCLE SAFETY

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Road Safety Committee

The parliamentary inquiry into motorcycle safety has recently been brought to my attention and I shall briefly address some of the terms of reference.

(a) trends over time in crash types including on-road and off-road crashes, rural/urban breakdown, experience levels of riders (where known) and types of motorcycles being ridden;

The fact that returning riders are one of the highest risk groups is a telling statistic; riding a motorcycle is a skill that requires practice. Without practice a motorcycle rider can not safely operate the vehicle in all circumstances. I believe it would be beneficial for skills based training to be encouraged and possibly subsidised as motorcycle riders who are better trained are then better able to deal with road hazards, they will have faster reaction times, they will react appropriately, and they will have a greater level of awareness and roadcraft.

One thing that is often overlooked is the fact that motorcycle safety has been improving. In 1990 there were 233 motorcycle fatalities in Australia. In 2009 there were 224, and in 2010 there were less than 200. During the same time period the number of registered motorcycles more than doubled. This represents a real world reduction in motorcycle fatality rate i.e. the fatality rate has halved in since 1990.

(b) the changing face of motorcycling and in particular, patterns of motorcycle usage over time including the uptake of motorcycles as an alternative form of transport and its impact on road safety;

As petrol prices rise more people are considering a motorcycle as a means of cheap transport. This will have positive effect on congestion and emissions levels. Additionally motorcycles do less damage to road surfaces. If new riders are given appropriate attitude and, more importantly, skills based training motorcycling will be a safe endeavour.

I firmly believe that safety could be improved by legalising the practice of "filtering." Filtering would be loosely defined as a motorcycle passing between stationary or slow moving traffic (traffic moving less than 40km/h) with a speed differential no greater than 20km/h. With the addition of advanced stop lines for motorcycles (similar to those currently in use for bicycles) this would allow motorcycles to filter to the front of a traffic queue. This will eliminate the risk of a motorcycle being rear ended (9% of all accidents involving a motorcycle)

and will allow motorcycles to separate themselves from the pack of traffic, thus giving them space and removing them from a more hazardous situation. This practice is currently being used to great effect in places such as the U.K., California, Sao Paulo, Belgium, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and many more countries.

The British publication "*Motorcycle Roadcraft*" (*The Police Riders Handbook to Better Motorcycling*), notes the following under the topic of "overtaking":-

When traffic is stationary or moving slowly in queues, motorcyclists can use their manoeuvrability and limited space requirements to make progress. The advantages of filtering along or between stopped or slow moving traffic have to be weighed against the increased vulnerability while filtering.

If you decide to filter:

- Take extreme care
- Keep your speed low- you need to be able to stop suddenly if circumstances change
- Always identify a place where you can rejoin the traffic flow before you move out
- Make yourself visible – consider using dipped headlight
- Be ready to brake and/or use the horn
- Use the opportunity to make progress but be courteous and avoid conflict with other road users

Watch out for and anticipate:

- Pedestrians crossing between vehicles
- Vehicles emerging from junctions
- Vehicles changing lanes or U-turning without warning
- Doors opening
- Reflective paint and studs which could throw the bike off line
- Traffic islands
- Other bikes also filtering

As more motorcycles are on the road consideration should be given to the paint used for road markings. Currently, in Melbourne most road markings are extremely hazardous to motorcycles in the wet. Drivers and those that design the road markings may not realise that a motorcycle can easily lose traction on painted sections such as arrows, lines, and pedestrian crossings. This problem could be easily remedied by using high friction paint. This is widely available, it is already used in bus lanes throughout Victoria.

(c) the attitudes of riders to safety and risk taking including drugs, alcohol, travelling at inappropriate speeds, use of protective clothing and fatigue;

In my experience the vast majority of motorcyclists would never ride after drinking or taking drugs. This is not true for car drivers.

The use of protective clothing is actively encouraged by rider training courses, licencing courses, and most importantly by the motorcycling community. However it must be recognised that it is much safer to prevent an accident from occurring in the first place; this can be done through improving riding skills and roadcraft.

(d) riders and drivers attitudes to each other;

In my experience riders often assume drivers can not see them and ride accordingly. This is due to the fact that the majority of drivers do not actively look for motorcycles and often change lanes without doing a head check. Drivers also often poorly judge the speed of motorcycles; this leads to them pulling out in front

of motorcycles when it is not safe to do so. I also believe that drivers who have never ridden a motorcycle have very little understanding of why motorcyclists act the way they do and what riding is actually like. This lack of understanding is detrimental to the rider-driver relationship.

There is also a fundamental difference between drivers and riders. After attaining a driver's licence, the vast majority of drivers then never seek further training or actively practice driving. This leads to the reinforcement of poor driving practices such as not doing head checks, tailgating, not using indicators, not adjusting to the conditions on the road, etc.

Conversely, motorcyclists constantly seek to improve their riding skills. They attend training courses, track days, and free training sessions are even organised for new riders. Roadcraft is actively practiced and there are even on-road training sessions that address this. If this is further encouraged and subsidised then rider safety will improve.

(h) new initiatives to reduce motorcycle crashes and injuries:

As discussed above new initiatives such as legalising filtering and using high friction paint will greatly reduce motorcycle crashes and injuries. It would also be beneficial to educate drivers about motorcycles.

Regards,

Tudor Sava

