



Submission No. # 37  
Received  
Road Safety Committee

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21<sup>st</sup> June 2011

**Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Motorcycling Safety**

To whom it may concern,

I would like to enter a submission in response to the following terms of reference being investigated by the committee:

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

I believe that on the whole, motorcyclists have a very responsible approach to safety regarding the use of alcohol and drugs when riding, and riding when fatigued. The vast majority of motorcyclists are aware that riding is an activity that demands coordination and full concentration, and are less likely to drink and ride or ride when fatigued.

On the other hand, motorcyclists have different attitudes than some drivers toward travelling at excessive speeds. When speed is described as 'Inappropriate', it has different connotations to different people. For example, some people consider any speed over the posted limit to be 'inappropriate'. Other road users, however, would consider it to mean 'speeds not appropriate to the surrounding environment and conditions'. There are different attitudes amongst the motorcycling population, but as a general rule; I believe many motorcyclists consider current speed limits to be too low, and that higher speed limits would be more 'appropriate' for many roads. This is especially true of regional roads, which most motorcyclists (and many drivers) could safely navigate at speeds greater than the current limits.

Unfortunately, motorcycles can sometimes attract a certain type of person that doesn't fully appreciate the consequences of risk-taking behaviour on the road. Often it is these few who demonstrate irresponsible behaviour such as riding at speeds inappropriate for the conditions or riding without adequate protection. It is often these people who find themselves in the media as a result of their actions, which reinforces the stereotypes that society holds of motorcyclists as reckless or irresponsible. Several recent incidents that have gained media attention were actually relating to people riding stolen motorcycles, a fact which was not emphasised in the media reports.

#### **(d) riders and drivers attitudes to each other;**

I believe that there is a certain degree of animosity between motorcyclists and drivers, for a few reasons:

##### 1. Driver behaviours

Many drivers do not display awareness or consideration of other road users. Dangerous or inconsiderate driving can be observed on a daily basis, which may include behaviours such as:

- a. sudden lane changes, often without indicating
- b. failing to perform head-checks when changing lanes
- c. pulling out of side-streets into the path of oncoming vehicles
- d. failing to adequately control a vehicle due to distraction (mobile phones, applying make-up, adjusting stereo controls, etc)
- e. driving whilst under the influence of drugs or alcohol
- f. tailgating and other forms of intimidation

These driver behaviours have a negative effect on all road users, but the potential consequences are far greater for motorcyclists than other vehicles. Unfortunately, these behaviours are becoming more common on our roads; which puts riders at greater risk and results in an attitude of contempt by some motorcyclists towards drivers in general.

##### 2. Rider behaviours

Motorcyclists often display behaviours that irritate or frustrate drivers. Some examples are:

- a. Lane filtering (riding between stationary or slow-moving cars to get to the front of the intersection): Whilst the vast majority of motorcyclists consider this to be a safe and beneficial (for both the rider and other drivers) manoeuvre, drivers see it as 'skipping the queue' or 'pushing in', and sometimes respond by attempting to cut off the motorcyclist by opening doors or closing the gaps with their vehicle.
- b. Lane splitting (riding between vehicles moving at or near the speed limit): Unlike filtering, lane splitting is considered by many motorcyclists and drivers alike to be a dangerous manoeuvre.
- c. Excessive speed

These behaviours affect the mentality of drivers, which in turn can lead to animosity by drivers towards motorcyclists.

##### 3. Portrayal of motorcyclists in society by the media

Motorcyclists are often portrayed by the media as dangerous risk-takers. This is supported by advertisement campaigns run by agencies such as the TAC, telling society that "It's up to motorcyclists to reduce the risks". This gives the impression that it is the rider's responsibility alone to look after themselves, and that drivers do not have a part to play. This message is interpreted by motorcyclists to mean that the government believes that drivers don't need to look out for riders, where in fact, drivers have a huge part to play in ensuring that motorcyclists are safe on the roads. As a result, motorcyclists feel completely betrayed by the government, and this contributes

enormously to the attitude of animosity towards drivers. In addition, it feeds the stereotype that riders are irresponsible, and influences drivers' attitudes towards riders in a negative way.

**(g) countermeasures used in Victoria, Australia and other comparable overseas jurisdictions to reduce the number and severity of motorcycle accidents with reference to road environment treatments, behavioural change programs and the design and technology of motorcycles and protective gear;**

The Victorian government's overwhelming response to motorcycle safety has been to increase the enforcement of road laws. This has involved numerous police campaigns targeting motorcyclists, which have often involved crackdowns on inappropriate speed, unlicensed riders and unregistered motorcycles, and drink-riding. These campaigns have been a great success or complete failure, depending on who you talk to. From the government's perspective, they have issued fines for the offences previously mentioned. This could be seen as a win for road safety, but motorcyclists don't see it that way. Rather, motorcyclists feel that by targeting a specific road user, the government has simply widened the gap between the two.

To elaborate; although the intentions of these campaigns may be positive on the surface, police have abused them in order to harass legitimate riders who are riding safely. This is demonstrated by the fact that when police have pulled over a rider for a license/breath/registration check, if no offense has taken place, officers have in many cases proceeded to issue fines for petty infringements that have no relation to road safety. These infringements are often along the lines of inappropriate placement of registration labels, aftermarket exhaust systems, rear fenders not being of the correct size and length etc. This sends the message that the government is not really concerned about the safety of motorcyclists, rather that they are simply out to make life hard for us and discourage us from riding.

The other visible response to motorcycle safety has been the advertisement campaigns run by government agencies such as the TAC. As discussed above, these advertisements have not had a positive impact on motorcyclists' approach to road safety; rather they have fuelled animosity and contempt by motorcyclists towards the government and other road users.

With respect to road environment treatments, the condition of roads in Victoria is atrocious. Years of neglect have resulted in a network of roads that are badly surfaced, poorly marked and surrounded by environmental hazards. Whilst work has been done in recent years (e.g. resurfacing of the Monash Freeway), the vast majority of roads frequented by motorcyclists are in a poor state. This is particularly true of regional and rural roads that don't have a high traffic volume.

## **Conclusion**

In closing, I hope my submission has given you an insight into the terms of reference from the perspective of a motorcyclist. I have not made any recommendations as such, but rather I have tried to comment on the terms of reference in order to explain why things are the way they are.

Finally, I would like to state my opinion that motorcyclists are legitimate road users, and should be treated as such. I have not commented on the environmental or economic benefits of motorcycle (or two-wheeled transport in general), but it is clear from the statistics that motorcycling is becoming more popular every year, and the amount of riders on our roads is growing. The Victorian government would do well to consider the opinions of motorcyclists who enter submissions, and act accordingly to any appropriate recommendations raised.

Thankyou for your time and consideration, I look forward to reading your report and the recommendations that form as a result of this review.

Kind regards,

Thomas Wentworth