

# TRANSCRIPT

## ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into motorcycle safety

Melbourne — 17 October 2011

#### Members

Mr A. Elsbury

Mr T. Languiller

Mr J. Perera

Mr M. Thompson

Mr B. Tilley

Chair: Mr M. Thompson  
Deputy Chair: Mr T. Languiller

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Executive Officer: Ms K. Jenkins

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#### Witnesses

Mr R. Wadsworth, statewide recreation and tourism coordinator, and

Mr R. Pitt, trail bike project manager, forests and parks division, Department of Sustainability and Environment.

**The CHAIR** — Welcome to the final session of today's hearing in the Road Safety Committee's inquiry into motorcycle safety. We have received more than 68 submissions since releasing the terms of reference. The purpose of these hearings is to obtain some further evidence from selected witnesses covering the terms of reference. You are reminded that anything you say or publish before the committee is protected by parliamentary privilege. However, once you leave the hearing anything you say or publish outside this room is not so protected.

Hansard will be recording today's proceedings and will provide a proof version transcript to witnesses so that any typographical errors can be corrected. It is then likely that the material will be placed on the web.

I note and am grateful for the number of independent observers in the room, which is reflective of the high interest that the inquiry has been generating.

At this stage I invite you to make some opening comments, after which the committee would be pleased to ask some questions of you. I invite you to introduce yourselves and give your title, for the purposes of Hansard, prior to commencing.

**Mr WADSWORTH** — I am Richard Wadsworth. I am with the Department of Sustainability and Environment, and my role is as the statewide recreation and tourism coordinator.

**Mr PITT** — I am Roger Pitt, trail bike project manager within the forests and parks division of the Department of Sustainability and Environment.

**Mr WADSWORTH** — We thought we would start this presentation with a visual. There has been a lot of talk from what I have seen of the submissions and presentations about off-road riding versus on-road riding. I thought it would be good to show you just what that actually means.

**Mr PITT** — What we will actually see here is vision which is shot by the riders themselves, so it is not edited, sanitised or prepared for public view. With a \$200 or \$300 video camera the riders will take images which they will load on to websites. It is just to give an idea, and Richard will talk through what the riders are doing and where we are going.

#### **Video shown.**

**Mr WADSWORTH** — This is on an open public road through forest. We have a network of around 40 000 kilometres of open public roads, often of a class more suited to four-wheel drives but open to motorised vehicles, and they get a fair bit of use by trail bike riders. With the research we have done and what riders self-report too, whilst they will enjoy that riding, there is also another experience that they seek, which Roger will show a bit later. That is what we would call off-road riding and some people call single-track riding, where riders will create their own tracks through the forest. They are called single track because they are single-wheel ruts through the forest, so four-wheel drive vehicles cannot get down them. They are illegal in the sense that it is an offence under the Land Conservation (Vehicle Control) Act 1972 to go off an open public road. Basically to call something a road you have to be able to get a car down it, and you can see there what an open public road looks like in terms of a dirt road.

Single track is a different beast, and I guess what we do not have and what a number of agencies have reported is good data on your crashes and injuries in that part of the world, so it is a bit of a hidden valley in terms of what happens there, what riders do and what injuries they sustain.

I think we have had multiple submissions now that there is no good data on it, and getting good data on why there are injuries in that environment is critical because at the moment most of the agencies are focused on dealing in the space they are more familiar with, which is the ABS road network, the sealed road network. Accidents and injuries in this part of public land is a bit of an unknown. From what other agencies have said, there is a bit of a snapshot from hospital admissions that it is reasonably significant, but I do not think there are any real hard stats on exactly where it is occurring, the exact nature of the injury, the types of bikes they are riding, all those sorts of things.

We will leave that video presentation there, but for us, we are the land manager and the road management authority across parks and forests.

**The CHAIR** — Just briefly, with that footage, is that something you have just tracked or you have sent people out to film it on your boundaries?

**Mr PITT** — No, this is a self-posted video, which is done by riders — not professional riders, not professional film crew — it is just their own recreational ride which they have filmed.

**The CHAIR** — And you have tracked that on the website.

**Mr PITT** — This is on YouTube, so riders will upload it. This group of about three riders have got probably 40 or 50 such filmed rides which actually show their riding and the kind of riding they do.

**Mr WADSWORTH** — Some of the research we have done shows that riders might spend about 50 per cent of their time on the road network, the dirt roads, but the other half has been going single track, basically getting off the road network and exploring the forest, and they are really passionate about it. Although we regard it as illegal and unregulated and it causes damage to the environment and all those sorts of things, riders are hugely passionate about it and it is very difficult to stop. It is quite common for riders to go out there and use a hybrid of the road network and the single track. What that means in terms of injuries and the like is a little bit of an unknown. That is a big gap in data that a number of agencies have reported.

**The CHAIR** — All right, we can move to questions. We have some that have been provided in part and we will tackle them progressively. What progress has been made by DSE towards addressing the relevant recommendations, if any, made by the Victorian Auditor-General's Office in the report into motorcycle and scooter safety programs?

**Mr WADSWORTH** — I might start, Roger, and then you can fill in the bits I miss. A lot of the recommendations that relate to DSE were about better data gathering and our role in supplementing and informing that process. DSE's primary responsibility is not road safety, that is the remit of other agencies, but we certainly are a key player in terms of being a land manager and a road manager, but in terms of the recommendations of the VAGO report, it was probably around having input and representation in the committees that are going to inform how that data gets gathered.

We do have a role in compliance, and we have played a little bit in the education space, providing and developing information, brochures and videos on safe riding for riders, but we probably would be looking to other agencies to provide a lead in funding for that. It has not traditionally been an area that we have put a lot of time and attention into.

**Mr LANGUILLER** — Thank you both for coming to present evidence to the committee and for your submissions. The Transport Accident Commission's submission referred to a partnership between that agency and yours to begin collaborative work on a safety related program. Would you expand on what this partnership involves and the results hoped for as a result of this partnership?

**Mr WADSWORTH** — In 2006 DSE was funded by government to do a four-year initiative around trail bikes, and it was primarily around community conflicts over trail bike use in the forests and the impact on rural residents with noise and all those sorts of issues. Over that time we did research on riders' behaviours and attitudes, we built infrastructure in the forests for riders to use to move them away from residential areas, promoted riding routes to try to encourage them to ride away from residential areas and developed educational information. We also developed a bit of an enforcement program. We went out there with the police and ran operations. The importance of having the police there was we do not have the ability to enforce powers under the Road Safety Act, so for the police members, in terms of riders being unlicensed or unregistered, their key play is on that, but we play a support role.

We developed some expertise in that space and we developed this with the TAC. That project ended in 2010. As a response to the VAGO report, the TAC thought that it would be good to tap into that expertise again. They have given us some funding to fund a project officer, Roger, for 12 months to do some work, and really that is going to be focused around developing some additional education material, codes of practice and information we are getting to retailers in terms of wearing protective gear, safe riding and those sorts of things; doing some compliance and education activities in the bush so that we can have a visible presence there, meet riders on their turf and talk to them about some of those issues; and also look at the issue of data gathering and input into what

all the data needs are and how that data might be gathered. We would not lead that but we would be representing DSE and assisting that process.

**Mr PITT** — To clarify as to how much has been achieved to date, I only started in that role as of today, so appearing before your hearing is actually the very first part of that. We look forward to a 12-month period, from today, of engaging with riders to deliver a much safer and more environmentally friendly and sustainable approach to trail bike riding on public land.

**The CHAIR** — Have you been issued with any environmentally friendly trail bikes so that you can meet them on site?

**Mr PITT** — We do have a limited number of trail bikes, and we have staff who have undergone training and accreditation. These are our authorised officers; a certain select band. We actually go out and engage with riders, and we find that there is an incredible improvement in the effectiveness of doing that when we can actually talk with riders as trail bike riders ourselves rather than in a four-wheel-drive vehicle. We do have very good engagement when using our trail bikes.

**Mr WADSWORTH** — I would make this point, having seen some of the written submissions and heard various agencies present here, that there has been reference to committees being set up and investigations to look at data gathering and what not. I am not sure if those committees have met, but I think it is really important that DSE feeds into those committees because in the end in terms of off-road riding we are a key player because they are riding on our estate and we have a vested interest in being represented at those committees and making sure that gathering that research is useful.

**Mr LANGUILLER** — Thank you. I have a supplementary question: your partner VicRoads talked about DSE and your responsibility and jurisdiction over 40 000 kilometres, I think you have indicated, of roads and again along the same lines in terms of partnerships, that you lack data in relation to off-road. The Department of Health this morning submitted to us the following if I may put it to you: the number of major trauma cases from motorcycle-related injuries was approximately 300 in 2009–10. And then the Department of Health went on to say that specified hospital admissions from off-road motorcycle accidents have increased by 27 per cent. Specified hospital admissions from on-road motorcycle accidents have decreased by 17 per cent. So they appear to have that data. Do you have a partnership with them? In going back to the question we talked earlier in terms of speaking to each other and acknowledging that, particularly as it appears that off-road has been a very significant part of the overall data about serious injuries as well as fatalities.

**Mr WADSWORTH** — It is an interesting statistic you quote there because there has been success in moving down the reported incidents for on-road bikes but the off-road incidents are going in the other direction. I guess I would be asking: what are the government and the different agencies doing to address that increase in off-road reported injuries? We talk to VicRoads, we work with VicRoads on issues. I guess a measure of success in dealing with this increase in off-road injuries would be: where are we putting our time, effort and resources? Is that reflected in where we spend our money? I suspect, from my point of view, it is probably not. There has been a little bit of research done in that space so they are starting to get a picture.

But what I do not think has happened is that we have shifted where we spend our money, and if we are going to be evidence based, what is the evidence telling us and are we directing funding towards where those increases are or directing that research effort into where there are deficiencies of knowledge. They are my questions sitting on the side of the fence where we have off-road riders and we have those issues. We are certainly looking forward to dealing more with VicRoads, particularly — —

**Mr LANGUILLER** — I am assuming you do not talk to the Department of Health?

**Mr WADSWORTH** — No. I tore out of the *Sunday Age* an article about the fatality reported in the Yarra Ranges where a trail bike rider hit a tree and died. That was reported on Sunday. One of the issues with injuries is that information does not come back to us. We do not keep reports; we do not get data. So as a manager of that public land and that road network — and maybe that is our deficiency, not asking for it — but we do not get the information that says, ‘This is what is happening in the roads you manage and the public land you manage; here are the trends and maybe these are issues that need to be looked at and responded to’.

**The CHAIR** — I see that as being quite a striking issue that you have just commented on, and I would like to make sure that we are able to follow that through. If there is an accident on tracks in the state forest, you are not brought in as part of the accident review process to observe when and how the accident occurred.

**Mr WADSWORTH** — Yes. I guess my point is that it is hard to respond to injuries and instances if you do not have information about their prevalence and where and why they are occurring. So we are pretty much blindfolded in terms of what is happening there. We have not got good data. I guess it has been flagged that that needs to be addressed, and I am hopeful that that will change.

**Mr LANGUILLER** — Just to be absolutely clear, if I may, you do not have a representative on the interagency data quality committee?

**Mr PITT** — That is correct.

**Mr LANGUILLER** — You do not?

**Mr WADSWORTH** — No.

**Mr PITT** — I have a couple of other points to add in here about the increase in the number of off-road crashes. There is no question about the fact that trail bike riding is increasingly popular. More and more people are going riding. More bikes are being sold. We have an increase in the number of very cheap bikes which sell for about \$500 or \$600, which puts a lot more people into this riding area. We also have a transfer of people who have previously been road bike riders but because of their concerns about safety they have a perception it is safer to go trail bike riding and more of those have transitioned to become trail bike riders.

There is also a possibility, and this is anecdotal, that there are people who have previously expressed their mechanical urges to drive hard and fast and who have done it on the road. Because of our increasingly controlled road management, in terms of enforcement, police, speeding et cetera, they are actually seeking that same outlet by going off-road where they can do it without the same fear of being caught for a traffic infringement. This is anecdotally reported to me by riders. In summary, there are more people riding. They are looking for an adventurous, challenging, pseudo-motor sport experience in some cases and it is going to happen that there will be increased injuries due to the increased exposure.

**The CHAIR** — One thing I will raise that has just come to my attention is that with off-road riders it may be that numbers of them may be under-age, so to speak. If one is riding with friends out in the middle of the bush, law enforcement would not be prevalent in those regions and therefore it would be possible for some young kids with a mechanical understanding and an interest in the outdoors to ride from the age of 14, 15, 16 on in the company of friends. Is that something that has been observed?

**Mr WADSWORTH** — We observe it. I would not say we observe it in high numbers. You might correct me, Roger. But one of the things we did come across when we ran forums for trail bike riders was that they felt quite strongly that there should be some form of junior licence so that a son could ride with his father and learn to ride safely and then transition to being a fully licensed rider. I will not discuss the merits of it but I guess I am just trying to reflect the views of people who ride. Some are quite passionate and of the view that that should be an allowable activity. Do you want to comment on the level of young riders?

**Mr PITT** — Yes. The proportion of unlicensed under-age riders was lower than we initially expected to find, and that is referring to state forests. But it appears that the under-age unlicensed riders tend to be found on the urban/rural interface where they will ride from home, so in the outer suburban areas they will ride on vacant land, recreation reserves, adjacent areas of state forest. That is where we actually find the largest proportion of the unlicensed, unregistered riders. The ones who have actually gone on a trailer with their bikes to the state forest 40 kilometres away by and large will have a licence and registration.

**Mr WADSWORTH** — Just commenting on that, we did some enforcement over the life of the 2006–10 program and one thing we did note was a significant rise in the number of recreationally registered bikes. That was quite a significant spike in excess of the rise of motorcycle sales, and I think that was because riders were seeing an increased police and DSE presence out there checking for licences and that drove a proportion or some proportion of riders who might have been unlicensed or unregistered to get licensed but particularly to get registered. So we saw quite a significant increase in recreational registration over the life of that, which says to

me that having some presence out there has some impact. If part of what we wanted to do was to have riders ride bikes that were appropriately registered and roadworthy, then that was a worthwhile outcome.

**Mr TILLEY** — I would just like to discuss with you DSE's research and experience, and in particular I want to separate the issues between those illegal activities such as single-track riding and legitimate riding pursuits in state forests and state parks. Are you able to go into some detail about attitudes, risks, protective clothing and training — those types of things?

**Mr WADSWORTH** — We did some market segmentation of riders to try to get an idea of their attitudes and behaviours, and we came out essentially with four market segments of riders. We provided a copy of that in our research. What we found was that there was a significant cohort of riders who were quite responsible, aware of environmental issues and rode just because they were passionate about being out in the bush. There was a segment that our market researcher called the 'Don't give a damns' who were out there, they did not care about the environment, they did not care about others, they rode for thrills and did not care about their impacts on others. But again that was only one of four segments of riders.

We found that the majority of riders were open to the idea of doing the right thing, even though if you looked at their riding behaviours they were riding illegally in terms of riding on single track, not because they want to break the law but because that was the kind of experience they wanted and that is what gave them greater enjoyment. So in terms of their behaviours, you had a group of people who were mainly just passionate about getting out in the bush and enjoying it. One of the terms the market researcher used to describe their passion for riding single track was 'pathological addiction', which was really just another way of saying, 'Here is a recreational group that are really passionate about what they do, they enjoy it and they want to continue to enjoy it'. So, yes, they were some of the attitudes and behaviours. I am sorry; there was a second part to your question which I have forgotten.

**Mr TILLEY** — Yes, it was just about protective clothing.

**Mr PITT** — I will respond to that. The compliance operations we conducted during the period 2007 to 2010 engaged with approximately 3000 riders. Although we were actually engaging on the basis of other issues relating to education and compliance, we would observe the riders and their protective clothing use. We can actually state that across the board we had a very high rate of uptake of appropriate protective clothing. The number of riders without a helmet out of 3000 was fewer than 10. That is the first thing. But unfortunately some riders think that because that is the only required or mandated item of protective equipment it is the only one that they actually need to wear. That is the only piece of protective equipment required by law. When it comes to regular trail bike riders they all wear boots, protective clothing and most would wear gloves and goggles all of the time.

We have actually found that the riders who can afford it will be wearing good-quality body armour with spinal protection, and increasingly over the last couple of years we have noted the uptake of neck braces and knee braces. Neck braces will sell for a price in the vicinity of \$400 to \$1000, and knee braces will sell for in the range of \$800 to \$1500 a pair. Many more riders would choose to use these items of protective equipment if they were more affordable. Overall the use of protective clothing by trail bike riders appears by observation to be much greater than the use by their cousins who ride on the road.

**Mr TILLEY** — The other part was specifically about training.

**Mr WADSWORTH** — Rider training?

**Mr TILLEY** — Yes.

**Mr PITT** — There does not seem to be much of a rider training process; there seems to be a rider licensing process, and we should not confuse the two.

**Mr WADSWORTH** — For most riders it is an acquired skill. They ride with their mates and develop competency. A more experienced rider will take them out, and they learn through trial and error and the odd crash here and there. It would be interesting to see if riders would take up formal training. There are organisations that do it. There are clubs that run their own training programs that are not regulated and

accredited, but they take riders out and train them up. But generally speaking my perception is that it is mostly a self-taught skill.

**Mr PITT** — My perception, adding to that, is that the riders who are in the lowest-risk cohort are the ones most likely to be prepared to take part in more advanced training. The ones who are at most risk are the ones who are least likely to avail themselves of additional training.

**Mr LANGUILLER** — What do you think, if I may, through the Chair? Do you have a view? Should there be further compulsory training given that, as it appears from not just you but your friends the other agencies, you are responsible for it?

**Mr PITT** — It is quite clear that you can actually get a full licence to ride a 1300 cc motorcycle without ever riding on a road. You can go to an area of training and do your learners permit, get that, and you can go back after another certain period of time and get your P-plate. Then after time elapses you will be qualified to ride and take a pillion passenger on a very high-powered motorcycle when you have never yet ridden on the road. When I compare that to the requirements for training to get a car licence, where you have 120 hours of logged driving experience under different conditions — and this is for a much less vulnerable group of vehicle operators, in a car. The statistics that you have seen today show that very clearly, and yet they have a much more sophisticated system. I am thinking that our motorcycle riders are perhaps getting out on the road with less than the required training.

**Mr WADSWORTH** — This is not our space to speak to, but I will say one thing: riding a trail bike on dirt roads or on a single track requires quite a different skill set to that required for riding on roads. That is one issue. In terms of what training would be appropriate, that is not something I want to buy into. In terms of whether it is DSE's responsibility, I would say no, it is not our responsibility — —

**Mr LANGUILLER** — Whose is it?

**Mr WADSWORTH** — I imagine it would presumably be the responsibility of the agency that issues licences to people. DSE does not issue licences or registration. We put out bushfires and do other nice things, but we do not do that, and we are not about to put our hands up to do it.

**Mr TILLEY** — You mentioned there are 40 000 kilometres of unsealed roads in parks and forests throughout Victoria. Over the term of the research and the recent project, in real terms how many bikes and how many authorised officers were ever in the field to capture and deal with the riding public?

**Mr WADSWORTH** — What was it we had — about 8 or 10 bikes?

**Mr PITT** — We had 9 motorcycles and 32 accredited staff trained to operate the motorcycles. We also conducted compliance operations using other staff with four-wheel-drive vehicles. Our total number of authorised officers who were specifically trained to deal with trail bike compliance, maybe from a vehicle, who went through that training process you had amounted to, I think, about 95.

**Mr WADSWORTH** — In terms of what that translates to on the ground I do not know. Being a visible presence out there, meeting with riders and seeing riders talking to other riders — they were seeing us out there in the bush for the first time in decades to talk about those issues. That had a powerful impact in terms of more riders choosing to go from being unregistered to being registered. Part of DSE's problem is we are not really resourced to do trail bike compliance. We are not authorised under the Road Safety Act, for example, to do licence checks, stop a vehicle, check for registration and those sorts of things. We really do rely on the police to do that. I see that we have a supporting role in terms of we know the landscape and where the road network is, and we work with the police to do that enforcement. Riders are more likely to stop when they see blue than when they see green. Having the police out there meant a much more effective operation, doing it with the lead of the police, if you like.

**Mr TILLEY** — Can I qualify the areas that DSE targets specifically. I know there was some work in the area that I represent, around Yackandandah and Beechworth. There was a police officer in Yackandandah who did substantial work with DSE, and hopefully he will give evidence to the committee at a later stage. What areas were you concentrating on or targeting in particular?

**Mr WADSWORTH** — The 2006–10 project was driven around community conflict. Where we made interventions was where there was high community conflict: where residents had been writing to local politicians or forming resident action groups. In some cases they were taking matters into their own hands. We had incidents of sharpened stakes being driven into tracks, wire being put across tracks at neck height and stuff like that. There were not a lot of incidents but enough to make you a little bit concerned. There was sufficient heat and conflict that government needed to do something. There were issues around the Otways, Paddys Swamp and Pauls Range near Healesville. There was a little bit around Warburton and a bit around Yackandandah. Where else, Roger?

**Mr PITT** — We have also had work in the areas around Mirboo North and Erica, Rawson through to Walhalla. They tend to be areas about 1 to 2 hours drive from Melbourne. Mount Disappointment is one area where we have a large area of state forest, but increasingly it has become almost semi-suburban: rural living allotments in an area where people are looking for peace, quiet and tranquillity.

**Mr WADSWORTH** — Yes, tree changers — people who have different expectations, whereas historically people who lived in that community probably rode bikes and were familiar with it, so it was not an issue. It is also a numbers game. As you get a greater volume of bikes out there the nuisance value increases. We did a fair bit of research on noise and how far noise travels, and we realised just how much of an impact that had. The point I would like to make is it was not driven around safety. We really did not have safety data; that was not the purpose of that funding. If we had good information on safety, we might actually be going to different spots; I do not know.

**Mr TILLEY** — I was at the top of the Pinnabar, boiling the billy and having a lovely old time when a group of boys turned up. They were very professional. Their attitude was very good in relation to the use of the road network in that area. But to turn up at the top of the Pinnabar of all places! Anyway, it was good to see them.

**Mr WADSWORTH** — Yes, they get around.

**Mr ELSBURY** — When I was looking at that video that you were showing us earlier I noticed that the riders seemed to be riding at a speed that I would call hooley-dooley. Is there any actual speed limit in parks when it comes to doing that sort of thing?

**Mr PITT** — One hundred kilometres an hour.

**Mr WADSWORTH** — We are outside the delimited zone, and you would notice, if you go into forest and park areas — —

**Mr ELSBURY** — I would call it something else, but that would be called unparliamentary.

**Mr WADSWORTH** — There are a few areas where there are speed restrictions — coming into built-up areas, camping grounds and those sorts of things. But outside of that you typically do not see speed restrictions, so the default is 100 kilometres an hour.

**Mr ELSBURY** — Almost as far as the throttle can open?

**Mr WADSWORTH** — Yes, but you would be very unwise to do those speeds due to the nature of the roads, the terrain and all those sorts of things. But you are not going to see a policeman with a speed camera out there.

**Mr ELSBURY** — No. I was going to say that you would not have many speed cameras out there, unless they were disguised as a koala or something like that — but highly impractical.

**Mr TILLEY** — Do not give them any ideas.

**Mr ELSBURY** — Watch out, yes; we have got advisers here. But with regard to the groups that are going into the parks, is there any possibility of having escorted troops into the parks? You would have one of your trail-bike-riding rangers who takes in a group and gives them the tour. Then while they are out there, they learn the respect for the place and also get taught a few tricks along the way that they might not know.

**Mr WADSWORTH** — We did. The main point is that trail bike riders, like motor vehicle drivers, are free to use our open public road network, and there are no restrictions on that. As part of the trail bike initiative we did engage some licensed tour operators to run tag-along tours. It was important that they were enjoyable tours, but weaved into that were some of the environmental messages and some of the ride safe messages — you know, personal and protective equipment messages. We used a commercial provider to take those tours and take people on tours to learn some of those things. But you are reaching a very small part of the market, because if you are going to run a tag-along tour, how many are you going to have in a group? It is 10 to 15 people, then you are starting to stretch it a bit; so it is quite a limited reach. It is probably a powerful way of delivering it to a small number of individuals, but not to a large audience — it would be quite expensive to do, I would imagine.

**Mr ELSBURY** — Are you aware of any of the motorcycle safety levy funds being used for off-road projects or in fact DSE off-road projects?

**Mr WADSWORTH** — I looked through the VicRoads submission, because it had an appendix that listed the projects it had funded — I think it was over the last decade; I cannot remember now — but there were only two projects that stuck out to me as being off-road related, and they were research projects. In terms of any of that levy money being spent on what people are loosely terming the ‘off-road environment’, I could not identify any projects specifically. That question would be better for VicRoads.

**Mr ELSBURY** — All right.

**The CHAIR** — What specific outcomes would you like to see from this inquiry?

**Mr WADSWORTH** — I think first and foremost, the gathering of good data. We keep identifying that there are data deficiencies. There is a need to look at how that data is collected and categorised, and to get better data to inform where money gets spent to make safety interventions. Roger knows this better than me, but in terms of collection of injury data, if a rider gets injured deep in the bush and no-one is likely to find him, he is likely to make his way out or his mates will drag him out to the nearest major intersection. If the police then come and record the incident, they will record it where they find that rider, or the ambo will record it to the nearest intersection that has a signpost on it — and that is not going to be deep in the forest.

There potentially is a misreporting of how injury data is reported in terms of its geographical location; I cannot say with certainty, but I suspect there is probably an underreporting, because it can be quite difficult to know where that person got injured or even where you are picking up that person deep within the forest. I think when we are looking at data we need to look at changing the way that data is collected and the way that data is described and sorted. That is so you can meaningfully work out where that accident happened — and I mean exactly where it happened — so that you can work out the underlying land tenure. You can work out whether they were on a road or off a road, what type of bike they were on and all the demographics and information that go with that. At the moment we really are not getting that information. In some cases, I believe, it is not even being reported.

**Mr PITT** — That is right. Unless they result in a serious injury, a lot of the crashes that do occur do not get reported; in fact they usually are only reported if the injured party is going to seek TAC benefits. So if it is a relatively minor injury, even if it is a broken arm, they may not actually report it. Implicit in that there is also a concern that the police may prosecute, if it is identified that they have become injured while committing an illegal act.

**Mr WADSWORTH** — On the other part of my response to that question, what I want to see is data drives more informed allocation of funding to address safety issues. The agencies that have the primary carriage for dealing with safety issues, I guess, fulfil that role. The forest is away from the public eye to some extent. It is outside the built environment, it is outside the sealed road network and it has historically been an area that does not get so much attention from some of the agencies that may have prime carriage for these things — I guess I am saying VicRoads, TAC and the like — but they have a role to play; they have primary carriage of some of these issues. At DSE we certainly want to assist in that area, but they may not be things that we would lead. We would certainly be keen to work with those agencies to address those issues once we had better information.

**Mr PITT** — One example of this in the area of compliance — and the police actually mentioned this — is the fact that we have got a relatively low level of compliance in terms of numberplate display. Where riders are not required to display a plate and are not facilitated to display a plate in a conforming way, it actually seems to

diminish their respect for what is right and wrong and they feel as if they have got a little bit more leeway in doing the wrong thing. That is one area, as the police mentioned, where we have exactly the same experience. Our self-reported data from riders shows that only half the riders display their numberplate in the way that they are supposed to. Others keep it in their backpack or affix it somewhere else, or it is not legible.

**The CHAIR** — Would it be possible to speculate as to the number of licensed drivers with registered bikes?

**Mr PITT** — Yes. We have extrapolated on this, and we understand that there are now approximately 20 000 recreationally registered motorcycles. Both from the data that we have in response to our market survey, which involved 666 riders, and also from our field observations while conducting compliance operations, we have found that approximately 60 per cent of the motorcycles that we engage are full registration and 40 per cent are recreation registration. On that basis, if we have 20 000 with recreation registration, we think there are somewhere in the vicinity of 30 000 full registration motorcycles. That makes a total group of about 45 000 to 50 000 motorcycles that are used for trail riding out of our total population of about 160 000-odd registered motorcycles in Victoria.

**The CHAIR** — Nevertheless, would there be a cohort of unregistered bikes — of people who have mates who have one and they do not quite have the time to get their licence or the finances to register the bike, so they just put it on the back of a trailer and are riding unlicensed and unregistered?

**Mr PITT** — There are some like that, but it is a smaller number than what we expected. What we have actually found is that with a number of motorcycles where you do not see a numberplate and you automatically think they are unregistered, they are registered — they are just not displaying a numberplate.

**Mr WADSWORTH** — The issue here is, we would not allow people to drive a car in the bush without a licence plate. If you saw a four-wheel drive in the bush without a licence plate, you would be going, ‘Hang on, what’s going on here? It all looks a bit dodgy’. Trail bikes will routinely be out there and may not have their numberplate displayed in a compliant way. But they are not doing that because they do not want to be acknowledged or to show their plate; they do it for practical reasons. Because of the way the plates are mounted, they are easily damaged, they break, twist, bend or fall off. They end up getting sick of reattaching it, and they do it in inventive ways. They sometimes use stickers. I have found them stuck up under the mudguard — then they pull the mud away and they go, ‘There’s my plate there’ — or they stick it in their backpack.

The police have raised it. We have raised it. We would like to see, I guess, a more practicable method that allows riders to do the right thing to show their rear plate, just so they can say, ‘I am legitimate. I’m doing the right thing. I have got nothing to hide’. It is of interest to VicRoads, the police and the land management authorities because we can then easily identify them — ‘Yep, that one is showing his plate. That one is not’, and we will concentrate our efforts on the ones that are not. At the moment, because it is not easy for them to practically show their plate, because they keep falling off, they are forced to be inventive about where they put it, and that means you cannot look at a bike in the distance and go, ‘He is registered’.

**Mr PITT** — The issue is the material from which the plate is manufactured. The plate is not really designed to be unsupported and so it does fracture and break very easily. Because it has sharp metal sides, riders also have a perception that if they fall off, they will be subject to getting cut and sliced by the exposed metal of the plate, and these are concerns which come up all the time with riders. They are not seeking to travel anonymously; they are actually fed up with the plates breaking all the time. I can say that from the trail bikes we use and the police use, they have exactly the same experience.

**Mr TILLEY** — In relation to one of the submissions the committee has received, can you confirm with us that there may have been some recent changes restricting rider access to state forests, and if so — if there are any changes — can you go into some detail for the committee?

**Mr WADSWORTH** — In 2006 to 2010, because that project was driven around reducing community conflict, and in some areas it was primarily in Paul Range up near Healesville and Paddys Swamp down in the Otways, where there was quite a network of single-track and four-wheel drive tracks, they were quite popular and were getting a lot of use from riders and causing a lot of nuisance for residents. From go to whoa on a weekend they were getting a lot of trail bike noise, and they wanted something done about it. We ran the consultation process, but from a four-wheel drive point of view — but more particularly at trail bike rider point of view — we closed tracks. We closed the tracks because we needed to put a buffer in place between residents

and where people were riding. When you close tracks and four-wheel drivers and trail bike riders lose access, they are not happy. We did not do that in a lot of places, but we did it where we felt we needed to in order to protect residents from going spare and being driven crazy by noise. Riders and four-wheel drivers lost out, but local residents won out, and unfortunately that was the compromise we had to make. It has not been wholesale, and we tried to compromise where we could. So there were trade-offs, but there is still a net loss for them.

**Mr TILLEY** — There is a lot of the stuff that the department puts out that is publicly available, such as retail maps. Does DSE publish a network for rider trails and some of these new trailer unhitching points and things?

**Mr WADSWORTH** — We have got an online mapping product called Forest Explorer Online. There is a bit of a time lag between getting the data and getting it on, but that shows all of our public road network. If you want to know what our open public road network is, it is on there. You can zoom in, zoom out, click layers on and all of that kind of stuff. All our recreation sites and our tracks are on there, but from a rider point of view it is not going to show single tracks, because they are illegal, and it may not show the entirety of the road network, because in some cases there are tracks that DSE might regard as being those that essentially we are not maintaining. We call them unmaintained roads that are just kept on a database because we might need them for fire-protection purposes, send a dozer down them to burn back off and whatnot. But certainly with our open public road network, the majority of it is shown on the Forest Explorer Online.

**The CHAIR** — To my mind there is some level of concern in relation to the fact that at this stage you do not have immediate awareness or appraisal of where accidents are occurring on tracks that are maintained by you. Do you think there would be merit in this matter being raised with relevant ministers sooner than later so that there was some sort of parks appreciation of some of these issues?

**Mr WADSWORTH** — I do not think we want to be the data gatherers. I do not think that is a role we can fulfil. But what we would like to do, I guess, is have input into how that data is captured and made available. At the moment we do not get it. There are reasons for that, because it is not being collected in a way that can then usefully be fed up to us. I would assume that there is enough grunt in the VAGO report and possibly what is going to come out of this committee to highlight the fact that the data gathering and data sharing needs to be a lot better. I will leave it up to the committee to make that kind of determination. We are keen to get better data, but we are not keen to be the collectors of that data.

**The CHAIR** — Noted. Where did that accident occur that was reported on Sunday?

**Mr WADSWORTH** — I only have what was reported in the *Sunday Age*. It says a ‘trail bike rider has hit a tree and died in state forest near the Yarra Ranges’. He was a 17-year-old from Frankston, ‘riding in rugged terrain near the town of Glenburn’. They had to get four-wheel drives to reach him, but they could not revive him. I just pulled that out because it was pertinent.

**The CHAIR** — So you picked it up. Our staff are collating details of accidents that are reported in the press. I think it would be unfortunate if Parks Victoria did not have some idea of the tracks that it maintains, not from the point of view of any legal liability issues but rather just to know where some of the inherent risks may be.

**Mr PITT** — It is common for us to only get this information by reading media reports and then investigating it further ourselves.

**Mr WADSWORTH** — I guess being able to identify hot spots would be useful.

**The CHAIR** — Yes, and while there is an element of logic that correlates with the nature of track and speed, one might think there can be some merit in having a wider understanding just so that there can be safety messages generated for the trail bike riders associations so they can better educate their own members.

**Mr PITT** — That is actually one of the issues here — among all the trail bike riders, we calculate that only about 4 or 5 per cent are members of a club or an association. Because it is an informal, unstructured recreation, about 95 per cent are not members of any affiliated or organised groups. It is a very loose-knit organisation, so it is not really very easy to maintain those channels of communication. We do so through engagement with riders on web-based chat forums.

**Mr WADSWORTH** — It is primarily a recreational activity that people do with friends, family and whatnot. It is not through a club structure so much. It has fairly low representation. One point I would note is that people have mentioned parks a couple of times. I work for the DSE and we directly manage state forest and you are probably more likely to find trail bike riders in state forests because I guess they feel that national parks and the like are more for other things and they are not as welcome, so they would probably tend to use the state forest network a little bit more, because they get bothered a little bit less.

**Mr PITT** — But there is also a better track network in the state forests. A number of them have been used historically for timber harvesting and so tracks still remain from timber harvesting operations as well, so there is really a greater number of tracks that are available for riders in the state forests.

**Mr TILLEY** — I will throw in one quick one, if I may. In the experience and research from the DSE, have you been able to find out if off-road riders have used emergency beacon locators — EPIRBs. Have you come across incidence of that out in our state parks and forests?

**Mr PITT** — A limited number of reports anecdotally. We are aware of a trial in one district where riders could actually, for a small fee, hire an EPIRB for a weekend's use and return it. That sounds really good for riders who are heading into remote areas where mobile phone reception may not be available.

**Mr TILLEY** — Taking that into consideration, it is probably a completely separate issue, but with the number of times where search and rescue has had to be deployed directly because there is a case of injury when somebody is injured out in the field and they have not returned to where the trail or something, do you have any data that has been collated in relation to the number of times search and rescue or DSE has had to be involved in a recovery?

**Mr WADSWORTH** — Anecdotally I hear about it as I travel around and talk to staff. They say, 'There was a medivac on the weekend from Delatite Arm' or wherever. Reporting is not formalised in any way, so I could not pull a report out and say that there had been this many, so no.

**Mr TILLEY** — But would it be fair to say that if there was any data that DSE had captured, that would certainly be one part of it? If the resources of DSE had been deployed into the state parks and forest network, there should be some data there that you would be able to provide us.

**Mr WADSWORTH** — But a lot of it depends on when it is happening. If it is happening on a weekend and our offices are typically unmanned, then it will go to the police. It would not come through us. Often we may not be aware of it. It kind of depends.

**Mr TILLEY** — All right. No worries.

**The CHAIR** — In the absence of there being any other questions at this stage, Mr Wadsworth and Mr Pitt, thank you very much for your evidence this afternoon. I commend you. It has been clear and informative and will assist the work of the committee. For you, Mr Pitt, in your first day on the job, I commend you on your contribution and I look forward to your knowledge base being extended in your second day on the job.

**Mr PITT** — Doubling it!

**The CHAIR** — A very impressive contribution, thank you.

**Committee adjourned.**