

TRANSCRIPT

ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into motorcycle safety

Ballarat — 16 November 2011

Members

Mr A. Elsbury

Mr T. Languiller

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Witness

Sergeant R. Humphrey, Ballarat highway patrol, division 3, western region, Victoria Police.

The CHAIR — Welcome to the public hearing of the Victorian Parliament's Road Safety Committee, which is inquiring into reducing death and injury arising out of motorcycle accidents. Anything you say within the precinct of this hearing has parliamentary privilege, and statements are immune from litigation. Should you wish to make any comments in camera — that is, in private — we are happy to take that on board as well. I do not expect that necessarily to be the case, but there may be certain circumstances which would give rise to that.

We have had a number of hearings in Melbourne, and yesterday we were in Geelong. There are a range of issues that we have been dealing with that might relate to off-road riding and the incidence of accidents there; the disproportionate accident and fatality rate relating to motorcyclists; the role of lane splitting, filtering, road design, road barriers, protective gear and the merits of mandating or otherwise any items of gear; the role of older riders and the increased take-up of motorcycling by a range of older riders; training practices and retraining practices; the use of transponders on the front of a motorbike; data-logging equipment and the possible role of airbags; braking systems; and cost recovery matters as they might relate to insurance. Those are some of the matters we have dealt with.

In terms of the role of a parliamentary committee, the Road Safety Committee has had a long history of leading road reform in Victoria, which has then become a template for road reform around the world. Examples of that relate to the mandatory wearing of seatbelts as well as drink-driving and drug-testing operations which have seen the road toll from 40 years ago reduced from some 1034 to hopefully well below 300 this year, and hopefully it will be reduced on a continuing basis into the future.

It might also be noted that there is also a campaign aiming to reduce the 33 900 deaths and injuries that occurred on Australia's roads last year and to see that further refined. For every fatality, there are some 50 injuries. We have noted also that a range of accidents have occurred. Yesterday one motorcyclist gave evidence to us that he had lost three friends. One was due to rider error, where the motorcyclist, who knew the Great Ocean Road very well, failed to take a bend in a manner to which he was usually accustomed and was collected by a car; another of the examples was where a lady was inadvertently sideswiped by an motorist; and in another a motorcyclist was collected from the rear in what I think was a concertina collision.

We are dealing with the reality of the consequences of road deaths — the cost and suffering for families, which lasts a lifetime, as well as the costs of dealing with road trauma. In the case of death the cost has been estimated at about \$100 000; in the case of quadriplegia and a lifetime on life support it can rise up to multiple millions of dollars. It is in this context that we are gathered here today to work out where there are wise ways forward in relation to our terms of reference.

I am very grateful for the attendance today of Sergeant Ross Humphrey from Victoria Police, Ballarat. We had some good contributions from Victoria Police in Melbourne and also in Geelong yesterday, when practical operational insights were accorded to us by a couple of the police officers in that district who work on the road patrol covering the Geelong-Colac-Otways region. Some keen insights were presented. I am not sure to what extent they have been reported in the *Geelong Advertiser* today, but if we have not heard about it thus far, it may not have been too contentious.

I welcome Sergeant Humphrey. We have five questions before us that we would like to ask. Perhaps I will open up to you for some general remarks about your lifetime experience of when you have had to confront road accidents. In my own electorate this week the local police have had to deal with a 16-year-old killed in a road accident, a suicide and an attempted suicide. The role of policing has its harsher realities, but in your own policing career there may be some instances or examples that might add to your contribution to the committee in relation to when you have seen and attended at road trauma during your time in the police force. We will keep it informal, but I will then ask my colleague Mr Tilley to take us to the first question and we will work through the committee.

Sgt HUMPHREY — My name is Ross Humphrey. I am a member of the Ballarat highway patrol.

The CHAIR — What is the region that covers that area?

Sgt HUMPHREY — Our region is the western region. We are division 3, so we cover — —

The CHAIR — It goes through from Ballarat to where?

Sgt HUMPHREY — We cover as far as down as to the Melton area — not including Melton, but to its border — and we cover what we call the Middle Creek on the border of the city of Ararat. We probably go down south as far as the township of Rokewood. In the north-western area we go out to Avoca, Landsborough and those sorts of areas.

All I would like to talk about generally is our local area and the issues concerned with our local area. You could say that Ballarat, or the Ballarat region, has high usage of on-road and off-road motorcycle areas. As far as off-road is concerned, there are a number of forests and old quarry areas that are used by off-road motorcycle riders. With on-road we find we get a lot of people travelling to the area. There are various roads or sections that are very popular, especially through Daylesford and Trentham and even heading up towards Avoca. That area is very popular with the on-road motorcycle riders.

My experience has been that the statistics in Ballarat may be a little bit different to other areas. We are finding that the serious injuries and fatalities occurring in the area are mainly with people outside of the area who do not live in the area. We tend to trend a little bit differently to other areas. I know other policed areas are concentrating on education programs for their local people, but we do not feel that would have the same effect in this area. The collisions that I have personally come across are usually on-road with more mature-aged riders — you could say in probably the 40 to 50-year-old bracket.

Mr LANGUILLER — If I may interrupt you, do you attend the off-road collisions and fatalities?

Sgt HUMPHREY — We do attend them, yes. It is in our charter for the highway patrol to attend all fatal collisions involving motor vehicles, which includes motorbikes, so we attend those as well. I have been in this area for 20 years, and there seems to be a trend where we have a number of off-road collisions that are spasmodic at odd occasions. Touch wood, we have not had any serious ones lately, but the on-road ones seem to be consistently always in the system.

If you want me to give a summary, it appears to me that the on-road collisions usually involve the mature-age rider. That is my opinion; it is probably not necessarily that of Victoria Police. It will be that the mature-age rider has probably not ridden regularly and is probably a person who is not necessarily aware of the extra fatigue involved in riding a motorbike. Two or 3 hours on a motorbike is obviously more fatiguing than driving a car for 2 or 3 hours, and they are probably not used to that level of fatigue. They are not necessarily at high speed, but as you stated before, they may come to a bend in the highway or road, and they do not necessarily negotiate that bend. There have been collisions or fatalities in the past where there has been high speed involved. That is usually straight off the road and into trees or other objects that are on the side of the road.

Mr LANGUILLER — Do you have adequate resources to attend off-road bike incidents, accidents and stuff like that?

Sgt HUMPHREY — We probably do not have the resources, no. We have made an attempt in this area, together with the combined councils of the area, to develop a local off-road group or unit, as part of which members could be trained and get equipment. That has probably been going for about 10 years now, but it really has not got off the ground.

Mr LANGUILLER — So do you not have an off-road bike and an officer trained to actually attend or patrol those areas?

Sgt HUMPHREY — No, not locally. We have, I believe, a bike. As to whether we have someone trained to use it, we probably do not have someone trained to use it.

Mr LANGUILLER — It is a large area.

Sgt HUMPHREY — Yes.

The CHAIR — Do you not have a person trained to use a bike?

Sgt HUMPHREY — No. I believe we do not have a person trained to use it. We only ended up with one bike, which is not sufficient anyhow. We need at least two people to be out in the bush or remote areas when patrolling for that sort of thing.

The CHAIR — Are there any other comments you would like to make at this stage?

Sgt HUMPHREY — I do not know whether you want to move onto protective clothing. It is my experience that I see a lot of young riders, particularly in and around town, who obviously do short trips from one side of town to the other, riding in shorts, T-shirts and thongs. Obviously we are very concerned that if they do come off the bike, they will do some sort of serious injury to themselves.

I have been riding motorbikes myself since I was in primary school. I have just recently given up riding a motorbike. I sold my last bike; I do not think I will get another one. I actually appear in that statistic of — what is it? — 233 per cent, the 50 to 54-year-olds, so I do not want to be a statistic in that regard. That is why I have given up my motorbike. I realised that when you are doing long hauls or if you like doing trips or like to go out for the day, it is fatiguing. It is not as though you are a young person any more, and I think it is probably that age group that is pretty well caught out.

The CHAIR — We can start some questions now, unless there are other issues you would like to speak to as well.

Sgt HUMPHREY — No, probably not locally; they are more general.

Mr TILLEY — Ross, thanks for coming along this morning. I appreciate you giving your time to be here. My first question relates to drilling down on local initiatives. In your long period of the last 20 years in the area, has it been with the highway patrol for the entire 20 years?

Sgt HUMPHREY — Yes.

Mr TILLEY — So you are well versed with what has been going on in relation to road safety in your area over a long time.

Sgt HUMPHREY — Yes.

Mr TILLEY — In saying that, there are often frustrations because you are trying to deliver a service to the Victorian community, particularly enhancing road safety. Perhaps you could add a bit of a wish list. There might be some initiatives that might be currently running in the area or some that you might have given your thoughts to or have wanted to raise. Earlier you were saying that over the previous 10 years you were trying to get some trained and qualified operators to operate a solo off-road motorcycle. Can you expand on some of those thoughts?

Sgt HUMPHREY — I think we hit the nail on the head again with the *Geelong Advertiser*. The Ballarat highway patrol previously, until the last couple of years, had only had six personnel. The Bacchus Marsh highway patrol, which is part of our area, has only four personnel, so that is a total of 10 for this whole area. There is obviously an issue with resourcing. We believe motorcycle targeting has not necessarily been a high priority because we have not had enough resources to do it. As I said, we have had meetings with councils to try to get motorbikes and equipment in order to do it, and then we find we do not have the staffing levels to man it.

Mr TILLEY — So it is one and five in Ballarat, and the other four are where?

Sgt HUMPHREY — At Bacchus Marsh.

Mr TILLEY — Is that one and three there?

Sgt HUMPHREY — One and four. I am talking just ORs.

Mr TILLEY — Okay.

Sgt HUMPHREY — If you want to split it, Ballarat has one senior sergeant, one sergeant and six ORs. Bacchus Marsh has one sergeant and four ORs.

Mr TILLEY — So in rough terms you probably only have five cars all up.

Sgt HUMPHREY — Yes.

Mr TILLEY — As you would appreciate, large parts of Victoria have many thousands of kilometres of off-road areas, and we have seen a high incidence of off-road crashes, whether they be serious or otherwise. I suppose with the lack of resources available to you to address that, is there anything you would like to concentrate on if the resources were available to you rather than having to rely on, say, the special solos?

Sgt HUMPHREY — Our statistics for that off-road area are very limited. Usually we only get involved when there has been a serious collision or a fatality. I know of collisions where people have been injured and gone to hospital and they have not necessarily reported to police. As I said, it has only been a focus for us if there has been something of a more serious nature. I just wanted to say that. Sorry, what was your question again?

Mr TILLEY — About having those other resources. One thing I did not mention is whether your air wing is doing some aerial stuff in your area.

Sgt HUMPHREY — Using other resources?

Mr TILLEY — Yes.

Sgt HUMPHREY — We have used the special solos in our area. Once again, they are very much tied up with the number of areas they have to patrol. I know you are asking about off-road areas. We have concentrated on trying to intercept these motorcycle riders going into the areas; we have targeted operations. Obviously we speak to them. Usually they come up here with trailers with motorbikes on them, and they pull up at certain locations. We usually try to target them as they are offloading their bikes. Once they are in the bush we are very limited because we cannot go into the bush with cars. It is just a matter of checking that they have a licence and that they are registered. Once we have done that and we leave — —

Mr TILLEY — When you are doing those sorts of things, do you have any data that reflects the number of riders with unregistered motorcycles, the number of unlicensed riders and those sorts of things?

Sgt HUMPHREY — I can only say from personal experience that you are more likely to get a higher hit with an unlicensed rider on an unregistered motorbike than what you get with a motor car.

Mr TILLEY — Part of this is an opportunity to understand that the highway patrol has a great concern for the motoring and motorcycling public and that their safety is a great concern to you and very near and dear to your heart. You have probably seen some tragedies on our highways and other roads throughout your lengthy career. We have had three days of public hearings in Melbourne, and yesterday we had a public hearing in Geelong. What is coming across is that certain groups suggest there are areas of government, police and other sections of the community that are seen as not necessarily favourable to the motorcycle rider. Could we discuss and hear some commentary in relation to your thoughts on motorcycle riders in general?

Sgt HUMPHREY — I believe we started this idea of a motorbike unit because of Moorabool. Moorabool was doing a trial after having a big problem with motorbikes, particularly around what must be small farmlets and new housing estates down in that area, causing a nuisance and annoyance to people. They would come out of the bush and ride on the roads in a careless manner or on the wrong side of the road and display unruly behaviour. That was the cause of the councils getting together. Ballarat has a similar problem, but not necessarily so close to the residential areas as Moorabool has.

Mr TILLEY — So effectively if you are going to take any affirmative action, it will be as a result of receiving information about certain behaviour or if there is a complaint or a heightened incidence of certain types of crashes?

Sgt HUMPHREY — We usually find — which leads back to the younger riders — that around the school holiday periods we are getting a lot of under-age people riding motorbikes. They obviously have access to bikes. They obviously cause a lot of annoyance with noise or repetition in and around residential areas, and that is usually when a complaint comes through.

Mr TILLEY — Is it reasonable to say that it is that section of people that take risks which gives the rest of legitimate, well-intentioned motorcyclists a bad name across the state in relation to a perception of motorcycle riders in general?

Sgt HUMPHREY — No. Are you saying there would be a prejudice of bias towards motorcyclists? No.

Mr LANGUILLER — Thank you for coming and for your submissions. My question is: are there any other initiatives that you would like to see implemented?

I want to give you a bit of background. We have heard from your colleagues in Victoria Police yesterday in Geelong — and it was interesting to me because I am not a former police officer like my colleague Mr Tilley, so I do not know how it works — that there are four major highways, but two are not patrolled. They can only patrol two at a time. For nurses there are nurse-patient ratios, and in schools you may have teacher-student ratios of 22 or 27 — whatever that may mean. Could you enhance my knowledge and tell me how that would work in your case? Is it on the basis of population or on the basis of the thousands of kilometres that you need to patrol? The point I make is that we have heard evidence that suggests that particularly amongst young riders, the novice riders, if roads and highways are patrolled, it tends to diminish their speed, and that contributes to diminishing the number of injuries, accidents and fatalities. Perhaps some marginally experienced riders, who by and large, it is my sense, tend to know what to do, are cognisant of the dangers that they face, given their experience.

What is it like in terms of your resources? You were telling us about off-road, and it appears to me that you have, like your colleagues in Geelong, pretty much no resources available to you. What about the on-road resources? Do you think you can adequately patrol your areas?

Sgt HUMPHREY — Let me just describe the Ballarat area. Ballarat seems to be like the hub of a spoked wheel. All the major highways have to come in to Ballarat. We do seem to have quite a few highways coming into Ballarat and leading out of Ballarat. When we have someone on patrol they necessarily have to patrol a number of highways, and therefore you are looking at hundreds of kilometres of road that one or two people, if necessary, have to patrol. We could be from here to Ballarat to Landsborough away, and we could be an hour or an hour and a half away in patrolling time. Then it will take you another hour or two to get to the other major road and patrol that one.

We do our best. We have recently had an increase in manpower resourcing and also in vehicle resourcing. We are not exactly seeing that come to fruition yet, because currently we are going through a retraining period. Hopefully, in the near future, we may see some sort of response to our increased patrolling. We target and we look at statistics and intelligence, and that shows us particular areas where we are getting fatalities. We apply for TAC funding — and we are usually fairly successful in getting it — and we patrol those areas. We find when we are in those areas and we are targeting those areas that we do get a decrease in the number of fatalities and serious injuries occurring, whether it be motorcycle or general motor vehicle.

Mr LANGUILLER — Is there any specific activity or initiative that you would want to see implemented that you can think of? Are there one or two?

Sgt HUMPHREY — I would like to see more men out on the road, pure and simple.

The CHAIR — In what precise roles?

Sgt HUMPHREY — Doing mobile patrolling. I will go back. I believe in the past I have been to one of the clubs myself — years ago. We are a small unit. Probably about 10 or 15 years ago we were cut back, and before then we were doing some education at the local motorcycle groups. I can remember attending at their clubs, giving talks and things like that. I have recently had discussions with the officer in charge of our unit, and hopefully with the extra one or two numbers that we have got now we can go back to doing that for the motorcyclists and for other areas as well, giving a bit more personal education.

The CHAIR — Do you know off-hand the names of the clubs in your area?

Sgt HUMPHREY — There are the Rovers, the Ulysses — or were you talking about recreational clubs?

The CHAIR — It was a wide-ranging question.

Sgt HUMPHREY — I could probably name a couple of others too, but they are probably well known nationally as well as internationally.

The CHAIR — That are based in this district?

Sgt HUMPHREY — Yes.

The CHAIR — But you do not visit them?

Sgt HUMPHREY — No.

Mr LANGUILLER — You have not been able to do the splash effect and push them on to other areas.

Sgt HUMPHREY — Yes, but it is usually because they have caused a bit of trouble and we have had to go around and tell them to tone it down a bit.

Mr LANGUILLER — They do not exist in Sunshine or St Albans, which is the electorate that I represent.

Mr ELSBURY — I represent that area as well, Telmo, so I know where you are going.

You mentioned earlier on about the issues you have had with off-road riders over in Moorabool and also in and around old quarries and up through the bush. In fact you have got a bike, which is really good, but no-one to ride it. How much exposure are you actually able to get with the off-road riders? In your opinion what are some of the issues associated with the off-road riding in this area?

Sgt HUMPHREY — Do you mean, how do we approach the off-road riders?

Mr ELSBURY — If you cannot sidle up beside them and say, ‘Okay boys, what’s going on?’, then how do you engage with them?

Sgt HUMPHREY — As I said before, we know some particular locations where they come in from other areas and they offload their motorbikes from trailers. Usually if they ride into the area, we have very limited contact. If they come into the area with motor cars and trailers, we are able to target those areas where they drop off and pick up, and speak to the persons there at the location. Apart from that, probably we have very limited contact.

Mr ELSBURY — On another tack — strangely enough it is to do with the TAC, so I do not know why I went there — are there any enforcement measures that you employ funded through the TAC?

Sgt HUMPHREY — Yes. Particularly in Moorabool, through Trentham and I think it was the Daylesford area it was identified that we were having a problem with motorcycle riders. I believe the TAC funded an operation in that area for us. That was on-road, not off-road.

The CHAIR — In relation to protective clothing you mentioned earlier on in your introductory remarks seeing younger people riding in thongs, T-shirts, shorts and whatever, without the benefit of protective clothing. Have you attended accidents where people have lost a lot of skin through an accident or sustained other injuries that could have been prevented through protective clothing? Do you have a view on the range of protective clothing that might be desirable?

Sgt HUMPHREY — I know the police department’s view is that we need full protective clothing and boots, to Australian standards. Usually the collisions I have been to have been more serious. There are usually broken limbs and what have you. However, in saying that, when the ambulance officers are there and cut off whatever clothing they have on, or if they don’t have any clothing, you can see that there has obviously been some contact with bitumen or gravel and you can see the disastrous effects of that, as well as whatever breakage or other injury they have received.

The CHAIR — In your own riding, what have you normally ridden with?

Sgt HUMPHREY — I have always ridden with full safety gear — helmet, jacket, boots and everything like that.

Mr TILLEY — I want to go back to the off-road stuff a little more. It is probably something more for Victoria Police as an organisation that deals with it, but can you give us some commentary? Presently we have the special solo unit working out of Dawson Street. It is a bit of an empire. They own everything and all ride

motorcycles. Are you aware of some of the efforts that the Department of Sustainability and Environment has been making in relation to off-road motorcycle use at all?

Sgt HUMPHREY — I believe there have been some combined operations. Previously in years gone by we have had combined operations with them. They are in four-wheel drive vehicles usually, so even though they are off-road vehicles they are usually very limited.

I will lead into a different area now. You could say that the detection of motorcycle riders — that is, the proper intercept of them — is very low. They may see you coming and see who you are, and you usually find that they disappear into the bush again. It makes it very hard for any sort of intercept.

Mr TILLEY — If some of the types of programs and relationships with other organisations were to be established with Victoria Police at a local level being a leader and organising things, and if qualifications for riders were able to be achieved at a local level, would it be something you would need to manage wholly and solely with the highway patrol, or could you work together with general duties in having qualified people accessing motorcycles to perform some of these roles of road enforcement and safety sort of stuff as well?

Sgt HUMPHREY — I have had no problems. As I have said, in the past we have used other departments to patrol the forest areas. To some degree it is more successful. They have their issues too with fire danger periods, camping areas and things like that.

Mr TILLEY — That is the sort of stuff I am leading to. In the time you have been in this area has there been a requirement or a need not only for road safety and enforcement activities but for searches and recovery?

Sgt HUMPHREY — Yes.

Mr TILLEY — Would you see that motorcycles principally, as this committee is looking at motorcycle safety, could be used for searches, recovery and those other types of activities as well?

Sgt HUMPHREY — Yes. That would definitely be worthwhile.

Mr LANGUILLER — One important area for our committee and indeed for the purpose of contributing to road safety issues is data collection so that agencies and indeed our committee can report on the basis of hard evidence and not necessarily on subjective judgements, which all of us with the best of intentions can make. You would be aware in terms of data collection with respect to motorcycle riders, both on-road and particularly off-road, if you look at Victoria Police data reporting and at VicRoads and the Department of Health, that there is a scale where the Department of Health is pretty accurate — not surprisingly, because it tends to report casualties and people who end up in the hospital through the department — then VicRoads appears to have some good data collection, though not as accurate as the Department of Health, and then there is you.

There is a significant disparity, difference or underreporting in terms of injuries and fatalities on occasion, particularly in terms of off-road because you are not able to attend, as you quite correctly indicated, because there are many riders who are unlicensed and may not wish to report to you, or riders have injuries and end up in the hospital but do not necessarily want to report. Can you take us through the process of your data collection? What do you do in terms of your data collection? What is your process? What is your system? What does an officer do when he or she turns up to an incident on the road? What kinds of questions do they ask? What kinds of forms do they have?

Sgt HUMPHREY — We have our traffic incident system, and that is where we report all our motor vehicle collisions, and that would include motorcycles. Even if they are off-road, they are entered on that system if they are reported to us. As I have said, you would probably find that our statistics are very limited and that we would not get that many reports. I can go to an example where I knew someone who had been involved in a motorcycle collision and been injured. I visited him in hospital, but the collision was not reported to the police. Also while I was at the hospital there was a conversation that the chap in the other bed had also been injured in a motorcycle collision that was also not reported, because it was an off-road collision. In terms of reporting standards, people are afraid or do not have the required licences or registrations, and that is why they do not report.

Mr LANGUILLER — Would your officers write down, for example, potentially inappropriate speed, excessive speed or illegal speed? Would your officers note some of the infrastructure issues that may well exist, or signage on occasion, road conditions or curves?

Sgt HUMPHREY — Yes. When you are talking about injury and non-injury collisions, we are under a pilot program at the moment but it has come in only recently. When you are talking about injury collisions, they would note what was at fault — the rider or the conditions. If they had run off the road and collided with a railing, a tree or something like that, they would note that there may have been fatigue, speed, inexperience or something like that. That is in the reporting standards. We have a method locally, and I believe it is probably statewide, where we report to our traffic inspector for the area and any serious injuries or fatalities are done on a separate report. On that pro forma we contact the local council or VicRoads and discuss with them if we find there were any treatments or road conditions that contributed to the collision or caused more injury as a result of the collision. We have a responsibility to follow up and make sure it is brought to someone's attention.

Mr LANGUILLER — So you are confident that your officers pretty much are able to report on a uniform basis, that the level of training is adequate and that they have knowledge of how to do the reporting?

Sgt HUMPHREY — Yes. Obviously the reports come through a supervisory level. They are checked and, if the standard is not there, they go back to them and there is a request for extra information if it is not apparent in the initial reports.

Mr ELSBURY — My question takes a completely different turn. I am interested in your thoughts about licensing of motorcyclists. I went off and did a 2.5-hour course, and at the end of it I got given a bit of plastic that says I can ride out on the road with everyone else with a learners permit. I also did a 3.5-hour course before that, so with 6 hours under my belt I am out there on the road after riding around a track at the breakneck speed of 30 kilometres per hour. I can now go out on the road at 110. Do you think the training regime for motorcyclists is adequate?

Sgt HUMPHREY — No. I believe it is the policy of Victoria Police, or the strategy or recommendation, that it needs to be a graduated sort of licence. I cannot specifically comment on the training. I was trained by Victoria Police in how to ride. I had a learner permit before I was trained by Victoria Police, and I know after I did about a five-week course with Victoria Police my knowledge of riding and the hazards and perceived hazards within that five weeks was far superior to that of anybody else who would have just come through on a learner permit or something like that.

Mr ELSBURY — You talked about perceived hazards. Do you think that there would be any way that drivers would be able to be educated a lot more about motorcyclists being road users — not perceiving them as hazards but as fellow road users, considering that we still have this prevalence of, 'Sorry, I didn't see you, mate', whenever there is a car-versus-bike collision?

Sgt HUMPHREY — That is a perception, that the motor car driver does not see them, and that can also happen with motor cars. We do in any motor vehicle have limited vision, be it forward or rear, when trying to see perceived other vehicles. We can make motor car drivers aware of the motorcycle rider, but once again, it does fall back on the individual how they see them. I can actually say you cannot see a lot of cars in rear-vision mirrors, so whether you see a motorcycle rider coming up behind you or beside you, it is a hazardous time for a motorcycle rider to be overtaking or passing a vehicle in another lane.

Mr ELSBURY — So you do not think there should be any sort of education campaign or even when people are going for their drivers licence having some component of the testing standard or the training?

Sgt HUMPHREY — We are not saying they should not be trained or educated in motorcycle riders being around them. What I am saying is we can do a lot of training, but the outcome — —

Mr ELSBURY — Ultimately is up to the driver.

Sgt HUMPHREY — Once again I can say that some motorcycle riders wear darker gear. I find that is a hazard with all vehicles.

Mr ELSBURY — We went and had a look at some motorcycle gear at a shop out at Keilor. I think the colour range went from black to grey to charcoal to gunmetal. It was quite concerning the amount of dark colour that was involved. You might have a flash of blue or a flash of red. I only saw one jacket with a flash of orange, and even then it was about a 2-inch strip.

Sgt HUMPHREY — Obviously the colours are dictated by what is popular. Whether they are a perceived colour or not, that is a different thing. As I said, with a motorcycle, like any other vehicle, we find if it is a dark colour, no headlights on and dark clothing necessarily on the rider as well, the perceived hazard is a much higher risk, especially on a dull day or necessarily in poor weather; you cannot see them.

The CHAIR — A couple of slightly different questions, Sergeant Humphrey. What is the worst accident you have ever attended involving a motorcyclist?

Sgt HUMPHREY — It was in the city of Northcote many years ago, where a motorcyclist has just gone straight off the T-intersection into a barbed wire fence and virtually decapitated himself.

The CHAIR — What is the worst case of a motorbike accident involving a serious injury?

Sgt HUMPHREY — Probably broken legs and arms, compound fractures where their bones come through the skin and very serious breakages.

The CHAIR — Thank you for that. We did take evidence from a trauma surgeon a few weeks ago where a fellow was going down to the Phillip Island MotoGP and he was collected by a vehicle and ended up in the Alfred hospital. At this stage it is envisaged he will be a quadriplegic, and there are significant implications for his life journey from that driver inadvertence, let us say — I am not sure; we have not got the report on it as yet.

Sgt HUMPHREY — All I can say is many years ago as a teenager I had the misfortune to go Royal Talbot Rehabilitation Centre, where you do see a lot of motor vehicle people recovering, and you also see a lot of motorcyclists recovering — missing limbs and arms and things like that. That was many years ago when I was a teenager. I think that would be a very big eye-opener to not just motorcycle riders but also motor car drivers — horrific injuries people have to live with after a serious vehicle collision.

The CHAIR — That is a significant part of the evidence we have been taking on board too — the cost and how some people might choose to factor in the cost and whether that be placed on the motorcycle rider, where they cover the cost recovery of what is estimated to be the direct cost as opposed to that being advertised across the wider range of insurance premiums.

In my last question there may be repetition in part, but what would you like to see being the result of a parliamentary inquiry or review into improving motorbike safety? One matter you have mentioned would be the resourcing aspect of cars on the road.

Sgt HUMPHREY — I will refer back to what the department recommends: I think a higher level of detection. It is in your realm as a committee. I believe that motorcyclists should have a front identifying number, like any other motor vehicle.

The CHAIR — How would that specifically help you in your work, or is that a general comment?

Sgt HUMPHREY — That would mean easier detection of who the bike belongs to and also who possibly the rider is.

The CHAIR — Do you have radar that takes front time as opposed to back?

Sgt HUMPHREY — Yes, we do. The problem we have got is we can radar a vehicle heading towards us, being a motorcycle, and you could attempt to pull the rider over not yet having seen his numberplate or identifying number, and he could likely disappear on you without you even being able to identify him.

The CHAIR — And likely disappear.

Sgt HUMPHREY — Avoid detection.

The CHAIR — Have you had to chase any motorcyclists in the district?

Sgt HUMPHREY — We do have a number of motorbikes. Yes, we have chased a number of motorbikes around here, and usually they are not apprehended because you have not identified them from a front numberplate, you have not been able to see a rear numberplate or they have had none on them. It is, you could say, easier for a motorcycle to avoid an actual intercept than a motor car.

The CHAIR — Any other comments?

Sgt HUMPHREY — No. I am happy.

The CHAIR — Good. Sergeant Humphrey, thank you very much for coming along today. If you do have any other follow-up thoughts, you will get a copy of the transcript, which you are welcome to read and get back to us, and that will then be placed on the web. Thank you very much for your time.

Sgt HUMPHREY — To summarise, I think the points that are covered in the recommendations via the Victoria Police would go to some degree in hopefully reducing the road toll and serious injury to those who are not doing the right thing. I am not saying that all motorcycle riders are necessarily doing the wrong thing, particularly the groups that are good, like the representatives who are here from biking groups. They do a good job in looking after and educating their fellow riders.

The CHAIR — Good. Thank you very much.

Witness withdrew.