

TRANSCRIPT

ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into motorcycle safety

Traralgon — 13 December 2011

Members

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Witness

Ms J. Tame.

The CHAIR — Ms Tame, you will get a copy of the transcript of the comments you make today. We note that you may exercise the opportunity to put more details through to the secretariat of the committee, but we invite you to make a comment now.

Ms TAME — Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak. I speak with the background of being a Ulysses member. I have been riding for 10 years, and in that time I have covered 150 000 kilometres on both city and country roads. I think that gives me a bit of practical background. I am a bit disturbed by some of the direction that I see this inquiry taking. I have half a dozen points here, but they are not necessarily in order. My first point is that the policy needs to be informed by riders who are familiar with the real problems. For example, stats might appear to show that motorcyclists have single-vehicle accidents too often, but it might not be recorded that some of these are following the evasion of another road user or as a result of hitting a bump or a furrow in the road. The stats may misrepresent that situation.

In relation to Wayne Moon's point about roadside signage being valuable, the advisory signage is valuable because it informs you about what might lie ahead, but it relies on there being a sound road surface, which is not always the case. It might be that heavy vehicles, logging trucks or something have furrowed the road, which might disturb the camber and put you on the wrong side of the road before you know what has happened. It is the same with potholes. This spring has caused a lot of weather damage; I appreciate that local government has a lot of work to do in that regard, but it is still a bad hazard all the same.

I have a few complaints about the motorcycle levy. It is not really fair, because most of the road damage and therefore most of the hazards are actually perpetrated by trucks. As a rider, that is sometimes hard to see in time. You cannot really pick up the bump or a lump. It might be in the shade of a tree, and it is just hard to see. Really the paramount issue for us is that the road quality is good, is safe and is up to the advisory signage. As I said, policy needs to be informed by riders, because with the best of intent people who are not riders can miss the point and be trying to solve an issue but really go down the wrong track or a peripheral path. As I said, trucks do most of the damage, so they should be asked to carry more of the load for road maintenance.

My final point is that the community consultation to date has not been satisfactory, in my book. It seems that the eastern committee, for example — the VicRoads one — has been driven by internal requirements and is really not open to our input as riders. For example, I was a member, and we have stepped off that through frustration. They seemed much more concerned about the colour and the format of their display trailer, like the protective clothing, than they were about listening to what we were concerned about as the real issues we face as riders. There were just too internally focused and not really receptive.

Sorry, that was my penultimate point. My final point is that we do not think protective clothing is worth making a big song and dance about. Almost all people dress adequately. I was speaking to Andrew at half-time there, and he said he has his Draggins and a jacket, and he is right. Most of us do that. Thank you very much.

Mr LANGUILLER — Thank you for your submission; we appreciate it. You raise a very interesting point in terms of the injuries and fatalities which, as has been described, could predominantly, if not the majority, be single riders. One important question that perhaps the committee may be able to do a little bit of research into — the fatalities we cannot ask, tragically, but the injured people we could ask through hospitals — would be whether that kind of reporting necessarily concurs in terms of the Department of Health, VicRoads and Victoria Police, because I have taken that point on board by the previous submitter, VicRoads, and it is interesting that you make that point. It would probably be worth pursuing from our end, but I am not sure whether that data is available. That is a good comment in terms of whether we could retrieve that information through the current data processing or system in terms of what sorts of questions there are and what kind of information is there. You could perhaps do a bit of a pilot project and ask 50 injured riders in this region and see whether their reporting concurs with some of the reporting from some of the other government agencies.

I think it is important in itself to work on that comment and submission in the sense that it is one thing to suggest it is the riders' responsibility and that therefore we need to work on the riders or infrastructure or whatever else, but there are times — and I think you have certainly seen that experience anecdotally down the road — when car drivers may be sometimes responsible. But it is only anecdotal; I certainly do not have the data available to me right now. Instead of concentrating and focusing our strategy and our routes on the behaviour and conduct of motorcycle riders, maybe we should concentrate on the behaviour and conduct of car

drivers. From that point of view I certainly think it is worth asking the question of whether it is retrievable or not; I am not sure, but I welcome your submission.

Mr ELSBURY — I just have two questions, both about training. It seems to be my thing, to be quite honest.

Ms TAME — Recent experience.

Mr ELSBURY — Given my experience with motorcycle training — I had never touched a motorcycle. Well, I lie — I had touched motorcycles before but never actually ridden one before undertaking this training. With 6 hours of knowledge about a motorcycle and reaching the breakneck speed of 30 kilometres per hour, I was given a learners permit, which allows me to put a yellow piece of plastic on the back of my bike and then open up the throttle to 110 legally on highways. Do you think that that is an adequate amount of training for a new motorcyclist, given the fact that you do not even have to undertake any of that training? Two and a half hours would have given me my licence; it is just that I was conscientious and did an extra bit of training beforehand.

Ms TAME — Look, it is all that I had. I must admit that I got my Ls as a 43-year-old, so I had a fair bit of road experience and roadcraft behind me. If it is drummed into you as a learner rider in that 6 hours that on the road you must think of yourself as invisible and that it is up to you to stay out of trouble — —

Mr ELSBURY — They taught us paranoia; don't worry.

Ms TAME — Good. I think that is all you can really do. You cannot kind of legislate or make people spend a week in school or anything. I do not know if that adds a great deal. If you have shown that you can control a motorcycle through those basic manoeuvres and you can answer a set of questions to show that you are thinking about what you are doing, I am really not sure what else you can do. It might be sensible — —

Mr LANGUILLER — On-road testing, for example?

Ms TAME — That is good. I have no objection to that. As I said, provided that you have the armoury of being able to control a motorcycle at parking speeds, you will be able to control that on the road. The only thing that is missing from the training day on the tarmac out the back of the school is roadcraft, and that is something you can only learn — in any vehicle — with time. If I had a daughter and she wanted to learn, I would be keen for her to wait until she had a couple of years experience in a car, but that is all. I really think that the current system of training is okay; it served me well.

Mr ELSBURY — The second question is in relation to drivers. Do you think there needs to be greater training of awareness of motorcyclists in the VicRoads driver testing?

Ms TAME — Very much so. The current design of cars is that they are very much safety oriented. The driver is actually too cocooned; the driver feels safe, and the driver is only on the lookout for bigger hazards. The human condition means that we are not so much interested in little things, and as bike riders we fall into that category. We have to know that the car driver is not really taking account of us; there is a fair chance that they are not. We just have to be very mindful of that, and so much the better if the car drivers could have it drummed into them that they have to watch out for riders. We are increasing in numbers. It is up to them.

I have a favourite hobbyhorse — that everybody should be fined \$10 000 if they cause a rider to come off. It will make them look; that would change behaviour. I have nearly come off once, and I have actually been bowled, just through a car driver not seeing me. It was not excessive speed. I was in the middle of a roundabout — all that sort of thing. Still, I was brought to grief.

The CHAIR — Ms Tame, you have referred to concern about the direction of the committee consultation. The committee is taking on board evidence from expert bodies in Melbourne like the TAC, VicRoads and Victoria Police, from academics who are looking at road engineering issues and from regional Victorian centres such as Geelong, Ballarat, Wangaratta and Wodonga, so we are taking on board information from a range of areas. I just want to narrow down the consultation process, because we have also taken evidence from Ulysses Club members in a number of different regions as well.

You have raised a slightly different point in terms of the analysis of accidents, and it may be an area that we can do some further work on to understand them a little bit better, because it could be a focus. You have suggested

that accidents, where there has been death or injury on the road, have historically been conveyed to us by some expert as involving a combination of speed, alcohol or drugs. Sometimes people indicate that they may have hit a wombat or had a problem with other unanticipated interference on the road. Are you able to give us a little bit more insight into where you would suggest our consultation dig deeper in conferring with the road users, so to speak?

Ms TAME — It is just off the cuff, but perhaps with the rego renewals you might put out a form and asked people to convey their near misses. You would get all sorts of different responses, I suppose, but you might at least build up some sort of picture, a scatter diagram, of what people thought was hazardous. There is another thing, too. Ken says that we need to push for more census data — you know, the national census. I know it is beyond this inquiry's bailiwick, but there are 100 000 bikes registered in Victoria and yet there is not provision for that sort of thing in the census. When I was living in Melbourne my bike was the only means by which I could get around, but there was no category at all for that.

The CHAIR — With your comment on a scatter diagram, is that a particular background area of expertise that you have, to portray information conveyed of a factual situation through a scatter diagram? What do you envisage there?

Ms TAME — I suppose for the number of responses to what kind of thing troubled them or if they had had an accident previously what they thought was the cause of it. They might identify road conditions, a stray animal, evasion of a car or just plain made a boo-boo and misjudged and went off. There is no doubt that some accidents are caused by excess speed, but not nearly so many as are represented, I would suspect. As I said when I was speaking to you a little while earlier, I was rounding a left-hand bend, just like Wayne said, and I just hit a bump that I could not see and I bounced onto the wrong side of the road. It was a tight corner and I was under the speed limit. As I said, I was enjoying myself, but I was not over the speed limit. That could have been nasty too if a car had been coming the other way.

The CHAIR — The bump in the road being the cause?

Ms TAME — Yes, because I literally bounced over it to the wrong side of the road. I could not see it in the shadow or anything.

Mr LANGUILLER — What sort of bike do you ride, if I may ask?

Ms TAME — They are road bikes, litre bikes, both of them.

The CHAIR — My colleague might be seeking to find out what cc they are.

Ms TAME — I see, 1000cc.

Mr LANGUILLER — So it is a reasonable bike?

Ms TAME — Yes.

Mr LANGUILLER — Thank you. Can I ask you something further. You have heard me talk about the TAC ads. Given your experience of what I think you said was 150 000, what do you think of those ads?

Ms TAME — I think they are awful. I think they just totally misrepresenting — —

Mr LANGUILLER — Why do you think they are awful?

Ms TAME — They just portray the motorcycle riders as lunatics, and that is just not so. There might be a small percentage of young men who are, but there are so many thousands of Ulysses members; we are up to something like 50 000 or 60 000. That mad, idiot fringe that is portrayed in those ads are just such a minority.

Mr LANGUILLER — It is not a small number, given that they are 162 000 motorcycles registered and there are 336 000 licences. I am sorry; I interrupted you. You do not think they are good? Do you think the message that is reached is the one that people should get? Are they designed for the 10 or 20 per cent of riders who misbehave, so to speak?

Ms TAME — I think so. I think they are all targeted. Those people will not be listening anyway, and they scare the tripe out of the likes of me, who are just getting started. Okay, now I am confident and happy. They are just frightening and they are targeted at the wrong people. I just think that they are misrepresentative. They give the car drivers a reason to hate us as mad and irresponsible people. That is the other thing I do not like.

Mr LANGUILLER — Since I have been a member of the committee, if I may say, I have become aware of a whole bunch of issues that I was not aware of, although through my family I have been brought up to speed about what happens on the road. My brother is a motorcycle rider. I must say that I have asked people around the table, as you do when suddenly the ad appears on television, and the commentary from people who do not ride is usually pejorative about motorcycle riders. They do not have much respect for or much positive to say about them.

Ms TAME — No, that is right.

Mr LANGUILLER — This is only anecdotal from only a few people I have asked from time to time. I have not yet been able to get somebody to say, 'And this is the message', but time will tell. You have ridden 150 000 kilometres. Can I ask you whether they were all in Victoria or in other states and territories as well?

Ms TAME — The vast majority were in Victoria, but we do go on tour interstate.

Mr LANGUILLER — How do our roads compare to those in other states, given your experience?

Ms TAME — The nearer you are to Melbourne and the higher the number of voters in the area, the better the roads. Out here, and especially — —

Mr ELSBURY — What are you suggesting?

Ms TAME — Out here, they are sealed but they are sort of hilly roads and they are used a lot by dairy tankers and log trucks and they cut up. They are the dangerous ones because they are hilly and you cannot see what is around the corner. You are just clipping along at a nice speed suited to what the advisory signs suggest and then suddenly there is this furrow or ridge in the road and you are fighting, not for control exactly but it really puts you off. You have to back off speed and go again. If you are silly enough to be operating near your limit, that can send you off the road, so you just never operate near your limit. You always have something up your sleeve but it cannot always save you.

Mr LANGUILLER — You have ABS and all that of course?

Ms TAME — No. On the car, yes, but on the bike, no.

Mr LANGUILLER — Have you ever had to use it in the car?

Ms TAME — No. On the bike, yes. I was riding a demonstration bike at the Ulysses AGM. Somebody stopped in front of me, I did not expect it and I had to have the ABS in operation then, and I was thankful for it. It is a good thing, and it is percolating its way down into lower-level bikes now.

Mr LANGUILLER — You ride in groups with your club, I presume?

Ms TAME — Yes.

Mr LANGUILLER — Are there any dangers associated with riding in large groups?

Ms TAME — Initially, until people get — —

Mr LANGUILLER — Is there one you could think of?

Ms TAME — Not really. Once people kind of learn what is acceptable group behaviour, they are all very good. We might get in a new person who will do something dumb like try to pass you up the inside, up the left, or something, but you quickly put them right with just an informal chat at lunchtime, saying, 'Don't do that'.

Mr LANGUILLER — Can I ask you one question I have not asked. Given that you are a rider, as I see them now and as I understand, you ride and you stop at a town and have a meal at a pub. What is the culture and the convention, if I may say, of the club about drinking?

Ms TAME — We might have one glass at lunchtime, but that is enough.

Mr LANGUILLER — And you are confident that that is predominantly the culture?

Ms TAME — Yes, absolutely. It might be different with different clubs — I do not know — but it certainly is that with Ulysses.

Mr ELSBURY — Which clubs?

Ms TAME — Patch clubs — and they are not our cup of tea.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much, Ms Tame. I just remind you that you will get a copy of the Hansard transcript. If you correct any typos and return it to us, your evidence will be placed on the web as one of a number of submissions or contributions that we have received. Thank you for your time.

Ms TAME — Thank you very much, panel.

The CHAIR — Thank you.

Committee adjourned.