

TRANSCRIPT

ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into motorcycle safety

Traralgon — 13 December 2011

Members

Mr A. Elsbury

Mr T. Languiller

Mr J. Perera

Mr M. Thompson

Mr B. Tilley

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Witness

Senior Sergeant D. Watson, Victoria Police, Traralgon.

The CHAIR — Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the Traralgon hearings of the Victorian Parliament's Road Safety Committee. My name is Murray Thompson. Hansard staff will be recording the comments made today. Those who give evidence will in due course receive a copy of the transcript. You can peruse the record, correct any typos and send it back to the executive officer as directed, and the material will then be loaded onto the web as part of our reference research material. Should there be any evidence that anyone would like to give in camera — and we have had some information given to us in confidence — then we are happy to take that as well if there are any sensitive matters or protocol issues that people would like to raise without it being available to the public; it would just be for the deliberations of the committee on our own.

We are privileged this afternoon to have as our first witness Senior Sergeant David Watson. David, would you like to step forward? We do not need to swear you in today, David. Some parliamentary committees do take sworn evidence, but this is one where we have not made that our practice. Thank you for taking the time to appear before us.

Sr Sgt WATSON — My pleasure.

The CHAIR — We look forward to your comments. I invite you to speak in general on the insights you might like to raise, and then my colleagues would be reckoning to cross-examine you.

Sr Sgt WATSON — I have prepared a very short presentation. It has got a few slides and a couple of graphs to give you an idea of what has been occurring in the area — division 5. It will not take very long — I do understand that the best way to proceed is for you to ask questions and me to answer — but it will give you a bit of an insight and an overview of division 5.

The CHAIR — Good. Thank you very much. For the assistance with the transcript, could you give us your postal address so that we can send you a copy of the transcript for today?

Sr Sgt WATSON — It is the Morwell police headquarters, 8–10 Hazelwood Road, Morwell 3840.

Overheads shown.

Sr Sgt WATSON — Eastern region division 5 comprises the PSAs — police service areas — of Latrobe, Bass Coast, South Gippsland, which is the one PSA, and the Baw Baw PSA. Each of the PSAs is quite different in the make-up of issues with motorcycles. The Baw Baw PSA has some major issues with off-road motorcycle incidents. Where Baw Baw is situated obviously is very close to Melbourne and the south-east suburban fringe. It is very popular with off-road motorcycles to come down for a daytrip or for a weekend camping trip because of the forests that are available with the off-road driving. Because of that, the serious injury collisions in Baw Baw are heavily influenced by off-road motorcycle collisions.

The Bass Coast PSA is the home of the Australian Motorcycle GP and the Phillip Island grand prix circuit. It is not just the GP, but they also have the World Superbikes and an array of smaller events that attract a lot of bikes down there throughout the year. The GP circuit is utilised for 350-odd days out of the year, and a lot of that is motorcycle racing.

The CHAIR — Sorry, how much was that?

Sr Sgt WATSON — It is around about 350 days a year. That comprises all sorts of racing, but quite a high proportion of it is motorcycle racing.

The CHAIR — Just to clarify, Phillip Island is used 350 days a year for racing?

Sr Sgt WATSON — Just about, yes. It is used whether it be closed circuit or purchased — you know, people would come down for training — but it is heavily used, yes.

The CHAIR — We might need to send our colleague Mr Elsbury down there. He is getting his licence and he is looking for some off-road experience.

Sr Sgt WATSON — Okay. The Latrobe PSA has different issues because we have got a greater population with Latrobe being Moe, Morwell and Traralgon. We have a lot of issues with trail bikes in built-up areas, pit bikes and also on the boundaries of towns where you might get the youth riding unregistered trail bikes

unlicensed. The last fatality we did have in Morwell was a pit bike where a 16-year-old was killed as he rode across the road. That was at Easter time.

This is a quick graph. The top one shows you all injuries in ED5. This incorporates all types of injuries, whether it be serious injury, other injury, transported to hospital. We have all three PSAs up there for you. The bottom one shows the amount for motorcycle injuries that occur out of those. As you can see, Baw Baw does have a significant number of motorcycle injury collisions.

The CHAIR — Are there any other issues to draw to our attention? From a perusal it would seem that the injury rate is declining.

Sr Sgt WATSON — It is declining, and that is because there has been a lot of work put into motorcycle issues. It is right at the forefront of what we are trying to achieve down here.

The CHAIR — While we have got that on the board, I invite my colleagues to ask any questions that they would like. Will you be coming in a moment to the effort to comply — what are the factors behind the effort that have seen the decline in that data?

Mr LANGUILLER — Just on that, if I may, I thank you for your submission. Are there any specific safety initiatives that you have been undertaking that may be the ones that have led to the decline in serious injuries?

Sr Sgt WATSON — As far as Victoria Police is concerned, we have certainly been aware of this for a number of years. We have been putting a lot of resources into the enforcement side of it. Unfortunately our resources do not enable us to go into the bush. We have taken on more proactive measures where we will base ourselves where the motorcycles congregate before they go into the bush and feed them educational material, check their bikes for roadworthiness, make sure that they are licensed and registered. That has had an impact on it, in cleaning out the ones that should not be there.

Mr LANGUILLER — Can I take a step back, thank you, Mr Chairman — how big is your region? Can you quantify that in square kilometres? What is the diameter?

Sr Sgt WATSON — If you looking from the Bunyip River through to past Traralgon, certainly you would be looking at about 150 kilometres, and then we go from Rawson, which is up around Mount Baw Baw, and that goes right down to Wilsons Promontory.

Mr LANGUILLER — How many major roads and highways are there?

Sr Sgt WATSON — We have the Princes Freeway/Highway, the Strzelecki Highway, the South Gippsland Highway and the Bass Highway.

Mr LANGUILLER — Have you estimated approximately the unsealed roads that are there and being used in terms of — —

Sr Sgt WATSON — No, not in regard to the total length of unsealed roads. It might be something — —

Mr LANGUILLER — Your data seems to be very good; impressive.

Sr Sgt WATSON — The data is quite good, yes.

Mr LANGUILLER — What other resources are available to cover that region? How many officers, cars, bikes and off-road bikes and horses, if any, do you have?

Sr Sgt WATSON — I have two off-road bikes. At the moment I have one rider who is qualified to go off-road. Unfortunately very early in the new year we will be losing that rider because he is joining the Australian Defence Force.

Mr LANGUILLER — You have one rider, so he is not a 24/7 service of course, or 10 hours a day and 7 days a week.

Sr Sgt WATSON — We try to task him as often as possible. We do work in conjunction with the DSE in regard to controlling the bush tracks.

Mr LANGUILLER — That person works as an off-road exclusively?

Sr Sgt WATSON — Not exclusively, no; we cannot afford that.

Mr LANGUILLER — How many additional officers are there?

Sr Sgt WATSON — The highway patrols are made up of a sergeant and nine at Latrobe, a sergeant and seven at Bass Coast and a sergeant and six at Baw Baw.

Mr LANGUILLER — So all up?

Sr Sgt WATSON — All up, there are three sergeants and 22. The other resource is an on-road solo, which is based at Bass Coast highway patrol. There are two riders for that down there.

Mr ELSBURY — You were saying that when you have the off-road riders you intercept them when they are taking the bikes off the trailers. What kind of information are you giving them? What is the material that you provide and the kind of advice whilst giving them a roadworthy?

Sr Sgt WATSON — There is the roadworthy check and then obviously checking the licence and registration. We are trying to get them use common sense. They tend to get out there and have no rules. They obviously go as quick as they like, as far as the terrain allows them. It is obviously a dangerous hobby or sport. It is really just about talking common sense to them and telling them to watch out for themselves while they are partaking of that pastime. We try to give them some pamphlets that we have been able to get printed through our Eastern Region Motorcycle Working Party. I have brought along a few pamphlets, which I can certainly leave here. This is more so for the on-road bikers, who are also checked at the same time.

The CHAIR — Just with that eastern region working party — what are the characteristics of that particular working party?

Sr Sgt WATSON — It is under the banner of Eastern Region Road Safety Network. We have participants from the council — —

The CHAIR — So that is the VicRoads group?

Sr Sgt WATSON — It is, yes.

The CHAIR — Okay. We have to get an overview of the structure of that. Are there any special elements of that group that might be different to other parts of Victoria? Is there any stronger engagement with some of the motorbike organisations?

Sr Sgt WATSON — I believe we do have a good association. We have members on the committee who are from bike clubs. We have members on the committee who are from training facilities. We have VicRoads officers. We have people who are just civilians and are interested in it and want to come along and have their say about it.

The CHAIR — Have you ever had any thoughts as to how government could engage more strongly with non-government stakeholders? We appreciate you work in line with DSE. Have you had any other ideas as you have sat through these meetings of how things could be done better — more people to engage with or more people to liaise with?

Sr Sgt WATSON — The people we are targeting or looking at — we do engage with the motorbike shops. When they go into purchase a motorbike or whatever is for their motorbike we try to leave as much information there for them also.

The CHAIR — And when you say 'engage', is that once every six months, or so to speak, to give them an update on a brochure or another pilot?

Sr Sgt WATSON — It would; it would be in regard to the initiative that is being promoted.

The CHAIR — Is that well received by the shop proprietors?

Sr Sgt WATSON — It generally is, yes.

The CHAIR — Are there any new initiatives? Or can you outline any other initiatives that have led to that declining trend in the eastern region?

Sr Sgt WATSON — Personally, I think it is not just about one or two initiatives. There is no silver bullet. It is a matter of mixing them up. There are a lot of different initiatives out there, and each one will affect somebody in a way. We have done a lot of work, as I said, through that working party. If it were to go and look at it further, I would certainly be able to show a couple of road safety commercials that we have just presented this year.

The CHAIR — Before you move on — they are all the injuries, which would be motor vehicle injuries as well?

Sr Sgt WATSON — That is right.

The CHAIR — The bottom graph set shows motorcycle injuries. What is the definition of ‘injury’? Or to put it another way, does it range from death to hospitalisation?

Sr Sgt WATSON — Again, there is some confusion in regard to how these statistics are drawn. A serious injury, realistically, is someone who is admitted to hospital. That does not mean they have been taken to hospital and to the emergency department. If they leave that emergency department, they are classified as having an injury but not a serious injury. Someone who has a serious injury is actually admitted to hospital.

Mr LANGUILLER — If I may, through the Chair, how did you arrive at that description or definition of ‘injury’ and ‘serious injury’ or ‘impairment’? Is that done in consultation with, for example, the Department of Health, the TAC and VicRoads?

Sr Sgt WATSON — No, it is not.

Mr LANGUILLER — That is your definition?

Sr Sgt WATSON — That is the Victoria Police definition.

Mr LANGUILLER — That is the Victoria Police definition, which may or may not be the same as the other government agencies.

Sr Sgt WATSON — That is correct. You will note that it shows all injuries, so everything is blocked in there.

The CHAIR — Just on the definition of ‘injuries’, it includes those who have been admitted and those who are injured, so casualty admissions and deaths as well?

Sr Sgt WATSON — Yes.

Mr ELSBURY — Given some of the evidence that we have received so far in this inquiry suggesting that data has been unreliable in large sections, I am interested to know how you collected your data. Was it when police got involved, or did you actively go out and seek from the local hospitals information about injured persons as a result of motorcycle accidents?

Sr Sgt WATSON — The data that is presented today is from our corporate statistics committee. It has been verified by them. In regard to where that data comes from, again I believe it comes from the Traffic Incident System, which is how we record our traffic incidents.

Mr ELSBURY — The problem we have found is that not all motorcycle accidents, for whatever reason, get reported to the police. That is a lot of people, for whatever reason, whether it is an unregistered motorcycle, an unlicensed cyclist or perhaps a substance issue that they have got that they do not want the boys and girls in blue to know about. We are trying to get indicative information about motorcycle injury, but there seems to be a gap between what the force has got, what the hospitals have got and what the TAC gets in the end. One of the

issues that we are trying to deal with at the moment is this inconsistent raft of numbers supposedly trying to tell us the one story.

Sr Sgt WATSON — I can certainly understand that. Sometimes getting proper statistics and information can be difficult.

Mr ELSBURY — Basically for a government you are flying blind if you do not have the data available to you. It is good that the force has got its information, but when you have got a hospital telling you that you have got another 40 people that have come in on top of what the police have actually said and then the TAC is only paying out 80 per cent of that, you start wondering where we start, where we go and how we engage.

Sr Sgt WATSON — I do not know how many people are presenting to our local hospitals who have been involved in that, because I do not have that information.

The CHAIR — Is there ever an issue that you are aware of that relates to the location of an accident, whether it occurs in a state park or on private land?

Sr Sgt WATSON — If it occurs on private land, it is not included in the statistics as a collision. If it occurs at a state park on a formed track, it would come under the definition of a collision as it is open to the public.

The CHAIR — Have you been aware of any accidents on private land?

Sr Sgt WATSON — If there has been a serious incident that has occurred on private land, we do get reports of that. Obviously if there is a fatality that occurs because of a quad bike or trail bike accident on private land we still have to go and investigate as police.

The CHAIR — But that accident does not come into your data?

Sr Sgt WATSON — No, because it occurs on private land.

Mr LANGUILLER — How much would you know about your data in terms of the demographics, the age, the gender, the time and day of the accident or injury, the type of motorcycle and so on? How much information would you have in terms of how the accident occurred? Was it the cause of the motorcyclist, the truck driver, the car driver or the infrastructure perhaps?

Sr Sgt WATSON — All of that.

Mr LANGUILLER — All of that?

Sr Sgt WATSON — Yes. I can glean a lot of information out of the data that is there in regard to the demographics of the driver, the make-up of the driver, the car and the type of licence that they have. All of that information is collected so that it can be analysed.

Mr LANGUILLER — How would you improve, then, that reporting system and mechanism? Would you have any ideas or do you think it needs improvement, first of all?

Sr Sgt WATSON — Personally, I would say that it needs to be uniform, rather than one person reporting in one way compared to how we report and another organisation reports. It all needs to be uniform. Even within Victoria Police it needs to be uniform so that we are all on the same page.

Mr LANGUILLER — So the other government agencies and yourself can be harmonised, so to speak, and certainly within Victoria Police. May I say your reporting is very good. I say so with due respect to the other areas and regions we have looked into, but you seem to have information available to you that perhaps —

Sr Sgt WATSON — As far as the tasking and resources are concerned, it is certainly very important to be intelligence led. We need the intelligence to be able to task our resources appropriately and efficiently to problem areas. Where we do not have the resources, as I say, we try our best. We do what we can with the resources we have.

Mr LANGUILLER — And what are your views on the online format for more minor accidents?

Sr Sgt WATSON — I think for the minor accidents, no-one hurt — fine. That certainly gives us back that time that we would have spent, which can be a couple of hours off the road if you are looking at that. So it is a step in the right direction. It goes back to when I first joined when we had different methods of reporting and we had green cards. They took about 5 minutes to fill out because there was no injury and no offence disclosed — that sort of thing. So it was very good, that.

Mr LANGUILLER — Just on the data, if I may speak on it further, in relation to the issue of speed, what would be the little boxes or questions that you would ask yourself in that speed variable within your information?

Sr Sgt WATSON — In regard to speed, we gather information of what speed limit the collision occurred in — so whether it be in 100 zone, 110 zone, 50, 60 or whatever the zone. We certainly know that most collisions in the rural areas occur in 100-kilometres-an-hour zones. That is the sort of information. Anecdotally, if speed is involved, again that is expressed by the member's opinion and what he may present it for later on.

Mr LANGUILLER — So it could be excessive speed, it could be illegal speed or it could be inappropriate speed?

Sr Sgt WATSON — It could be, yes.

Mr LANGUILLER — Any of the three. Would your officers be trained and skilled to be able to make judgements more or less at the same level? Would they be looking into this sort of description of — —

Sr Sgt WATSON — Probably not at the same level. The highway patrol operatives are certainly more trained in regard to attending collisions, attending traffic incidents, than what the general duties members are.

Mr LANGUILLER — So, for example, on the day of the accident, it is a 60-kilometres-an-hour zone, but it happens to be raining and windy. When they do write their report they will be writing a description of that. So it may well be a legal speed, but it may be an inappropriate speed given the atmospheric conditions of the day — it is raining, it is windy or there are winding roads.

Sr Sgt WATSON — Again, taking a bush track or something, it is a 100-kilometres-an-hour speed limit. You go up some of the mountain roads on the way up to Mount Baw Baw and it is a 100-kilometres-an-hour speed limit. Cars, in particular, would not be able to sit on 100 kilometres an hour because of the nature of the road — it is just not safe to do it.

Mr LANGUILLER — I must tell you that I am a bit shocked about how busy your region is in terms of Phillip Island. I was not aware of that. I am not sure about my colleagues, but certainly that is good information. If anything, it proves that we should be here asking these questions, because you cannot beat those people who are on the ground. But is there any particular peak period other than most days of the week?

Sr Sgt WATSON — In regard to motorcycles?

Mr LANGUILLER — Yes. How busy the region is in terms of attracting riders, and is there a particular time of the year, a month or a weekend, that you think, 'This is the time'?

Sr Sgt WATSON — There is. It is generally weekends — Saturday and Sunday, and the summer months. Trail bike riders like getting out during the better weather.

Mr LANGUILLER — Do you get additional resources to help you during those peak days, weekends and times of the year?

Sr Sgt WATSON — I can get assistance from our state highway patrol, who have off-road solos available, but that is a state resource. It is very difficult to obtain, because it is so much in demand by the whole of the state. I am not 100 per cent sure — I think there are only 15 riders there at any one time. So if you are trying to get 15 around the state, you might get them for a couple of weekends a year.

Mr ELSBURY — But the thing is, talking to your colleagues as well throughout the organisation, you would also find that it is weekends during the summer months when they have the influx as well, so of course they are wanting the same resources at the same time.

Sr Sgt WATSON — Yes.

Mr ELSBURY — In their areas. It is not just a regional thing that it is on the weekends in the lovelier weather. It is not exactly what we are having just at the moment, but when it gets a little more temperate, that is when the trail bikes come out — —

Sr Sgt WATSON — They do.

Mr ELSBURY — And the riders in general.

Sr Sgt WATSON — And you have your long weekends — Australia Day weekend, Easter is very popular, Labour Day. You can rest assured it is very busy in the forested areas then. One thing we are looking at — and, as I said, we do have two off-road bikes, but very shortly we will not have anyone to ride them — is applying for funding to train members so we can use the bikes to go back out for that particular need.

Mr LANGUILLER — When will this happen — that you will not have — —

Sr Sgt WATSON — It will be very early in the New Year that we will lose our rider.

Mr LANGUILLER — Because you would be aware of course that in excess of 50 per cent of serious injuries and fatalities happen off-road. While I think it is terrific to have all those resources to patrol the sealed roads, the reality is that more than 50 per cent of serious injuries and fatalities will occur off-road.

Sr Sgt WATSON — That is right, which is what the next slide shows.

The CHAIR — We might hold it there with our questions. Thank you for that, David, and please continue with your presentation.

Sr Sgt WATSON — The top line on the next slide indicates the number of collisions involving motorcycles that occur on the paved roads within the PSAs. You can see Bass Coast is very high in relation to the other PSAs and in regard to the paved roads. The bottom one shows the number that occur off-road, and again Baw Baw stands out very predominantly whereas the other two do not have as big an issue with the off-road crowd.

As I mentioned before, the Eastern Region Motorcycle Working Party has managed to obtain some funding to produce these motorcycle road safety advertisements, which are aired on local television down here. I guess the concept is that we are using local members and people are able to say, 'I know you. You pulled me up two weeks ago and told me off for doing such and such'. We found that certainly anyone who we have spoken to who has seen the ads has been very receptive to them. They think they are a good initiative. Members have said, 'I spoke to someone who saw me on the television the other — —

The CHAIR — And this is played on local WIN TV?

Sr Sgt WATSON — Mainly on Prime TV.

Video shown.

Sr Sgt WATSON — That was one we were assisted with from the other emergency services throughout the area.

The CHAIR — Production cost?

Sr Sgt WATSON — Sorry?

The CHAIR — Production costs?

Sr Sgt WATSON — Through funding — just funded. This is the second.

Video shown.

Sr Sgt WATSON — That one was the highway patrol members from this area and also the adjoining area in division 6 — Bairnsdale, Sale. The ads have been broadcast right around there.

The CHAIR — When did they first start playing on TV?

Sr Sgt WATSON — They started playing just before the grand prix. I think it was about 8 October.

The CHAIR — This year?

Sr Sgt WATSON — This year. That is the two ads for this year; we had one playing late last year and early this year, which was the first of the three we had. Unfortunately I do not have that one with me.

The CHAIR — My question before was: how much did it cost to produce?

Sr Sgt WATSON — Could you help with that?

Ms McCALLUM (from gallery) — For those two ads it was approximately a \$1500 production cost for both.

The CHAIR — Actors Equity was not brought in?

Sr Sgt WATSON — There was some terrible acting in it.

The CHAIR — Okay.

Mr ELSBURY — It gets the job done.

Sr Sgt WATSON — They do get the job done.

In regard to education also, which is an important factor, another initiative is the motorcycle trailer in regard to protective clothing, and that is available anywhere within our region. This is set up at the — it is not the Traralgon show, is it?

Ms McCALLUM (from gallery) — It was set up at the Hazelwood car and bike show.

Sr Sgt WATSON — It was recently set up at the Traralgon show, which was held two weekends ago. That just focuses on trying to influence people who ride bikes to wear the correct clothing when they are riding. I have lost count — when you see someone on a warm day, they will be riding down the street on a 500 Moto Guzzi with thongs — —

The CHAIR — Moto what, sorry?

Sr Sgt WATSON — Moto Guzzi.

The CHAIR — Probably the member for Western Metropolitan Region would understand that language.

Sr Sgt WATSON — They are on some big powerful bike, and they have on a singlet and a pair of shorts. If they come off, they are going to — —

Mr LANGUILLER — How much work do you do on protective clothing and on encouraging riders to use it? Can you describe the program?

Sr Sgt WATSON — The program is obviously this here, but we do have operations throughout the year where we will pull up motorcyclists and if they are not wearing the appropriate apparel, we will advise them, ‘You are stupid riding without protective clothing’. They do not seem — —

Mr LANGUILLER — How often do you manage to do that?

Sr Sgt WATSON — We focus on the periods leading up to the major events at Phillip Island when we know we are starting to get an influx of riders coming through. We look at what the period of time is. We will focus on that maybe two or three times a year.

Mr LANGUILLER — What is your view on the question of making protective gear mandatory or otherwise? Do you have a view on that?

Sr Sgt WATSON — I would like to see it done.

Mr LANGUILLER — All of it or some of it?

Sr Sgt WATSON — All of it. It is no use going halfway. They just do not realise how rough the road surface is when they come off. There have been some horrendous injuries just from sliding along the road and thinking that a pair of jeans or a light shirt is going to protect you. It does not. This actually shows you; it has a before and after. We have leathers that have had an incident to show you the level of protection they give.

Mr LANGUILLER — In your experience, whether it is based on your data, empirical research or anecdotal observation of riders, how many do not wear protective gear? What is your view of the fraternity so to speak?

Sr Sgt WATSON — That is hard to answer. Really you see a lot of motorcyclists riding with jeans, a pair of boots and, maybe, a light jacket. They are not approved motorcycle garments; they are not protective clothing. I guess the older, more experienced riders would know to wear their leathers or the new lighter materials that offer protection, but I think the younger ones are the ones who tend to just jump on the bike and go for a squirt.

The CHAIR — How much more of your presentation have you got?

Sr Sgt WATSON — Not very much at all. Again, with VicPol strategies, we are obviously very big on partnership priorities with VicRoads, the TAC, the road safety network and the motorcycle working party. With enforcement priorities we target high-risk behaviours through intelligence-led tasking.

The CHAIR — Can you give an illustration of that?

Sr Sgt WATSON — Certainly the off-road cycles. We know in regard to the busy periods when we have the motorcycle GP, the international superbikes, we would run operations leading up and during that period because we know we get high-risk behaviours down there. People come down thinking they are Rossi or someone like that, so we throw a lot of resources into that. We also have our divisional motorcycle road safety trauma reduction strategy, which is something that gives us direction and includes a lot of this sort of stuff. The education resources include our local publications and DSE. VicRoads and the motorcycle party have devised this in regard to maintenance and contact numbers for riders to be able to report areas that might need a little bit of fixing up — that there might be an issue with. All of the shires and councils have come on board with that, so not just VicRoads.

The CHAIR — What sort of issue?

Sr Sgt WATSON — It might be a dangerous area — a dangerous bend or something that could be fixed up that is not quite motorcycle friendly. It might be a pothole that has occurred overnight or over the last week that needs to be fixed up. That is the sort of thing. It is a maintenance issue or a maintenance report.

The CHAIR — Thank you.

Sr Sgt WATSON — Again, as I said, there are a couple of recommendations, including protective clothing for motorcyclists; certainly a lot of thought needs to go into that. The front numberplate, I know there are issues for and against but certainly in regard to identifying someone who does not want to stop, the front numberplate is a bit of an issue.

Mr LANGUILLER — Would you agree with a form of ID or a chip? It could be something else. As you know, there appear to be objections to the front numberplate for a range of reasons. Is it reasonable to suggest that what you want is to be able to identify the rider?

Sr Sgt WATSON — To be able to identify the rider.

Mr LANGUILLER — You could not care less whether it is a plate or a chip or whatever they use these days — something that identifies the motorcyclist.

Sr Sgt WATSON — Yes. The off-road issue — the classification. This is a personal view, but I see it as a hobby sport. It is a recreational activity where people willing go into the forest areas or the bush to take part, yet the repercussions are significant to our serious injury collisions. The last one is in regard to returned riders. You

get a lot of men in particular who have ridden all their lives and who have gone through and find they have no children on their hands. They are coming close to retirement and they go out and buy the big Harley or something and — —

Mr LANGUILLER — Or new riders at the age of 40 or 50.

Sr Sgt WATSON — Exactly. These other riders may have had a licence all their lives so they do not have to have a LAM bike. They just go out and buy a big tourer bike. They do not have the experience they think they have. They are good-weather riders. They go out at the weekend and they just do not have the experience.

Mr ELSBURY — My question is about resourcing, and I am pretty sure that police resourcing has been an issue since before Ned Kelly. With regard to training up a rider to do off-road work, generally how much would it cost to undertake that sort of work?

Sr Sgt WATSON — The actual training costs nothing to the department, but because we are in a rural area, we have to send our members to the city and the accommodation costs and incidental living costs are there. The other part is providing them with appropriate protection. If it is off-road or on-road, they have to have the right riding apparel too. That is a cost to the PSA, and we are always concerned about budgets and that sort of thing.

Mr ELSBURY — I have to say that you have a beautiful segue there because my next question is actually about off-road riders. When you come across off-road riders, how many of them tend to be using protective gear?

Sr Sgt WATSON — Probably the majority. It is a hobby sport. They have spent a lot of money on their bike and they enjoy it so they will wear their protection — their rib protectors, their shin guards, proper boots and all that sort of thing. In Latrobe it would be the young people who ride their trail bikes in the quarry areas or in pine plantations. They ride in a pair of jeans and a light shirt.

Mr ELSBURY — They are the people who take their off-road riding seriously.

Sr Sgt WATSON — Seriously. They are generally well protected, yes.

Mr ELSBURY — And if we could transplant a part of that DNA into on-road riders, you would be a happy man.

Sr Sgt WATSON — I would be.

Mr ELSBURY — And last but not least, you mentioned that the younger riders tend to ride out through the pine plantations. On the whole, what age group do you think you are dealing with predominantly in incidents on motorbikes?

Sr Sgt WATSON — Again, it is hard. Latrobe is just so diverse.

Mr ELSBURY — It is spread out, yes.

Sr Sgt WATSON — It is spread out. In Latrobe they can be as young as 12 and upwards. We have had fatalities in pine plantations where 14-year-olds have been involved. There are the returned riders — over 40s, that sort of thing. The off-roaders are generally over 30.

Mr LANGUILLER — Just a quick one. I noted that in terms of the off-road activities, you talk about DSE but you do not talk about VicRoads. Do you get any support from VicRoads for your off-road activity and work?

Sr Sgt WATSON — You said ‘support’, but apart from education and the support through the motorcycle working party, VicRoads does not have responsibility for mountain trails.

Mr LANGUILLER — They do by law.

Sr Sgt WATSON — I am not even sure if they do.

Mr LANGUILLER — May I quote the act? I do not need to, but I will refer you to — in interests of time, because it is an important question, given that we are talking about a major government agency — section 3 of the Road Safety Act 1986, which provides the definition of ‘road infrastructure’ on page 35. They are responsible for it, if I may, with respect, assert.

Sr Sgt WATSON — You will find that if it is in a state forest, the DSE would be the organisation that we would go into partnership with. VicRoads certainly does support us with our educational material, but it does not have the resources. Certainly through RoadSafe it helps with funding.

Mr LANGUILLER — And the TAC?

Sr Sgt WATSON — We apply for funding through the TAC.

Mr LANGUILLER — Thank you for that.

The CHAIR — Thanks very much for your time, Senior Sargeant Watson. I have one question. You have introduced to us some new material in terms of the advertising campaigns. In some other regions we have not seen the well-produced TV advertisements on Prime and WIN, on my understanding. Of the new initiatives that are being developed in the region, which do you think have been some of the best that have had an impact with your own work in this area? Noting a multifaceted approach, which ones would you nominate as having had a worthwhile impact?

Sr Sgt WATSON — I think those TV commercials have had an impact. From the evidence coming back from the members who are out there and have said that they have pulled people up, they have seen them, and that has made them think.

The CHAIR — So the message has gotten through from that process?

Sr Sgt WATSON — It has, yes. We also have other means of education. We have our skins or banners on particular highways that send safety messages, particularly for motorcyclists. A lot of that has to do with protective clothing.

The CHAIR — So you have banners alongside the road as well?

Sr Sgt WATSON — Yes.

The CHAIR — What messages are on those banners?

Sr Sgt WATSON — They are to do with protective clothing and speeding, with some graphic pictures of what has happened when they have not been wearing gloves — fingers are broken and that sort of thing.

The CHAIR — And it has been locally produced messaging?

Sr Sgt WATSON — No, I think they are not just locally produced; they are everywhere, aren't they?

Ms McCALLUM (from gallery) — Yes. We received funding through the TAC, so the requirement is that we use TAC designs and prints.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much for your time. As I noted earlier, you will get a copy of the Hansard transcript, on which you can correct any typos. We then ask that you get that copy back to us. Thank you very much for your time and your keen insight into the role of law enforcement in the district.

Sr Sgt WATSON — Thank you.

Witness withdrew.