

TRANSCRIPT

ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into motorcycle safety

Bairnsdale — 14 December 2011

Members

Mr A. Elsbury

Mr T. Languiller

Mr J. Perera

Mr M. Thompson

Mr B. Tilley

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

Staff

Executive Officer: Ms K. Jenkins
Research Officer: Mr J. Aliferis

Witnesses

Acting Sergeant R. Turner,

Sergeant R. Lay,

Inspector I. Gillespie, and

Acting Senior Sergeant M. Hamshere, Victoria Police, Bairnsdale.

The CHAIR — Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the Bairnsdale hearings of the Victorian Parliament's Road Safety Committee. Thank you for your attendance. You will receive a copy of your transcript, and we invite you to correct any typos and get them back to us, following which they will be placed on the web. As you would be aware, we have already had a submission from Victoria Police HQ. We look forward to you being able to complement its insights and provide a regional appreciation of a range of road safety matters. We thank you for the time you have allocated to be with us here today. Your colleagues are welcome to sit at the table as well, should they wish. Some of us may have a sense of déjà vu with some of the people who are here — they were in Traralgon yesterday representing Victoria Police.

By way of commencing, what I suggest is that if you would like to speak in general terms, and then we would be happy to cross-examine you. We are not taking sworn evidence in this inquiry — I do not envision that being necessary — but we look forward to having a constructive dialogue with the ultimate objective of improving some road safety outcomes in this part of Victoria.

Our comments here are covered by parliamentary privilege. I do not envision that would be an issue, and we do have the capability of taking evidence in camera, which would not form part of a public record but which would inform us privately. I do not necessarily see that as an option that is likely to be required at this stage.

We hand over to you, gentlemen. Hansard has established your identities for its purposes, and the only thing that might be helpful from Hansard's point of view is to have a postal address to which the transcripts can be directed. Where would you suggest that correspondence be forwarded to you? The Bairnsdale police station?

Acting Sgt TURNER — Yes, thank you.

The CHAIR — The address of the police station is?

Acting Sgt TURNER — It is 45-47 Main Street, Bairnsdale, 3875.

The CHAIR — Thank you. Who is going to open the batting?

Acting Sgt TURNER — I will open. My name is Acting Sergeant Ralph Turner. I am currently the officer in charge of Bairnsdale highway patrol. I have been for about three months temporarily. I give my apologies for Acting Senior Sergeant Dwayne Morrison, who could not attend today. I would like to welcome committee members to Bairnsdale in relation to the parliamentary inquiry into motorcycle safety.

Firstly, I will briefly describe the East Gippsland area, the main highways we patrol and the challenges faced by Bairnsdale highway patrol members in relation to policing the increasing numbers of on-road and off-road motorcycle riders travelling in what is an extremely diverse area. I will provide a short description of East Gippsland. It is a shire of approximately 21 800 square kilometres in area that is characterised by large areas of heavily vegetated mountain ranges, thick bush and state forests, smaller, densely populated areas, numerous farming communities and a number of coastal and lake resort areas.

The area attracts large numbers of tourists at various times of the year, and this equates to large increases in motorcycle traffic along our main roads. The main roads for on-road purposes for motorcycles are the Princes Highway, the Great Alpine Road, Omeo Highway, Gelantipy Road, Bonang Highway and the Monaro Highway. This occurs particularly during late February with the superbikes at Phillip Island, also during mid-October with the MotoGP at Phillip Island. All of the roads that I have mentioned above are referred to in motorcycle rider travel magazines, rider guides and on the internet on various sites as good-to-excellent motorcycle riding roads — this is for on-road motorcycles — and as a result we are seeing an appreciable number of motorcycle riders riding through East Gippsland throughout the year.

I will briefly touch on the diversity of motorcycle types, and I will speak in terms of on-road motorcycles at this time. I will speak briefly on off-road motorcycles later. Basically there are two categories — the sports bikes, which can be high-powered sports bikes or lower powered touring type sports bikes, that travel through our area regularly. The others are the cruisers, which are the Harley type of motorcycle. With the sports bikes, it is humbling to think that some of them have speeds in excess of 300 kilometres an hour, and that is off the showroom floor. What is even more humbling and distressing at this time is that under the current VicRoads licensing requirements, a person who is 19 years and 3 months of age can be riding one of these high-powered

sports bikes with no restrictions on his licence. I will get to the VicRoads model for the graduated licence system a little bit later in my address.

In regard to motorcycle collisions in the East Gippsland area over the last 12 months, we have seen three fatalities, which have all been on-road bikes on sealed roads — two in a 100-kilometre-an-hour zone and one in a 40-kilometre-an-hour zone, which was a roadworks zone.

The statistics for injury collisions in East Gippsland over a 12-month period, according to TIS, the traffic incident system, is 21. The causal conditions have been listed as inappropriate speed approaching entering bends or corners — it seems that the predominant number of on-road injuries and fatalities occur on bends; lack of concentration; fatigue; lack of riding experience; lack of knowledge of local roads; not adjusting to changing conditions — that is, wet weather, gravel or objects on the road; lack of familiarity with the handling characteristics of the particular motorcycle they are riding; and returning motorcycle riders. Returning motorcycle riders and motorcycle riders who are older than 40 years of age are overrepresented in the injury and fatal statistics in this area.

I will give you a couple of pamphlets to pass around the table. These are handed out as part of the police initiative in relation to on-road safety.

The CHAIR — Just while you are doing that, I would like to ask about the statistics relating to the causal factors that you mentioned. Has the data been broken down per incident, so to speak, to indicate that one might have been due to an approaching corner and five might have been fatigue related?

Acting Sgt TURNER — Generally incidents are broadly lumped together as either ‘driver error’ or ‘driver inexperience’ on the TIS accident reporting system. In the driver-error category that can be many different causes and they are put together as the one causal factor.

The CHAIR — Does TIS record all those other factors?

Acting Sgt TURNER — No. There is a place for the member to put that information on TIS either in notes or at the summary at the end if they so desire, but unfortunately many members do not go into too much detail.

The CHAIR — We had some evidence given yesterday by a lady who remarked that a lot of accidents could be caused by a furrow in the road that is shaded by a tree and is not visible, and so, in terms of the cause of accidents, they were not all due to misadventure or inappropriate skill on the part of the motorcyclist but rather due to a road factor. To what extent are those other issues broken down in the data? From what you are saying, as it makes its way through to TIS, it might be reduced to cyclist error rather than a more detailed assessment.

Acting Sgt TURNER — Yes, it is generally recorded as driver error for any of those type of factors. ‘Road condition’ can be another one if it can be proven at the time beyond doubt that the motorcyclist hit a pothole in the road. I cannot give you exact figures, but part of my job as officer-in-charge of the highway patrol is to audit collisions in East Gippsland. One thing I have noticed particularly on the Great Alpine Road is that the vast majority of on-road collisions occur while riders are negotiating bends or corners. For whatever reason, that is where they seem to be coming off and most of those incidents are recorded as driver error. I think one was put down to road condition because the rider said they had hit a pothole and I think that could be proven. With most of them there is no such easily identifiable cause. Inappropriate speed has been suggested as a cause; the rider might not be exceeding the speed limit of 100 kilometres per hour on those roads, but the safe-cornering speed could be 50 to 60 kilometres per hour and the rider has made the approach to it at 80. That is what we consider with a lot of them.

The CHAIR — Thank you.

Acting Sgt TURNER — The police initiatives pamphlets I have passed around feature topics such as sharing the roads; tips for riders which informs both riders and drivers — drivers are on the roads too — about awareness, safe distances, driving safely and expecting the unexpected; as well as the *160 Country Road Deaths — Why?* pamphlet. This initiative was made in conjunction with media releases relating to the inherent risks of driving on country roads. I have been involved in further initiatives in relation to education, which involves speaking to the years 9, 10, 11, and 12 high school students, who may have their learners permit and

are about to get their P-plates and highlighting those P-plate issues such as safe driving. We will be finetuning this involvement with schools to include information regarding both on-road and off-road motorcycle rider responsibilities within this targeted group. I believe in trying to get the message across early before they start riding.

There is another initiative we are running, which is for both on-road and off-road motorcycles. From January through until about April to May next year we will be running a joint operation with the Wangaratta highway patrol, which will be targeting the alpine areas of East Gippsland and Alpine shires. It will be targeting all on-road and off-road motorcycle riding behaviour. Our intention there is to identify and apprehend offenders, educate offenders where possible, educate other motorcycle riders and also build up an intelligence database by pulling up many of the utilities we see travelling through the area with bikes or trailers on the back, finding out where they are riding and trying to get a better idea of how many are riding up there.

In relation to off-road motorcycle users, East Gippsland has a large proportion of state and other forest areas; it is approximately 10 000 square kilometres, as you will see by the maps there. These areas are utilised regularly by four-wheel drive groups, mountain bike riders, hunters, campers and trail bike riders. Tyranny of distance and the lack of proper equipment and resources makes these areas very difficult for the police to regularly patrol and monitor. There are literally thousands of bush tracks up there, and basically what I am saying is we cannot be everywhere.

Referring to factors that come across in the TIS collisions that are being reported, I might add that the majority of off-road collisions that have been reported, particularly in the Omeo and Swifts Creek areas, have been reported well after the event for TAC purposes, so the information on those TIS reports cannot be totally irrefutable evidence. We cannot prove it; it is basically the same thing. It is inexperience on a particular motorcycle or inexperience riding in the mountain areas; fatigue; riding conditions — they do not ride to the conditions of wet weather or slippery conditions; mechanical failure; and the road or track condition — those roads and tracks up in the mountains and state forests are not regularly maintained and they have lots of wash-outs and ruts on them, which is evidenced in the TIS causal factors, which are generally put down as either rider error or road design. Inappropriate speed for track conditions and design is another possible causal factor; and some were found not to be wearing appropriate protective motorcycle gear, and I will brush on that very shortly.

As to police initiatives, as has already been stated with the on-road initiatives, there are off-road initiatives as well. The Bairnsdale highway patrol is currently seeking to expand our local experience and equipment to address the issue of off-road riding by educating members in the skills of off-road motorcycle riding and obtaining off-road motorcycles, in order for us to police this area. In relation to the report that Victoria Police is submitting on this occasion, 12 recommendations have been made, all dealing with different but equally important aspects of motorcycle safety. I will just pick out a few in particular that I believe are critically important. The first one is that all riders, no matter where they are riding, need to be wearing full safety riding apparel to approved Australian standards. My understanding is that the only part of the apparel that is to an Australian standard at the moment is the helmet. This is clearly not going to help us in our efforts to make the roads safer.

Quite often I will see — and I will pull them up, too — riders riding with thongs, shorts and a T-shirt on. You try to explain to them what will happen if you come off at even 30 or 40 kilometres per hour: ‘You are going to have serious soft tissue injuries which could take weeks or months to heal’. That is a very important one, I feel. If this is legislated, it is recommended that there be appropriate penalties for non-conformity in this area to allow police to be able to police the area properly.

The next recommendation is the separation of the motorcycle licence category from other motor vehicle licences. That will allow us to monitor areas such as learner riders. I know that many inexperienced police will look at a VicRoads licence and not fully appreciate the information that is on that licence. My submission is that a motorcycle licence should be a separate licence. I believe that is part of what VicRoads is suggesting and that the conditions or restrictions should be highlighted on that licence, because there is just not enough room on a car licence to show all the information in relation to cars, heavy vehicles and motorcycles. I think that is a very important one. The identification of returning riders would be handy — I do not know how that would be able to be done — as well as the identification of quad bike riders, who are currently not required to wear any safety gear, even a helmet, because a quad bike is defined as a motor vehicle. I believe this needs to be addressed.

Others recommendations are for front and rear numberplates on all motorcycles — I think that is an important one — as well as improved rider training and the acquirement of skills under the VicRoads graduated licensing system. Undoubtedly you would all be aware of the VicRoads model for the graduated licensing system. It means that any rider, even if they have a full car licence, has to have a minimum three-month learning period that has to be monitored by another experienced rider, and then they have to have three years on a restricted licence, which allows us to monitor them better. They have to have some form of ID on the bike to identify that they are a restricted rider, and they can ride only a learner-approved motorcycle during that period.

The creation of a motorcycle advisory body with representation by Victoria Police would allow police to identify issues and have these issues considered from different perspectives; I think that is important. Lower speed limits, which VicRoads has already touted, for routes such as the Great Alpine Road would be very beneficial, particularly in some of the more dangerous areas with the tighter corners. Better signage is definitely required for a lot of those roads. The police have identified many black spots and have at times spoken to VicRoads and local councils about those black spots. We feel that very often we do not get the necessary outcome we are looking for in relation to these matters.

In summing up, I see the four key areas in addressing motorcycle trauma as: proper training in the first place, and the graduated licensing system is part of that — they have to pass actual tasks to progress to the next stage of their licence and show that they are competent and safe riders at every stage; education, and that can be via police and via the media, and continuing education as required, including appropriate advertising campaigns — the TAC has had some really good ones over the years, and hopefully it will keep coming up with really good issues and portray them in the correct way for people to watch the ads and take them on board; the enforcement of road safety by Victoria Police; and the improved condition and signage of our roads, particularly on bends and sections of road that have been identified as black spots. That is the completion of my submission. Thank you.

The CHAIR — Thank you for very much for your contribution. There was an accident on the Great Alpine Road yesterday.

Acting Sgt TURNER — Yesterday, yes.

The CHAIR — Do you have an early assessment of that available for our record as opposed to the coroner?

Acting Sgt TURNER — I will give you a brief description. A 61-year-old male was following a B-double truck. The B-double truck came out of the bend, and it occurred on a straight section of road. The motor scooter was following the truck. The B-double truck driver was watching in his mirrors because it was apparently a good straight stretch of road and a safe spot to pass. The B-double truck driver stated he was driving at 60 kilometres per hour at the time, so he was only going slow. He said he was watching his rear-vision mirror and then all of a sudden he saw the scooter rider sprawled on the road back behind the truck. The scooter rider did not appear to even get to overtake the truck. There was virtually no damage to the bike, a couple of scratches on his helmet and no visible injuries. At this stage we are thinking that there might have been a medical condition, but we do not know that until the coroner's report comes through. I was talking to the members who attended up there, and they said, as far as they could see, there were no skid marks and no evidence of the rider trying to avoid an object or going too fast or even losing control.

Mr LANGUILLER — Thanks for your very important submission. We appreciate the many safety initiatives that you are undertaking. We thank you for the literature that you have provided to us. Can I just go through a couple of things? You talked about protective gear and Australian standards, and your submission appears to suggest that you would embrace making safety gear mandatory?

Acting Sgt TURNER — Yes.

Mr LANGUILLER — As we understand, it is only the helmet. You are quite correct on that; it is only the helmet that meets the so-called Australian standard, and then it is all over the place, to put it in plain English. You seem to be suggesting that you nevertheless want to make protective gear mandatory.

Acting Sgt TURNER — Yes.

Mr LANGUILLER — Can you clarify the returning rider's comment that you made in terms of the idea? It is first time that I have heard that submission put to us, and it is an interesting one that we should be absolutely clear on.

Acting Sgt TURNER — Returning riders, I think, are broadly defined by VicRoads as people over 40 years of age who have ridden a motorbike earlier in their years and have not ridden for five years. That is their broad definition at this time.

Mr LANGUILLER — Just for the purpose of clarification, under education and advertising in your submission it says that you are happy with the TAC ads. Can I put to you that submissions that we have received from motorcyclists and clubs right across the state, more or less — given that we have been to Geelong and Wodonga, as you would be aware, and Wangaratta — do not seem to relate to it. We heard one submission yesterday that it probably represents a tiny minority of the fraternity and that the majority do not appear to relate to it or to engage. In your submission you said that it is important that it be relevant to the motorcyclists themselves. Why do you think it is cool? Is that your experience, given your on-the-ground, front-line experience with cyclists? Evidently there are two camps: the TAC and Victoria Police saying that it is good; and the motorcyclists saying, 'That is not me'. It seems to create, as we understand, an impression that motorcyclists would not necessarily attribute to themselves.

Acting Sgt TURNER — I can only speak on behalf of Victoria Police. I am a motorcycle rider myself with about 35 years experience. The TAC ad campaigns, particularly the most recent ones I have seen, are very good. I am not sure why other riders are not relating to them. I cannot speak for them, but from my perspective and working within Victoria Police I do find those ads to be very confronting. They do get you to think about certain issues. I would be hoping that people who watch those ads, whether they be motorcyclists or drivers or truck drivers, even if they do not like the ad, would think about what is going on out there.

Mr LANGUILLER — You talked about 10 000 square kilometres that you and your troops have to patrol. Can you take us through the resources that are available to you, particularly the off-road ones? What sorts of resources do you have available to you? In your remarks you said we cannot be everywhere.

Acting Sgt TURNER — Exactly.

Mr LANGUILLER — If I may respectfully ask you, where can you be given your resources?

Acting Sgt TURNER — The East Gippsland shire is 21 800 kilometres. The 10 000 square kilometres I referred to was approximate. It is state and other forest areas. There are currently two highway patrol offices — one at Bairnsdale and one at Orbost, which is further to the east. Our resources at this stage are three road cars that work out of the Bairnsdale office and two road cars that work out of the Orbost office. We currently have no motorcycles or members trained to ride motorcycles. I mentioned that in the submission. At the moment we are doing our best to expand our local experience by addressing these issues by educating relevant members on motorcycle riding standards, off-road as well as on-road, and obtaining or sourcing maybe two or more off-road motorcycles.

Mr LANGUILLER — So effectively you do not have an off-road — —

Acting Sgt TURNER — We do not have an off-road policing capacity at this time.

Mr LANGUILLER — So you cannot patrol the off-road at the entry and exit points?

Acting Sgt TURNER — No, certainly. We cannot control any of the tracks up in the alpine areas.

Mr LANGUILLER — And you would be aware, of course, that in the order of 58 per cent of fatalities happen to be off-road?

Acting Sgt TURNER — Yes.

Mr TILLEY — I want to get into a conversation about the local area. My experience is that I share the other side of the hill. My electorate is there, Benambra, which is unique, as is this side. We share many of the roads. I just want to talk, firstly, about some of the on-road stuff. You mentioned speed limits on the GAR and the Omeo Highway. You are probably aware that in the next few years the 27 kilometres of the Omeo Highway

that remain unsealed will be sealed. No doubt that will be an issue confronting the community, particularly Victoria Police as an organisation. No doubt we will see an increased number of motorcyclists coming down for the GP and things like that. In relation to that you mentioned speed limits. You had some conversation about inappropriate speed, particularly on the GAR and the Omeo Highway. Can we just expand a little bit more in relation to your thoughts on that? You would understand VicRoads has a formula for setting speed limits; and it has to meet its formula. What contribution can you make, from your experience?

Acting Sgt TURNER — The formula that VicRoads has, from what I understand is V-roads or something, works on perfectly straight sections of road; it does not work on a road such as the Great Alpine Road. A section of the Great Alpine Road I will take as an example is just north of Bruthen to Swifts Creek. That is probably one of the windiest and most notorious sections of the road. There are other sections between Omeo and Mount Hotham that are particularly notorious as well. In relation to an overall speed limit for that road, it is 100 right through.

I believe the average rider or driver cannot ever attain 100 kilometres an hour on a lot of those sections of road. It makes sense to lower that speed limit maybe to 80. The other comment I made was about inappropriate speed, and I will define that. Inappropriate speed is a speed that does not exceed the posted speed limit for the road but is a speed that is too quick, depending on the road conditions or design. If there is a sharp corner, VicRoads has these nice, neat little yellow advisory signs with a 60 or a 50 or a 40 on them, but they do not tend to stand out to drivers or riders; they are very insipid. I would like to see much larger signs further from the bends — especially bends that have been identified as dangerous or which are black spots — and that are far enough away from the bends to give riders in particular the distance to use their brakes and slow down. Where VicRoads seem to place these advisory signs now is right at the bend, and a lot of the time you do not see it until the last minute. Obviously some drivers do not drive as safely as most of us do and they will go into a bend or a corner at an inappropriate speed and then realise as they go into the corner that they are going too fast, and that is where a lot of the problems seem to occur.

Mr TILLEY — Moving on, in relation to the area and in particular to the subject of off-road riding, and I will open up this part of the conversation to other colleagues as well — —

Acting Sgt TURNER — Okay.

Mr TILLEY — We have heard evidence in Geelong, Ballarat, Wangaratta and Wodonga in relation to that. We touched briefly on resourcing. Has resourcing in this particular area changed at all in the last decade or 15 years in relation to initiatives for road safety so far as having the capacity to meet those sorts of patrol areas that you have to cover?

Acting Sgt TURNER — I cannot speak over the last 15 years, but over the last 10 years — I have been in Victoria Police for 10 years — it does not appear to have changed in that time.

Insp. GILLESPIE — We have had an increase in our staffing numbers over the last few years, albeit a slight increase.

Mr TILLEY — Is that a change in general duties or is it particularly with the TMU?

Insp. GILLESPIE — There has been an increase in the highway patrol numbers particularly in Wellington. There has been no increase in Orbost or Bairnsdale.

Mr TILLEY — Thanks for that. I just want to move to off-road. We have heard evidence from other areas about some initiatives that have taken place — some great initiatives statewide from groups and individuals. Perhaps anybody who is with us at the moment can give us some accounts of initiatives around the state or some relationships with other departments that have taken place over the years, particularly with off-road riding. As we can see, the representation of off-road crashes is quite significant. There are some issues in relation to the definition of a road. We need to clarify it specifically. The legislation says it does not matter whether it is a sealed road or an unsealed surface. Do you have any idea in this particular area of how many unsealed roads you have in parks and forests?

Acting Sgt TURNER — I might hand that one across to Sergeant Rod Lay because he has a fair bit of experience in the off-road field.

Sgt LAY — I cannot give you the statistics on the quantities, but there are far more unsealed roads than there are sealed roads in the region by a significant amount. When I was at Yackandandah in your area there were maybe 100 kilometres of sealed roads in the area and 550 kilometres of dirt tracks in the adjoining forest, which was a small geographical area compared to the geographical area that contains the sealed roads. My experience here would be that it would be the same and perhaps even more so in favour of the number of dirt roads because of the isolated nature of the area. There is a huge forest which is just full of bush tracks, and none of them are sealed and yet we have a comparatively small number of highways that flow through. In terms of those used by motorcyclists, there are only a couple. There is the Great Alpine Road, the Pacific Highway and the Monaro Highway further in East Gippsland and that is about it. But the forest tracks are widely used.

Mr TILLEY — Could you expand on some of the programs in particular? Before I go down that track, in relation to off-road and on-road riding and part of the skills and education, do you see there is any transfer of skills and education from off-road riding that can apply to roadcraft on the road?

Sgt LAY — Absolutely. There are significant differences in the skills required to operate a dirt bike and a road bike safely. However, there are some basic skills that are requirements for both, particularly the skill of learning to look where you want to go and not where the bike is heading. That is a basic skill that causes crashes when you do not obey it. A motorbike may be heading in a certain direction, but to get it to go around a corner you have to look. It is like riding a horse: you have to look where you want it to go. If you look where you are heading, your body will naturally cause it to head in that direction. It is like if you are going around a corner and you think you might be going to run into a tree, if you look up at the tree, you will run into it, and that is something that needs to be taught from an early age.

Kids often learn to ride on a dirt bike. Some of those kids go on to ride road bikes at a later stage, and I believe they need training from an early age in relation to those basic skills to allow them to ride a road bike safely in the future, because the requirements for training and licensing for road bikes are, in my view, not sufficient.

Mr TILLEY — So your colleagues are aware, in a former life, before I was a member of Parliament, I was a member of Victoria Police and I was part of the Wodonga traffic management unit. Rod and I share a number of experiences in particular on that side of the hill and what can and cannot happen. We just want to get some information on the record in relation to the quality of training that can minimise the incidence of crashes in areas where a lot of the topographical road structures are very similar to over on the other side of the hill.

In your experience with the Yack ride and the Tallangatta secondary school, do you have any involvement with the school programs?

Sgt LAY — It might be timely for me to start at the start and make a presentation to the committee that outlines exactly what my involvement is. Would that be suitable?

The CHAIR — Yes, we do have some time, so fire away.

Sgt LAY — I will be succinct. I have been riding for around 35 years as a racer, as a coach, as a licensed tour operator with Parks Victoria and also representing Victoria Police. I have raced in Motocross at a national level and Enduro, and I have raised the Fink Desert race and things like that. About 10 years ago Tallangatta Secondary College was suffering from an inordinate number of kids missing school time due to off-road motorcycling injuries. The local safety committee approached the local inspector who asked me to develop a program to address it. I had already been given permission to represent Victoria Police when racing off duty from a PR perspective. I had a motorcycle with police graphics and 0.05 as a racing number. I would go to events and be a racing policeman. That was working well. I developed a program that I now call Ride Safe which I presented to kids, initially at Tallangatta Secondary College, about safe and responsible riding.

That developed to include practical rider training. Victoria Police paid me to go to the college and practically coach the kids in rider training techniques. I have been a qualified off-road motorcycle coach for about 12 years, and I use those skills to help the kids learn how to ride. At the same time, I was able to get across the information that we wanted to get to them about legislation and safe and responsible riding. The school noticed a decrease in the number of kids missing school as a result of injuries and also an increase in the suitability of their behaviour when riding around the town. There were more kids wearing helmets and less riding inappropriately.

I developed the program that saw me visit 15 or so different schools in the north-east, and I also attended various fairs and shows, both with a static display, often with the TMU, and also with a couple of actual riding displays. I did some more rider training over in the north-east. I also had an enforcement role as the officer in charge at Yackandandah, which was a country police area, and I was responsible for the policing of vehicle usage in Stanley forest. That is the closest forest to Albury-Wodonga, so it has high off-road motorcycle vehicle use and a lot of crashes as a result, so I was actively policing that.

The program morphed when the DSE started its statewide trail bike project. I had a strong involvement with that from inception. That was an excellent project, and I worked with the DSE in formulating strategies. DSE engaged me to coach some of its forest officers in practical riding techniques at the Broadford motorcycle complex. Roger Pitt did an excellent job; he was in charge of that project. I continued to work with Roger on some of the handouts that he has produced, which are also very good. Together we produced TV shows which are now podcasts on the DSE website. They show people, practically, the skills required to negotiate rough terrain, such as steep hills, up and down, and rocks and rivers, and that has an eco bent.

I have been a licensed tour operator with Parks Victoria, and those tours are eco-accredited, for the last eight years or so. I have run more than 60 multiday adventures into the Victorian Alps with groups, and I have had a coaching role in that as well. I have coached from kids at Motocross to adults at Motocross to adults as trail riders. So I have a reasonable amount of experience in relation to off-ride bikes. Also, I am a social road bike rider, and I have a road bike.

What I have noticed is that there are opportunities for improvement in the government approach to off-road motorcycling. I approached VMAC about five years ago and discussed this with them. To their credit, they took it on board. Speaking quite frankly, I believe that there was some resistance from VicRoads, and that they had the opinion that dirt roads were not their environment, not their responsibility, and so the strategies that I suggested at the time were resisted and did not come to fruition.

However, since then, things have changed a little, particularly with the DSE. The DSE approached the problem in a very sensible manner. It conducted a series of wide community forums and investigated what the problem was, and from that intelligence they developed strategies. I think it was very good. However, it did not reach its potential. Their education was awesome; their intelligence gathering was awesome, and their education was awesome. They not only produced fantastic brochures, which you may have copies of there, which are the best in Australia that I have seen, but they also did things like attend the Yackandandah charity bash, which was a social event I ran in the name of charity, and they have come and worked with us in a partnership approach and have done things like a noise test.

As a result, the average noise levels of bikes that attended the event over five years decreased significantly. I understand that noise is a major problem with the community with off-road motorbikes. The DSE did some wonderful stuff. It did some compliance. With the riders who I trained, they bought eight or so bikes for the state, and its plan was to work in partnership with Victoria Police to conduct joint compliance operations. However, there were a couple of problems that they came across. One was that Victoria Police was not necessarily set up to adopt that model — the special solos are 15 or so members based out of Melbourne, and yet the DSE program was rural and there were not many rural police centres that had trail bikes that could work with them. If there were, they were not necessarily well resourced. So the compliance phase of DSE's operation never reached its potential, and as a result it did not have as great an impact as perhaps it could have had on motorcycle collisions. Education is fantastic, but without some compliance aspect we do not get a decent all-over result.

I believe that if resourcing allows it, Victoria Police should expand the regional special solo groups, as I am going to call them. The model at Benalla is excellent. It has been running a number of years. They have got two bikes and six or so members trained. They have reduced their total motorcycle injury collisions by some 30 per cent. Their figures are outstanding, and they are only addressing dirt bikes. What they have found is that it is the 'un' riders — those who are unlicensed and unregistered — who are the most likely to crash and cause the most problems, and by addressing those riders, they have significantly reduced the statistics and saved perhaps millions of dollars for the government. We all know that a fatal collision averages around \$1 million. You only need to save one and you have funded five or six of these programs statewide with a couple of bikes and multiple riders. There is significant advantage in furthering those opportunities.

In relation to quad bikes, that was brought up. I am a strong believer that you should ban them from the bush. Quads can go about as fast as a two-wheel bike and yet they are nearly as wide as a car. Our tracks are not set up for two lanes, and you are just going to get too many head-on collisions. I have raced against them at the Finke Desert Race. They terrified me and we were all heading in the same direction. The thought of them coming in the other direction at speed is frightening. I have ridden a quad bike out in the bush, and they can go way too fast. They are like a four-wheel drive in size at dirt bike speeds. I think we should resist their licensing and registration in the bush.

Another thing quickly on noise — there is no noise testing of recreationally registered motorcycles. That was an oversight by VicRoads. I think recreational registration is reasonable and its introduction was warranted; however, it did not come with any noise testing whatsoever, which means that a Motocross bike that does not comply with any VicRoads legislation in relation to noise can be ridden out in the bush because it does not get tested at the point of registration by VicRoads. Half of your noise problems come from legally registered bikes that do not fit the criteria for the type of registration. Nobody tests noise. Victoria Police does not have noise-testing capabilities. VicRoads does not seem to. DSE does, but because there are so few of them and they conduct so few operations, it does not happen much.

Practically, I have been trail riding for 30-odd years. I have seen the police in the bush twice in that time. This is not a slight upon Victoria Police; it is just a clear indication that we are not set up to properly police the trail bike problem. That is something that is extremely clear to me. I do not know whether we are adequately resourced to do it. In Bairnsdale at the moment I would say that the answer is probably no. We are struggling for members to field minimum crews to work the van. We do not have another half dozen members to pluck out to put on trail bikes tomorrow to go and patrol the forests to address that issue; however, in the future it may be something that we are able to do, and hopefully we can work towards it.

Mr TILLEY — Can I just ask how long it has been since you left the Yack?

Sgt LAY — Two years.

Mr TILLEY — I suppose since you left Yackandandah it has been hard. I place on the record that Bairnsdale's gain is north-east Victoria's loss for sure. Anecdotally I hear things around the district, but have you got anything to add in relation to the number of off-road motorcycle crashes that might have been occurring since you departed the area and the work you were doing there around Yackandandah and other parts of north-east Victoria?

Sgt LAY — I know that the active patrolling of the Stanley Forest and the work I did with Ride Safe up there definitely had the result of reducing the amount of off-road motorcycle crashes in the Stanley Forest. I focused strongly on the education of riders and also the policing of young riders, and that yielded great results. I cannot speak categorically about what has happened since I left.

Mr ELSBURY — Thank you very much for those presentations, gentlemen and lady. I have to say that I noticed the poster here, and I was wondering whether or not it was one and the same. I had a beautiful segue for a question, but that has been kiboshed just a little bit. Both of you have motorcycling experience. I am not too sure about the acting sergeant's or the inspector's experience with motorbikes. I would understand that with your additional responsibilities in your roles as sergeant and acting sergeant you probably do not have the time to actually be on the road as motorcycle officers anymore. Is that the case — that additional workload means that you cannot hop on the bike yourselves even though you would probably give your eye teeth to do it?

Sgt LAY — Yes. This program has been in suspension effectively since leaving Yackandandah. I have had to concentrate on the strategic side of it. I have ongoing work with the TAC through the sticker sheets and their website and the DSE through their program, but essentially it is on the backburner because we do not have the resources to allow me to do it.

Mr ELSBURY — And the same for you, acting sergeant, too?

Acting Sgt TURNER — Basically while I am in this position of acting sergeant, no, I would not have the time to be able to put towards that. When I finish my stint as acting sergeant and go back to senior constable, there would be the possibility, depending on resources, to put the time towards that, definitely.

Mr ELSBURY — You were talking about there only being 15 special solos in the state. I was saying this down in Traralgon yesterday and I think even up in Wodonga a couple of weeks ago — that with only 15 special solos available for the entire state it is going to be the same time of year that everyone is going to want them, because that is when everyone wants to go out into the bush and fang around. So are you suggesting that we need something a little bit more localised and additional resources to be required to assist with patrolling the bushland when we hit summer or the better months of the year?

Sgt LAY — Public holidays, Easter, cup weekend — you cannot get the special solos to come down those weekends. Everyone in the state wants them.

Mr ELSBURY — I will go on a slightly different tack here as well. I noticed that Acting Sergeant Turner was saying that there are people who have gotten their motorbikes and not been able to control them on a corner. They get the new 1000cc and open the throttle just that little bit too much on a corner, and whoops-a-daisy — there we go. I have undertaken some motorcycle training. You said you have had 35 years, I believe it was. I have probably had about 35 hours total. Actually, it is much less — 3½ hours total. Do you think there is a need to improve the training regime of motorcyclists, especially considering that you can go off and get your motorcycle licence on a scooter and then hop on a 250 geared motorcycle and off you go?

Acting Sgt TURNER — Certainly, and under the present VicRoads licensing scheme for motorcyclists a learner can be on a motorcycle after doing a learner test on a LAMS-approved motorcycle, which can be up to 650cc, out by themselves on a busy road or on a winding country road.

Mr ELSBURY — I know I hit a breakneck speed of 30 kilometres an hour in my training, and then I can just open it up and go 110 legally on a highway.

Acting Sgt TURNER — Certainly, but the skills are not there. The bike handling skills which need to be trained at a grassroots level are not there, so when they get into a situation, which they undoubtedly find themselves in a lot of the time and which quite often happens on roads at bends or approaching bends, they freeze or they do not brake. A lot of them just go straight ahead and go out into the outer rim or back into the corner.

Mr ELSBURY — Also, with off-road bikes there is not a course I am aware of or a requirement to undertake any training at all. Basically off you go; have fun, boys and girls.

Sgt LAY — Yes, you do the DECA VicRoads on-road course to get a normal road bike licence, and away you go into the bush. There are no requirements to do training at all.

Mr ELSBURY — It is a totally different type of riding.

Sgt LAY — Through my experience as an off-road coach too I have seen the need for a significant amount of rider training. Some people are fantastic riders from the get-go and need little training, but the majority of us need a significant amount of training, and you can see the development in the safety of riders when I get hold of them as a newbie and take them through the basic principles. Once you can show them the basic skills required, like looking where you want to go and things like that — do not put your feet down on the ground in corners et cetera — then the improvement in safety is noticeable, but they also need some follow-up. One day is not enough. You can make them far better riders and safer riders in one day, but they need to come back and get some reinforcement of that, because you forget things. Your skill level improves, you start to go faster, and you need more input after that. I do not think the current system is in any way, shape or form suitable.

It is difficult one, this one, but I am a believer that we should have a junior rider licence proposal where kids perhaps from the age of 16 can go riding with a suitably trained parent or guardian in the forest after they have both attended a course on safe and responsible riding with an aspect about legislation so that the kids can then legally pick up the skills and the behaviour required to teach them how to ride in a safe and responsible manner, because they are out there on their Ls on their first day in the forest. Not only do they have to learn how to ride the bike but they have to learn trailcraft, which is really different from roadcraft on the road.

On the road you have to stay on the left-hand side of the track. You are supposed to do that in the bush, but they do not do that, because you grow up with Motocross, and you learn that to go to the wrong side of the track is way faster on a lot of corners, so they naturally gravitate to the wrong side of the trail out in the bush. Then you

come over blind corners and you have your head-ons, which are the most serious type of accident and result in the most serious sort of injuries. It is a difficult one, but I would say that you would significantly improve the safety of junior riders by giving them some time out in the bush.

You get your learners after a 6-hour session at VicRoads. You have to do 120 hours to drive a car — —

Mr ELSBURY — That is a very long session compared to what most people get to do.

Sgt LAY — That is right, and in a car you have to do 120 hours, yet a car is inherently safer and easier to drive than a motorbike. It makes little sense to me.

Mr ELSBURY — With the number of people who are actually going out into the bush, is there no training you are aware of from accredited providers for off-road riding?

Sgt LAY — The only training that is available is related specifically to racing. They teach you how to go faster but not how to ride safely out in the bush.

Mr ELSBURY — Pick the apex of the corner and open her up hard.

Sgt LAY — Even the leaders like HART have only just recently introduced an off-road course, I believe.

Mr ELSBURY — Just as a wrap-up — and this is an open-ended question, so anything could come back at me — what specific outcomes would you like to see from this committee's inquiry?

Mr TILLEY — Santa Claus over there. It is a wish list.

Sgt LAY — I would like to see a better partnership approach between all the stakeholders. I think the TAC are working towards dirt bikes. They are starting there; they have asked me for advice about stuff to put on their website, which is great. The TAC, the DSE and VicRoads need to step up — and Victoria Police. Motorcycling Australia, nobody seems to have much to do with them, yet they are a core group. We need to better use our media, including the websites. The police website has nothing about dirt bikes, the TAC has nothing about dirt bikes, the DSE has a little bit, and Motorcycling Australia has a little bit. We need to work together to formulate a better response.

Mr LANGUILLER — Can you just explain what you do on a regional level in terms of that structure, that architecture, of communication between the various agencies? Is there a permanent body that you meet with or report to?

Sgt LAY — No.

Acting Sr Sgt HAMSHERE — There are partnerships with the motorcycle working party, and VicRoads form a part of that. They and RoadSafe are working together in conjunction with Victoria Police to address the issues relevant to the roads in this region. They are actually endeavouring to look at each particular black spot and address that particular problem specifically, because obviously they are all unique. So there are partnerships and working parties in place that are addressing those issues and working together.

Sgt LAY — Melanie is right. The RoadSafe committee have identified off-road motorcycle issues as a problem and a focus for them. They invited me to attend one of their meetings, and they embraced the strategies of the regional motorcycle groups that I put forward. They actually funded us with \$18 000 without us putting pen to paper at that very first meeting, which is meritorious, but we are not yet set up to take advantage of that.

Mr TILLEY — This is probably for Mr Gillespie and is in relation to the formula for VMAG and its having charge and responsibility for this area. Do you have any contributions to make through representations to VMAG on those issues that affect this region directly? You can take it on notice and we can follow it up later.

Insp. GILLESPIE — If you like, I will.

Mr TILLEY — Thanks for that.

The CHAIR — Sergeant Lay, we took evidence in Traralgon that one point of the imparting of wise advice to trail bike riders was at the point of disembarkation of their bikes before they went off into the bush. They did

not have the resourcing. Is there any of that level of instruction in this region as well, where you go where the people are about to set off from, as opposed to having a crew of police on the trails in the bush itself?

Sgt LAY — Unfortunately not. The DSE, as part of their statewide trail bike project, developed a number of trail bike unloading areas, which were a fantastic resource. I assisted with the development of one at Yackandandah. Not only do they provide a central spot for riders to embark from that is suitable for the community in terms of noise and stuff, they also allow us the opportunity to provide educational material and toilets and things like that at that point. However, I have been here for two years. There is a trail bike unloading area at Mount Taylor, and I am not aware of police ever going there to perform that function. It does not mean that they have not, but it is not something that I am aware of. I have never done it.

The CHAIR — Could there be some purpose served by having a specific area that people can take from, where there is an educational role played at that point as well?

Sgt LAY — The DSE already have a number of trail bike unloading areas statewide. They are described in their program. Roger Pitt can bring you up to speed on them. They are of great value.

The CHAIR — Acting Sergeant Turner, what cc bike do you have for your road riding?

Acting Sgt TURNER — My road bike is a 1250cc motorcycle.

The CHAIR — On behalf of the committee members, I would like to thank each of you for your contribution. Before we close down, is there anything you would like to proffer by way of closing comment?

Acting Sgt TURNER — No, thank you.

The CHAIR — You will receive a copy of the Hansard transcript to correct any typos and get it back to us. If you have any follow-up thoughts, feel free to liaise with Kylie Jenkins and the executive of the committee so that we can add that detail to our journey as we try to work out ways we can reduce the incidence of death and injury of motorcyclists in Victoria both on-road and off-road. Thank you for your time.

Witnesses withdrew.