

TRANSCRIPT

ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into motorcycle safety

Melbourne — 6 March 2012

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Mr R. Smith, riders division manager, Motorcycling Australia.

The CHAIR — Welcome to the public hearings for the Road Safety Committee's inquiry into motorcycle safety. The committee has received some 74 written submissions since the release of the terms of reference and inviting of submissions. The purpose of these hearings is to obtain further evidence from selected witnesses covering the terms of reference of the inquiry. Hansard will be recording today's proceedings and will provide a proof version of the transcript to witnesses so that any typographical errors can be corrected and it can subsequently be returned to the secretariat to be placed on the committee's website. I would ask witnesses and observers to respect the rights of witnesses and the responsibilities of the committee by keeping noise and movement to a minimum, and I would ask everyone to adjust their mobile phones, so that they are switched off or on mute.

To the witnesses today, thank you for attending the hearings, and I will inform you that you have the benefit of parliamentary privilege in relation to anything that you say here today; however, once you leave the hearing, anything you say or publish outside this room is not so protected by parliamentary privilege. Should there be any evidence that you would like to give in camera, we are happy to take that on board as well. When you commence speaking, it would be helpful if you could introduce yourself by way of name and appropriate contact address for the benefit of Hansard. Thank you for coming, and we will be pleased to hear from you today, following which we have a number of questions that we would like to ask.

Mr SMITH — Thank you. My name is Rob Smith. I am the manager of the Australian riders division of Motorcycling Australia. They are located at 147 Montague Street, South Melbourne.

The CHAIR — During the public hearings in Geelong you shared concerns about the quality of accredited training and licensing providers. Are you able to expand on these concerns?

Mr SMITH — My primary concerns are twofold, the first being delivery of the content of the training programs and the other being the audit process administered by VicRoads. If we deal with the first one, the content, currently VicRoads imposes requirements to ensure that there is a standard of delivery, and that standard includes key activities and key skills associated with safe riding. When the program was initially undergone back in 1993, a lot of care and thought was put into the standards and also the competencies that might be expected of a learner rider and a person seeking a licence. As you are aware, there are two stages involved in getting a motorcycle licence — the learner permit and the licence. Those competencies were clearly defined and fell into two broad categories, the first being the physical activities of riding the motorcycle and the second being the strategic activities associated with riding a motorcycle. As time has gone on there has been a gradual erosion, if you like, of knowledge. In part this is due to the fact that the organisations accredited by VicRoads are commercially driven, so there is a bottom line to consider, but also the quality of the training of the trainers has suffered over time. The core competencies have become massaged so that they are no longer as difficult for a person to achieve. Primarily this is being driven by the fact that most schools want to appear successful. They want to be the school that ostensibly provides the best training and has the highest pass rate, thus gaining a commercial advantage in the marketplace. As this has gone on, the end result for the person leaving the learner permit process — in terms of their physical skills of operating the machine — is in my opinion substandard.

If we approach the second issue, which is the one of strategic training, again what has happened is that in many cases this is now little more than lip-service. There are basic tenets associated with strategic riding that are delivered in a 'by rote' manner so that people learn by rote. In that way they are not really coached; they simply get a prescribed formula that is supposed to take them away and give them something to work with. There is always a caveat, which is, 'Right, now you have had this, the real learning begins'; however, if they are poorly prepared then in many respects they are behind the eight ball and they have to go out and find out for themselves just how dangerous the real world is.

The licensing process shares the same kinds of issues; however, theoretically the advantage of the licensing process is that the person who comes back will have gained some experience on the road. This is not always the case. Some riders complete the learner permit training, and, having completed that, they put the learner permit in their back pocket, as it were. They then do nothing until the time comes when they can undertake the licence training.

In that period between the two compulsory tests, if you like — they are not really compulsory — they have gained no on-road experience and achieved no real familiarity or basic skill fluency with the machine, so they

have stagnated. They then turn up at the accredited provider, pay their money, jump on a motorbike, get the training and do the licence course. At the end of that there is a motorcycle licence skill test applied, oftentimes poorly, and they then go away with a licence.

Mr LANGUILLER — Done by the trainer?

Mr SMITH — Yes. Again, they are underprepared. There is a need for a new system. I cannot see that VicRoads is ever going to go back and do what is required to make the old system work again. It worked initially, but over time it has fallen down. I believe that for VicRoads to go back and do that is to say ‘We failed, we dropped the ball and we do not want to have to do that. We would rather say that the old system is old, we need a new system, let us go and create a new system that enables us to move forward without having to address the issues of the old system’.

This may not be a bad thing, as when I was originally working for VicRoads back in the 90s as the chief motorcycle instructor, the test and the program that was put in place always had a projected life of no more than 10 years. I can remember on many occasions saying that there would be a need for further development of the program and the testing protocol to make sure that it kept pace with changes in technology, changes in educational techniques, et cetera. That has never occurred, so the fact that we are now looking at a new system, the graduated licensing scheme, is in my opinion a good thing. It gives us a chance to address those issues and move forward. However, the quality of the new graduated licensing scheme will depend upon the foundations that VicRoads puts in place to make sure that the quality of both the content and the delivery is ensured to make sure that the public can rely on what is being delivered by the accredited providers.

Mr LANGUILLER — How do you do that?

Mr SMITH — You have to have an audit process conducted by people who are expert, and therein lies one of the problems to date — that is, that VicRoads has no experts in motorcycle training and testing. They could have gone to other people, and they talk to the industry regularly, but the industry is motivated by different things. It is my belief they should have had independent input into the audit process; they should have had independent input into the delivery of both the training itself and what was needed to ensure the standards. If we are going to have a new system, the very first step, in my opinion, would have been to make sure that the foundation of audit had been laid. VicRoads has just released a document, which I believe you have, outlining the new system for motorcycle licensure. However, within that there is no mention of the audit process; there is no mention of how the quality is going to be controlled. I believe that is like building a house by starting with choosing the tiles and the roof and then laying a slab underneath it.

Mr LANGUILLER — In relation to the issue of the trainer being the same person who approves the licence, what do you think about that? Shouldn’t it be separate?

Mr SMITH — If the audit process and the standards have been ensured correctly, there would not be a problem. However, I believe there is a problem and I would support the idea there should be an independent tester of the basic skill fluency. That person should also be charged with the responsibility of auditing the delivery and the content.

Mr LANGUILLER — It would generate tension, wouldn’t it? It would force the trainers to lift their game, if there is a game to be lifted.

Mr SMITH — Yes, I think there is a game to be lifted, most definitely. I think if you had that process it would create the need for the standard to be lifted. I do not really understand why VicRoads has not been able to ensure the standard — a lack of commitment, maybe, certainly a lack of desire to address it in an appropriate way; and that desire needed to involve other people. Therein lies the problem in that much of what VicRoads does, it does from a standpoint of, ‘We know best. We are the people who know about road safety, therefore we have a vast array of information and academics, et cetera, who can support that. You really do not know and thanks for your advice but we are going to do it our way anyway’.

Mr LANGUILLER — Thank you. I will go on to the second question. It has been made clear to the committee that the current provider scheme is focused on delivering training based on the needs of paying customers. That has meant that some types of training, such as off-road training, are not offered by the majority of providers. A past recommendation by this committee was that the training programs should be provided by

private organisations except where the cost of doing so would be prohibitive, in which case VicRoads should provide those services. What are your views on that?

Mr SMITH — VicRoads used to provide training. Certainly when I started working for VicRoads in 1990 they provided the service and used a combination of full-time VicRoads employees plus trained volunteers to deliver that program. It was seen that in order for the accredited providers to be commercially viable VicRoads should not be in competition with those providers, and I believe there was significant negotiation between one of the primary providers and VicRoads at the time to ensure that VicRoads ceased delivering those programs. VicRoads was happy to stop doing that because there was a cost involved. They were happy to hand it over because the catchphrase at the time was ‘outsource’, so everything was to be outsourced to those providers.

Do I think that VicRoads could do that again, could go back? It would require a courageous move on the part of VicRoads leadership and executive to do that. It would require a significant amount of money. The accredited providers would probably object because they would see it as competition.

Mr LANGUILLER — But do they provide off-road training, for example? Is there a sufficient number of qualified expert trainers out there in the field in reality?

Mr SMITH — Can I just clarify — when we talk about off-road, are we talking about off-road as in dirt bike or off-road as on a bitumen range, off the road, which is currently the situation?

Mr LANGUILLER — I would think both. I think we need to know about both.

Mr SMITH — Okay.

Mr LANGUILLER — By and large the off-road includes both, doesn’t it?

Mr SMITH — At the moment there is no off-road and, let us call it, dirt-based training that is required for anything to do with licensing. That is a completely separate issue, and it is certainly linked to road safety, but it is not part of the licensing issue. If we are talking about off-road in relation to the licence process, from learner permit to licence, then we are talking about bitumen-range activities that are attached to a school and are off the highway. They are on private property. Generally the activities are conducted behind a gate so that there is no chance of traffic coming in off the road and interfering.

That kind of off-road training presents problems simply because of the cost of real estate. Certainly in rural areas there is a problem with delivery in that it is hard to find real estate that is suitable for the delivery of these programs. Anybody wanting to set up a school in the country has to buy a piece of land or rent a piece of land that either already has good quality flat bitumen laid on it and a classroom or they have to invest in it themselves. That historically has been the problem. However, organisations like DECA travel around with a mobile classroom to rural centres delivering programs I believe in places like cattle market squares. How successful that is, I do not know.

Getting back to the issue of off-road and dirt-based training, most dirt bike riders learn to ride in paddocks or illegally before they turn up for a licence, and they do that at a young age. The operation of the machine is already part of their skill set. Transitioning over to on-road skills is often seen as pointless if they do not intend to ever ride on the bitumen. It may well be that there is a need for recognition of that, and that may be something that could be part of examination of the licence process, so that there is a junior licence program. Currently we have thousands of under-age riders riding dirt bikes illegally.

One of the propositions that has been put forward is that there be a junior licence system that links the junior licence to the parent’s licence, so the parent becomes responsible for the activities of the junior rider. I believe this is something that deserves significant attention. It has been largely ignored. When we initially discussed the new graduated licensing scheme I can remember having a conversation with someone from VicRoads and saying, ‘At last we have the opportunity to do this in a holistic sense, look at the entire licensing process and create a process that captures both off-road riders — dirt bikes — and road riders’. If we do that, we will have a significant improvement in road safety, but it requires somebody to do it. I do not believe it has occurred.

Mr LANGUILLER — I want to seek clarification. Currently the under-age riders ride without licences?

Mr SMITH — That is correct. Go to any state forest, any paddock or indeed any parkland at weekends.

Mr LANGUILLER — Has the proposition you are advancing of attaching that junior licence to the parent happened anywhere else?

Mr SMITH — No, this would be a new process and a new system. It would be something that the rest of the world would be very interested in because many places share the same problems.

Mr LANGUILLER — It would engage parents to take responsibility.

Mr SMITH — Absolutely.

The CHAIR — Where does the idea come from?

Mr SMITH — It came from a policeman who attended the old Victorian Motorcycle Advisory Council some years back. I believe he was from somewhere like Albury-Wodonga or Shepparton. He was a trail bike rider himself. He brought the idea to VMAC and suggested it. Nothing really happened as a result.

Mr LANGUILLER — This was your opportunity to claim ownership of it.

Mr SMITH — I do not believe in claiming ownership of something I did not do.

The CHAIR — Thank you for your forthright process. I note the error of my colleague. It may have been a person by the name of Rod Lay who certainly has a keen interest in motorcycling matters in the north of Victoria.

Mr SMITH — Yes, I believe it may have been. I think it was.

The CHAIR — He takes an interest in these matters. Do you feel that could be an effective measure by virtue of the engagement of parents in the training process so that there is some legal avenue for it to be supervised?

Mr SMITH — I think it has a lot of benefits and not just from the licensing of the individual who is going to ride. It also means that there is an opportunity to establish a registration system for the motorcycles. That way we can look at the safety of the motorcycles, and we can then deal with the issue of stolen bikes, which is a big issue, because there is some level of traceability. It means that there may be avenues for TAC to provide cover for these people. TAC will probably be white with fear over this, but it is something that I think is important. If you are going to do this, you have to do the whole thing properly.

Mr LANGUILLER — Somebody picks that up anyway; I imagine it is Medicare, the feds or the state. I agree with you.

Mr SMITH — You have to approach this whole thing holistically and see how it dovetails in the broader sense with everything to do with licensing and registration. I believe this has that potential to address all of those issues. As a road safety enterprise the benefits are potentially huge.

The CHAIR — Thanks very much. We have heard evidence from the RACV that training post-licence is not supported by evidence, yet many riders have told the committee that post-licence training and ongoing training is a vital tool in keeping them safe on the road. Can you share your views on the importance of training before and after licensing as a trauma-reducing measure?

Mr SMITH — Sure. First of all, I am amused at the irony that an organisation that delivers on-road training to drivers cannot see the benefit of what they are doing. In terms of on-road training post-licence I would suggest that RACV look at themselves and say, 'Is what we are doing achieving anything?'. I think there is a definite need for post-licence training. Currently the majority of that training is skills-based. High-level training, as it is sometimes termed, or advanced training is usually about bitumen-based exercises on a range or track and centres around cornering skills, braking skills et cetera.

Motorcycling Australia has recently started delivering on-road strategic training. I am a big believer in that process. If it did not work, the police would not train advanced drivers; there would be no point. If it did not work, we would not be training ambulance drivers to be advanced drivers. We can say yes, but they are driving

to an emergency. Nonetheless the skills that they have to use in terms of collecting information about the environment, processing it and putting it into a plan are the same skills that a rider needs.

The vulnerability of a rider requires advanced information gathering and planning skills. If we accept the vulnerability, then we need to accept that there needs to be an increased level of training to deal with that vulnerability. The fact that there is no evidence says more about, no. 1, the people collecting evidence, and no. 2, the method of collection. In the old days the data collection was old-fashioned. We have mechanisms now that will allow us to measure performance far more objectively. There are in fact a couple of reports available, one from the University of Nottingham in the UK, that support through the Institute of Advanced Motorists the premise that advanced training does in fact produce safer riders.

Mr LANGUILLER — If there is one thing that comes to mind in terms of my recollection of submissions by Victoria Police and their analysis of serious collisions and fatalities, it is driver error. Time and again they have put to us in this committee that there is a very significant issue of driver error. Based on that, one would assume that additional training would not be a bad idea.

Mr SMITH — Once again, the issue is broader than just additional training for motorcyclists and has to extend to drivers. Drivers generally are — —

Mr LANGUILLER — As in car drivers?

Mr SMITH — Yes, car drivers are low-performance operators. They go through a licensing process that again tries to balance the needs of the public with commercial viability and the expediting of a process. At the end of that they get a licence and then they are waved away to be very happy in whatever vehicle they are going to be in, a vehicle which will protect them from the environment around them. They need to understand that they have a responsibility to all road users.

Currently we have a Road User or Abuser program, which is about being aware of cyclists. I look forward to that being extended to being aware of riders. Unfortunately in this case the prevailing attitude of many of the jurisdictions such as TAC and VicRoads is one that discourages motorcycling, despite the fact that the benefits are manifold. Certainly recent research from Belgium has shown that commuting motorcyclists can play a significant part in reducing travel times and pollution. There is still a belief that somehow motorcyclists are not only undesirable, but the riders themselves are risk-taking and irresponsible.

That catch-all kind of mentality can be recently seen in the TAC advertising campaign, 'Riders, it is up to you'. That is bit like saying to a woman wearing a miniskirt, 'It is up to you to protect yourself'. Society has to accept and protect all members of the society. The community needs to do that at a smaller level. Only then can we really address the issues in a way that is proactive. Everybody has to get on board with the fact that yes, we are different. We may not look like you, we may not dress like you, we may not do the same things as you, but we are all part of the same community. That acceptance is something that has to begin with organisations like TAC and VicRoads.

Mr LANGUILLER — If I may, you just reminded me of an interesting quote you put on record: 'Thanks for your advice, but we are going to do it our way'. Is that how you describe the relationship between yourselves and the TAC? I sense some institutional tensions — —

Mr SMITH — You sense? You would be right. I do not really understand how an insurance company like TAC can have become so powerful that they can influence policy in the way that they do. VicRoads has long had an unwritten policy of discouraging motorcycling. It was there when I worked there, and everybody knew it. I was told categorically, 'We will never do anything to encourage motorcycling'. I do not believe that is their role. They should be even-handed. It should be about serving all road users. Part of the problem is that we are surrounded by organisations that no longer see themselves as serving the community. If we do not put in place checks and balances on all of those organisations that ensure that they understand their role and are even-handed and unbiased, then the current dogma will continue and we will not move forward.

Australia has fallen behind in recent times in the OECD ratings of road safety from 13th to 16th. I believe this sends a clear message to all of those involved in road safety that whatever it is that they are doing, it is not working. There is a move towards — —

Mr LANGUILLER — It would be fair to suggest that there are thousands more road users today than there were perhaps 20 or 30 years ago.

Mr SMITH — Certainly, yes, and we have to be evolving and looking at new methods. Some of those may fly in the face of what we are doing currently. There is a preoccupation with speed because it is easy. If you focus on speed and demonise speed, it allows lazy road safety programs to perpetuate. The real issues lie in getting the community to accept responsibility for what they are doing and for each other, but unfortunately there are people who have made careers out of peddling the same dogma. They will continue to do that until someone says, 'Righto, that is enough, come up with something new' and, as I said, puts in place a system with checks and balances, which makes them accountable. Otherwise we will stick where we are and we will slide ever backwards. I do not believe that is the way to go.

Mr LANGUILLER — If the structured standards are an important way of reducing motorcycle trauma, what issues, if any, have you identified with the way we build and maintain roads and infrastructure in terms of motorcyclists, and how can it be improved?

Mr SMITH — This is a really important question. I may have outlined what I call the green tree frog principal the last time I spoke to you, but I may not have. No? I will, then. The green tree frog is the most delicate organism in the environment and it reflects its environment in its health. If the environment is sick, then the tree frog suffers. The reason it suffers so much is due to its sensitivity. Within the road safety landscape, if you like, the motorcyclists, pedestrians and cyclists are the green tree frogs. If something is not right, if something is toxic in the environment to the most sensitive road users, then it manifests itself most profoundly amongst vulnerable road users. If you fix the environment so that those people are taken care of, everybody benefits.

Mr LANGUILLER — Can you give examples?

Mr SMITH — In the past we have carried out road safety surveys of the Great Ocean Road. I was involved in those audits as a road auditor and used my road auditing qualifications and crash investigation qualifications to provide input to VicRoads to address some of the issues associated with the Great Ocean Road. A lot of works were carried out. As a result there was something like a 36 per cent decrease in motorcycle injuries and fatalities on the Great Ocean Road. That is unprecedented in terms of gain, and it cost very little. However, that program has not been maintained. It was a one-off, and the Great Ocean Road is sliding back to where it was. But that clearly had benefits for motorcyclists. Those same benefits, although they were not measured, would apply to everyone. If you clear a sight line through a dangerous bend so you can see what is coming, everybody can see what is coming. If you make the edge of the road into bitumen so you have some run-off, everybody has run-off. In that regard I go back to something akin to the tree frog analogy: if we fix the environment for the vulnerable road users, everybody benefits.

We need to turn the pyramid of need upside down. Currently the pyramid of need is upside down as it sits, with the most people being the ones that drive the policy and programs that are aimed at road safety and with the vulnerable road users sitting right at the very bottom, the pointy bit. Currently this is how it is. Because there are car drivers primarily associated at the top, we have an inverted pyramid. That gives this, and the vulnerable road users sit right at the bottom. So in terms of policy and expenditure everything is done to deal with car drivers and people who move around in cars.

Mr LANGUILLER — The so-called majorities?

Mr SMITH — Yes. If we turn that up the right way so that we put vulnerable road users at the top, everybody benefits. But we need to elevate the status of VRUs, and that includes motorcyclists; we need to recognise their needs. If you create the environment that does not kill them, everybody wins. But again that requires a philosophical change within the current organisations that deal with road safety. People do not really want to have to put motorcyclists at the top, because it means that suddenly there is a problem there that you have to actually look at and deal with in a way that goes beyond thinking, 'Well, the big stick did not work, let us just get a bigger stick'.

The CHAIR — Thank you, and I think you make a good point in relation to the vulnerability of pedestrians, motorcyclists and cyclists. There are some users of vehicles on the roads which might be a combination of being a bicycle that is engine driven in part as well, which is another smaller subset.

Mr SMITH — Yes.

The CHAIR — Can you detail to the committee your understanding as to why the on-road testing component for motorcycle licences was dropped?

Mr SMITH — Why it was dropped?

The CHAIR — Yes, the on-road testing.

Mr SMITH — Sure. It was dropped for commercial reasons. It was originally brokered, I believe, by Honda Australia via the training with VicRoads and it was dropped for two reasons, one of which was the commercial viability of delivering an on-road testing process because it meant that you could not bulk test. Currently you can bulk test 6 to 12 people in a short amount of time on a range that is very self-contained. To do an on-road test would mean that you would actually have to go out with one person in order to be truly objective and evaluate their performance, come back and take out the next one. VicRoads used to do that function. I used to be an on-road licence tester, and it would take half an hour at least per person. They were allocated 45 minutes because they had to have a debrief and go through the licence issuing process et cetera — the administrative part of it — but the actual process of going out on the road took around 20 minutes to half an hour. That was not commercially viable.

The other issue was that there was a high level of unreliability on the part of those delivering the testing process. VicRoads's testers themselves were not reliable. They were not reliable in two ways. One was in the method they used. The other was that they were not particularly good at operating motorcycles, so there were a lot of crashes involved, which was costly and difficult for VicRoads. So VicRoads was happy to drop it on the premise that there is no evidence to suggest that an on-road test does anything, but the real reasons were primarily about commercial issues and the reliability of the delivery.

The CHAIR — Just to clarify a point, did you say there were accidents that occurred during the actual testing process?

Mr SMITH — VicRoads's testers would fall off their bikes fairly regularly.

Mr LANGUILLER — Why is that?

Mr SMITH — It came down to the selection of the personnel. As the person in charge of the standard we ran a lot of training for these guys, but many of them were what they would call old hands who were reluctant to be educated and were not what I would call professional motorcyclists. They only rode the motorcycle to do testing, so they did not have continuing experience and they were not really up to speed. Their riding skills themselves were deficient.

The CHAIR — Thank you. I would just like to take you back to a question we covered in part earlier in relation to off-road training. Just to seek a point of clarification, for some of the current testers to obtain the off-road sector of training area or the area of bitumen or a classroom is an expensive exercise. Could it be that, say, for some of the off-road aspect VicRoads could take a stronger role in the provision of such a training precinct?

Mr SMITH — Absolutely. If VicRoads were to do that, then the accessibility issues would be dealt with. Certainly some of the providers would be able to go and deliver a much higher quality product if that were to happen, and in many cases those areas already exist. The relationships that VicRoads needs to develop are the things that are important. As an example, if you go to almost any rural centre, you will find there will be a supermarket car park. If there was a relationship between VicRoads and that supermarket to rent or use an area of bitumen — it is already there — it could be used providing there was agreement on the part of both parties. So that cost is not necessarily as huge as it might seem, insofar as you do not actually have to go out and buy a piece of land and then put some bitumen on it. It just means you have to make the best of what is actually there. I would suggest that is a reasonably cheap way of going about providing access.

Mr LANGUILLER — So lateral thinking is required on the part of VicRoads, a bit of common sense.

Mr SMITH — That is a very wry smile.

The CHAIR — I will just clarify the second point in terms of off-road training: do you mean not only car parks but dirt areas as well?

Mr SMITH — There is no reason why dirt training could not take place in paddocks. You just have to develop that relationship.

Mr LANGUILLER — Or DSE could help.

Mr SMITH — I beg your pardon?

Mr LANGUILLER — The Department of Sustainability and Environment could potentially help.

Mr SMITH — Yes, absolutely. I am sure there is access. Part of the problem would be to do with containment, but if there was a relationship between VicRoads and the DSE where the contribution of VicRoads was to put up a fence, then you would have containment. By sticking a corporate head in the sand and denying the existence of off-road riding — and I am talking about dirt bikes — it means that we can sidestep the issue. Off-road riding or dirt bike riding has been something that has been going on and is in fact has been part of Australia's culture for along long time. And yet it has been sidestepped for years. This should not happen. Off-road riders have the same rights and responsibilities as everybody else, and we should deal with it. Certainly in all the years I have been involved with committees and councils associated with various organisations — police, TAC, VicRoads — we have never really dealt with that issue, and this falls very nicely into the discussion we had previously about the licensure of junior riders. If you do the licensing part, you can do the registration part; if you do the registration part, you can do the training part, but it needs a strategy that incorporates and encompasses all of those aspects. Just saying that it is too hard should not be an excuse.

The CHAIR — All right. Are there any other comments you would like to make to the committee at the moment? We appreciate your evidence; it is of a very high standard.

Mr SMITH — I think one of the issues that concerns me is the issue of enforcement. I have a fundamental problem with enforcement. Years ago — and I am sure you will remember this; I suspect we are probably of similar eras — policing was about community and policemen policed for the community. Now we have enforcement, which controls the community. Enforcement has more to do with threat than it does protection, and as a result we have armed enforcers on the streets rather than policemen. If we are going to police effectively, there needs to be a relationship between those who are doing the policing and the people being policed. If you want increased road safety, there has to be increased community buy-in into the whole issue of road safety, and that includes policing. By having enforcement and community, there is a distinct point where the two stop and it is very much 'us and them'.

The police in recent times have been trying to do some work to relate to riders, but it has not been terribly successful. Most recently we have had Operation Halo. Operation Halo has been focused on pedestrians, bicycles and things like motorcyclists in bicycle lanes. There is not a great deal of evidence that motorcyclists knock over cyclists — in fact I do not believe there is any — yet we have had an enforcement program targeting the activity of riding in bicycle lanes. I suggest you could spend your enforcement buck a lot more effectively somewhere else on something that is not necessarily going to get people offside.

This goes back to my comment about the way motorcyclists are viewed. This attitude that motorcycles are a problem and motorcyclists are problem users is something that needs to be addressed. We are not feral. We hold down decent jobs. We do things that contribute towards the community. The fact is that we have to wear helmets — that is something we have to do — but we are not faceless, and we are not dysfunctional. The way things are at the moment is that we are presented in that way and the public at large sees us in that way. I believe there needs to be open dialogue between vulnerable road users — and that includes motorcyclists — and key stakeholders such as the police, TAC and VicRoads on how to change that perception. Therein lies a huge problem, and I think this committee can be instrumental in bringing that about.

There needs to be accountability on the part of all of those organisations in what they are doing. I do not see that accountability from the police. They do these operations, and no-one really holds them accountable on what the far-reaching effects are. TAC does things, and no-one holds them accountable. Since the recent 'Riders, it is up to you' campaign, as a rider myself I have experienced more attempts on my life that could be construed as road rage than ever before, and I believe I ride safely and respectfully most of the time. I would not be alone in this.

VicRoads is not really accountable, because there is a belief — and I do not mean to offend anybody — that these committees, no. 1, do not have any teeth, and, no. 2, ‘These committees are just about giving backbenchers something to do’. If they believe that about these committees, what chance do we have? Thank you.

The CHAIR — Thank you. In deference to my colleagues, in terms of the parliamentary committee process, I think if VicRoads reviewed the role of parliamentary committees and those recommendations that actually have been translated into law, they may form a different view.

Mr SMITH — I hope so.

The CHAIR — In addition to some recommendations having not been implemented, there is a continuing and important role served by the public consultation process where consideration is given to the review points of stakeholder groups and organisations.

Mr SMITH — Riders are looking at this committee with a great deal of hope and expectation, because I gave evidence to the previous committee — however many years ago that was — and there was not a great deal of follow-up as a result. However, at the time the engagement was not as significant as I believe it is with this committee. People are looking and thinking, ‘A lot of good things have been said here, and you guys are doing some really serious listening’. Riders are hoping that this is going to come out with something really useful for everything and is going to set the agenda for years to come and change things, but without that accountability I personally worry that there will be a bit of furore to start with and then by the time we get five years down the track, everybody will have forgotten it and the report will be sitting on a shelf somewhere and nothing will happen.

The CHAIR — Rob, I note your comments there, and time will measure the outcome in that sense. I was also interested in terms of post-licence training. What do you think the best example would be in post-licence training? You mentioned that there was a police aspect of it and that they took a serious view of it.

Mr SMITH — I believe the best method of post-licence training is on-road strategic riding — giving people an understanding of how to ride strategically. Last week Motorcycling Australia ran a course for potential coaches who would teach exactly that — on-road training. There is a system we use that is based on the police manual of roadcraft from the UK. It has been around since 1934. It works. It is nothing new, but certainly for Victoria it is new. I think there needs to be an expanding network of people who provide that kind of quality training. It needs to be seen as aspirational rather than something that is mandated, so people will say, ‘Yes, I really want to do that. That is going to make me a better rider’. If we could get those other stakeholders — like VicRoads, the police and the TAC — to support something like that, I think we can make motorcyclists much safer, and we can validate on-road training post-licence.

The CHAIR — Good. Thank you. Thanks very much, Rob, for your attendance here today. We appreciate you giving the time and the calibre of evidence. You will get a copy of the transcript, as indicated earlier. Please correct it and send it back in.

Mr SMITH — Thank you very much. I appreciate your time.

Witness withdrew.