

**Submission**

**No 18**

## **DRIVER AND ROAD USER DISTRACTION**

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One Company  
Many Brands



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27 April 2012

Staysafe (Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety)  
Parliament House  
Macquarie St  
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Mr Greg Aplin

### **Driver and Road User Distraction Inquiry**

Suncorp welcomes the Staysafe Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety *Inquiry into Driver and Road User Distraction on New South Wales roads*. Suncorp has a long standing commitment to improving road safety throughout Australia and is pleased to have an opportunity to contribute to this Inquiry.

### **The Suncorp Group**

Suncorp Group Limited and its related bodies corporate and subsidiaries (collectively 'Suncorp') offer a range of financial products and services in banking (Suncorp Bank), general insurance, life insurance and superannuation (Suncorp Life) across Australia and New Zealand. Suncorp has around 16,000 employees located across Australia and relationships with over nine million customers. This submission is made on behalf of Suncorp's personal insurance division.

### **Our Response**

Suncorp's response to this Inquiry is made by our national motor insurance brand, AAMI. Established in 1970, AAMI is a wholly owned subsidiary of the Suncorp Group. Each year AAMI conducts significant road safety research, trains thousands of young drivers in advanced driving techniques and rewards millions of Australians for maintaining a safe driving record. As such, we believe AAMI is well placed to provide a detailed response for consideration by the committee.

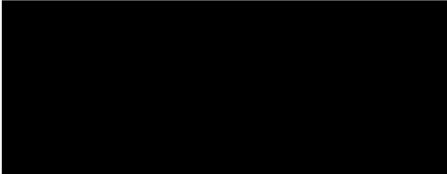
Within the attached submission, AAMI contends that driver distraction is a significant road safety concern that warrants greater attention from industry, Government and the community. AAMI's 2012 Crash Index research has found that an alarming number of young drivers admit to having sent or read SMS text messages while driving and that a significant number of drivers consider distraction as the greatest factor leading to road safety issues.

AAMI believes that as technology advances the already high number of devices in cars will increase, but this may not be a bad thing. If designed in the right way technology can support drivers and lead to improved road

safety. The key will be to ensure devices support the driver, rather than distract them. AAMI hopes that its research and experience can contribute to progressing road safety.

If you have any questions or comments for Suncorp regarding our submission, I encourage you to contact me on [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. Alternatively, please contact [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Yours Faithfully



**Annabelle Butler**  
Executive Manager  
Public Policy and Stakeholder Management

# AAMI Response

Staysafe Committee Inquiry into Driver and  
Road User Distraction

April 2012

LUCKY YOU'RE WITH  
**AAMI**



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## About AAMI

Established in 1970 Australian Associated Motor Insurers Ltd (AAMI) is a leading car, home, compulsory third party (CTP) and small business insurance brand. Today, AAMI is one of Australia's largest insurance brands protecting more than 2.5 million policyholders.

AAMI focuses on providing our customers high quality products with excellent customer service. Insurance benefits such as no fault, no penalty; lifetime repair guarantees; lifetime rating one/maximum no claim bonus; valet service; progressive no claim discount on home insurance and the first general insurance Customer Charter were all introduced by AAMI.

AAMI has become known for its commitment to safe driving: it rewards safe drivers with discounts on their insurance, has educated more than 75,000 young drivers in safe driving techniques through AAMI Skilled Drivers and invested hundreds of thousands of dollars each year researching the driving behaviours of Australians.

## Executive Summary

In 2011, there were 1,292 road deaths in Australia. AAMI views this as 1,292 too many. AAMI is proud of its long standing commitment to improving road safety and is pleased to contribute to the Staysafe Inquiry into Driver and Road User Distraction.

Since 1995 AAMI has conducted annual road safety research through the annual *AAMI Crash Index*. The *2011 AAMI Crash Index*, highlighted distracted driving as a key road safety issue. Distracted driving is quickly rising as a leading cause of accidents on Australian roads. AAMI's 2012 research has found drivers now rank distraction closely behind lack of skill and alcohol as 'the greatest factor leading to safety issues on our roads.'

There is no doubt that the number of electronic devices in cars is rising, and that these devices are contributing to driver distraction. Based on the findings of AAMI's research, more than 40% of NSW drivers between the ages of 18 and 24 admit to having sent or read an SMS text message while driving. Drivers in NSW appear to recognise the high risk of using a mobile phone while driving, with half (50%) supporting a complete ban on mobile phone use in the car, including use with a hands-free device.

AAMI believes that as technology improves, more and more devices will find their way into cars, however this should not be seen as a bad thing. With correct implementation, such as a driving mode that automatically diverts incoming calls and text messages, advanced technology can greatly improve road safety.

In fact, research into driver assistance technology conducted by the University of Sydney has found GPS monitoring systems that inform a driver how often they speed, or how risky their driving is, can significantly reduce unnecessary risk-taking behind the wheel. Following the success of this trial, AAMI has partnered with Mercurien to promote the *Better Driver* system, which monitors driver behaviour and has delivered a 38% reduction in crash rates in fleet trials. This is just one example of how technology, if used correctly, can improve road safety.

AAMI hopes that its comments, research findings and input can assist the Staysafe Committee Inquiry into Driver and Road User Distractions.



## The nature and extent of distraction as a contributor to crash casualties on NSW roads

Over the past decade, AAMI has observed an increasing number of crashes being caused by distracted drivers. In response to rising rates of distraction AAMI has introduced a number of questions researching distracted driving into the Crash Index survey. This research has found that distracted driving is becoming an increasing problem as mobile phones, GPS devices and other devices find their way into cars.

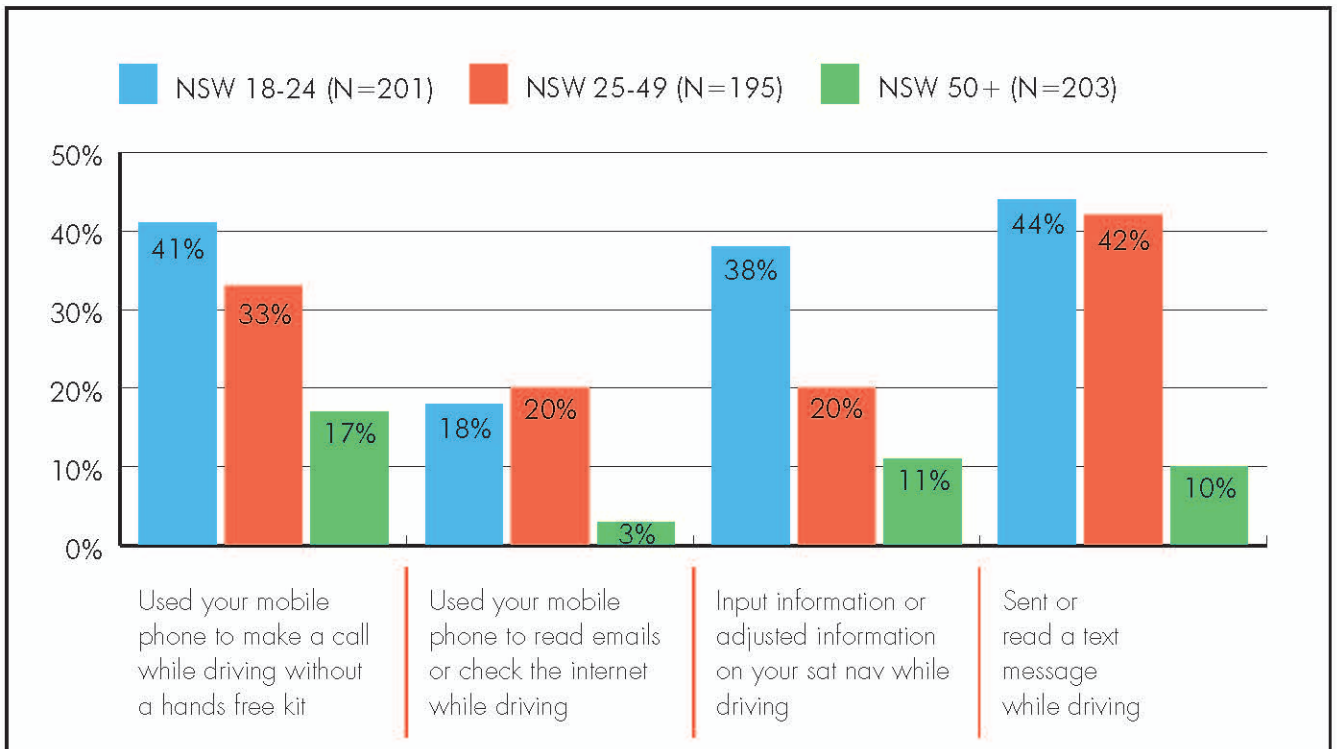
In the 2012 AAMI Crash Index drivers were asked if they had been involved in an accident over the past five years and if so, what factors contributed to that accident. The below table shows driver responses:

	National (n=3706)	NSW (n=599)	NSW 18-24 (n=201)	NSW 25-49 (n=195)	NSW 50+ (n=203)
I have experienced an accident as a driver in the last five years	25%	25%	30%	28%	20%
<b>Contributing factors</b>	<b>National (n=973)</b>	<b>National 18-24 (n=378)</b>	<b>National 25-49 (n=313)</b>	<b>National 50+ (n=282)</b>	
Momentary loss of concentration	18%	19%	19%	16%	
Bad roads\infrastructure (lights, non-visible signs etc)	12%	17%	16%	3%	
Traffic congestion	12%	14%	14%	7%	
Speeding	11%	12%	14%	5%	
Fatigue or tiredness	10%	13%	14%	2%	
Distractions inside the car	9%	15%	11%	3%	
Distractions outside the car	9%	13%	9%	8%	
Alcohol	3%	4%	3%	1%	

These responses indicate that distracted driving was a contributing factor in around 9% of accidents nationally, achieving a similar rating to bad roads\infrastructure, traffic congestion, speeding and fatigue or tiredness. Significantly, drivers aged 18 to 24 indicated that distractions inside the car contributed to 15% of their accidents which is considerably higher than the 3% of accidents indicated by drivers aged 50+ years. NSW rates of distraction are broadly consistent with these national averages.

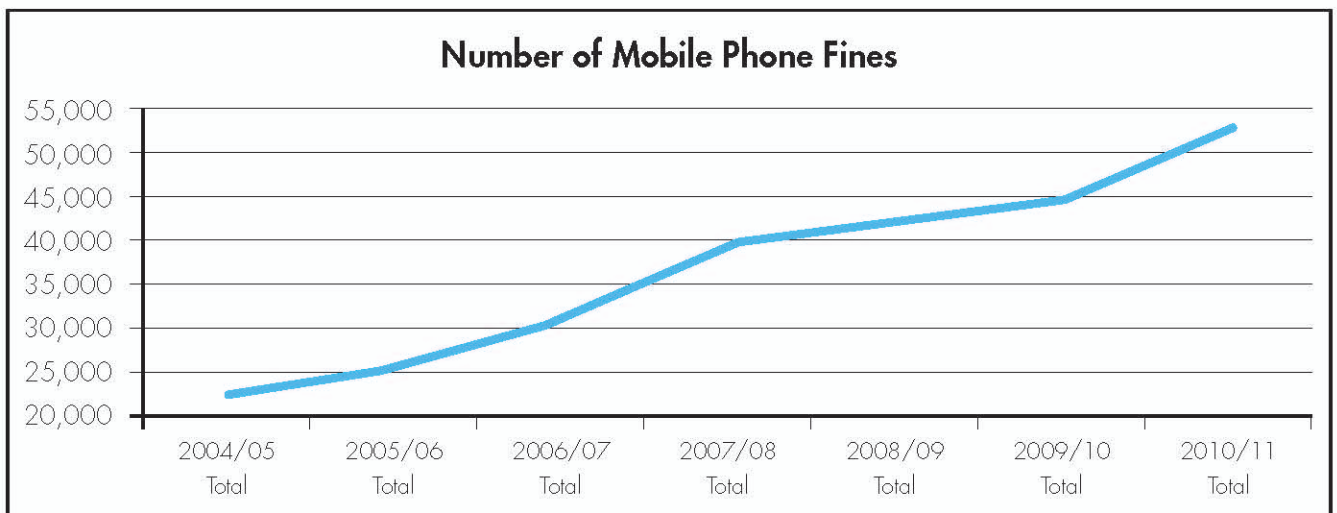
AAMI also asked drivers how they behaved behind the wheel, with some unnerving results. When asked 'What have you experienced while driving in the past 12 months' in the 2012 index, an alarmingly high number (29%) of NSW drivers report having read or sent an SMS while driving.





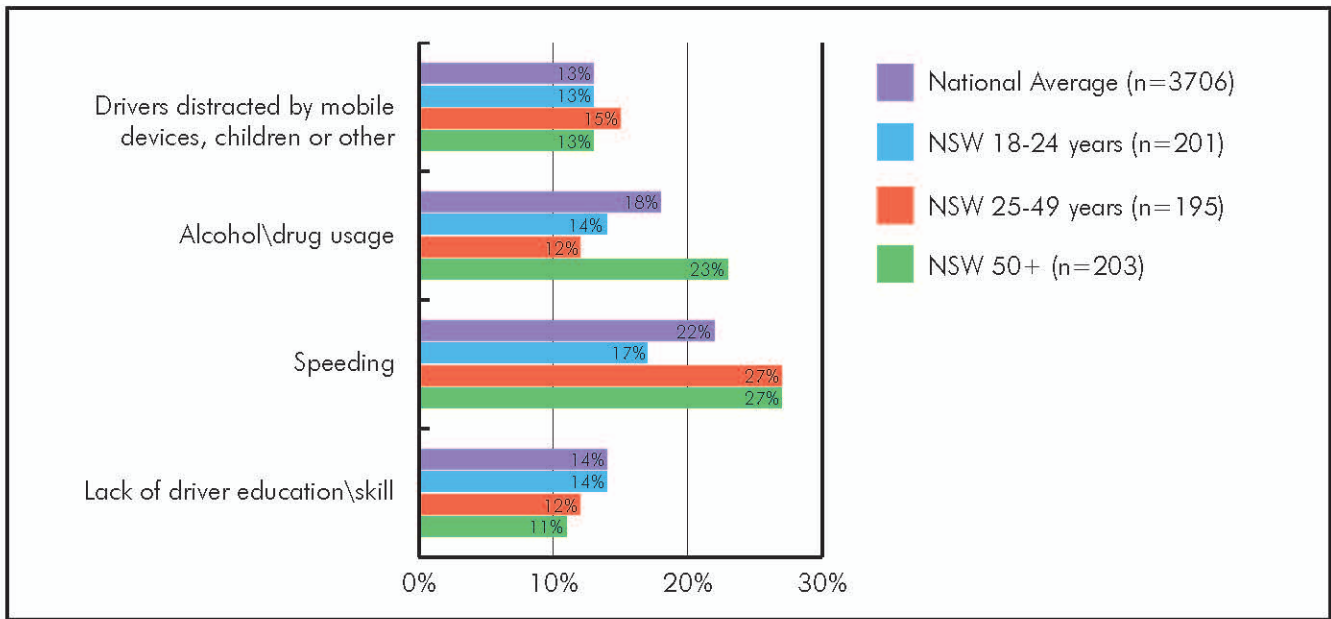
Again, NSW drivers (aged 18 to 49) were significantly more likely to be distracted by a mobile phone or satellite navigation device (Sat Nav) while driving.

The high number of drivers using mobile phones behind the wheel is evidenced by the number of mobile phone fines issued by the NSW Police Service. Statistics published on the NSW Office of State Revenue website demonstrate the increasing number of people fined for using their phones behind the wheel.<sup>1</sup> While the increasing number of fines may be attributable to improved enforcement, the overall number of drivers being caught using a mobile phone (52,689 in 2012) are disturbingly high.



In the 2012 index NSW drivers were asked what they felt was 'the greatest factor leading to safety issues on our roads?' Surprisingly, 'drivers distracted by mobile devices, children or other' (14%), were considered by NSW respondents to pose a similar threat to road safety as drivers with a lack of skill/education (12%), or even those under the influence of alcohol or drugs (17%).

<sup>1</sup>See Number of Mobile Phone Notices Issued by NSW Police, NSW Office of State Revenue, available: [http://www.osr.nsw.gov.au/lib/doc/stats/mobile\\_phone.xls](http://www.osr.nsw.gov.au/lib/doc/stats/mobile_phone.xls)

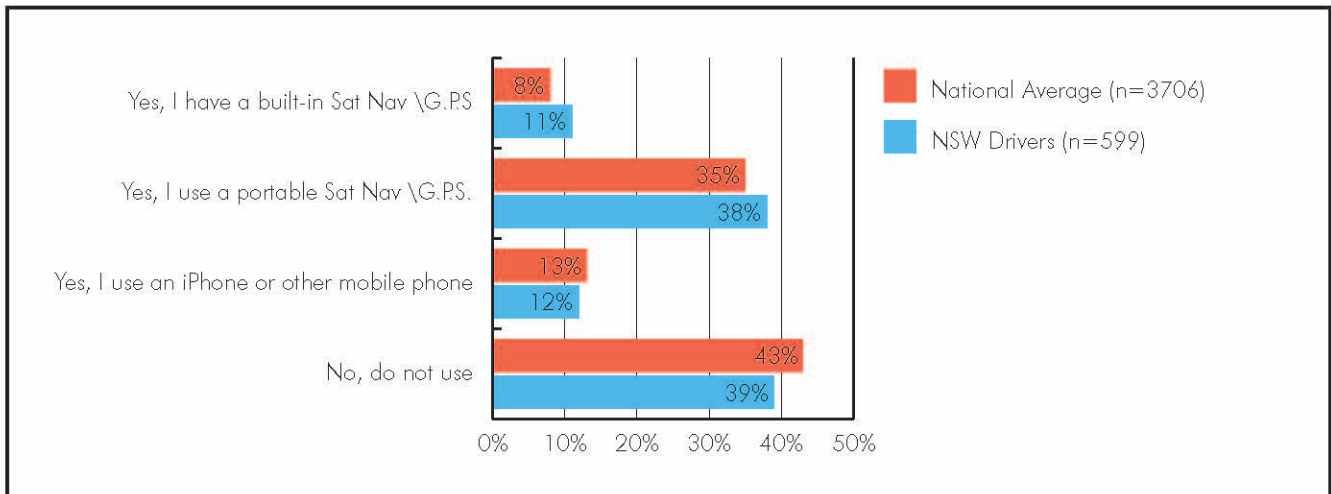


Combined, this research indicates that NSW drivers consider distracted driving as a serious road safety concern. AAMI contends that driver distraction is a road safety issue that warrants greater consideration by industry, Government and the community into the future.

## Current rates and future trends in take up of electronic devices, both by road users and vehicle manufacturers

AAMI research has found that electronic devices are becoming increasingly popular in the car. Electronic devices such as portable DVD players, mobile phones and satellite navigation systems are being used to entertain on long trips, play music, stay in touch with friends and keep drivers heading in the right direction.

NSW drivers appear to be welcoming new technology into their vehicles, AAMI research shows adoption rates marginally above the national average for satellite navigation devices. In the 2012 Crash Index drivers were asked 'Do you use a Satellite Navigation System or GPS in your car?' In total, 61% of NSW drivers use satellite navigation in one form or another, slightly ahead of the national average of 57%. Interestingly the use of mobile phones for navigation is rapidly increasing with 12% of NSW drivers using their phones for navigation in 2012, a significant increase from 7.9% the previous year.



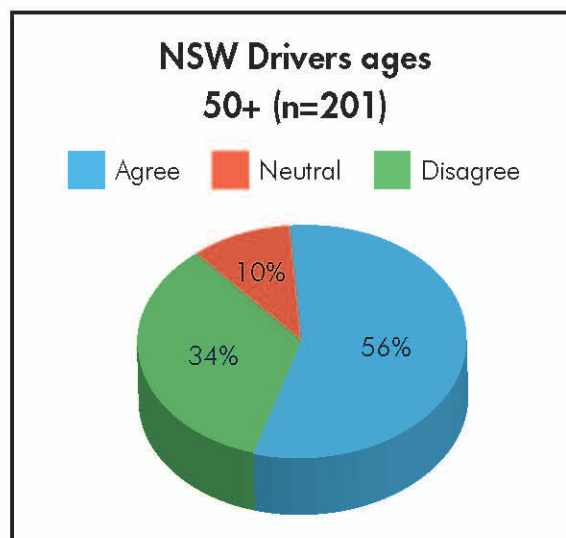
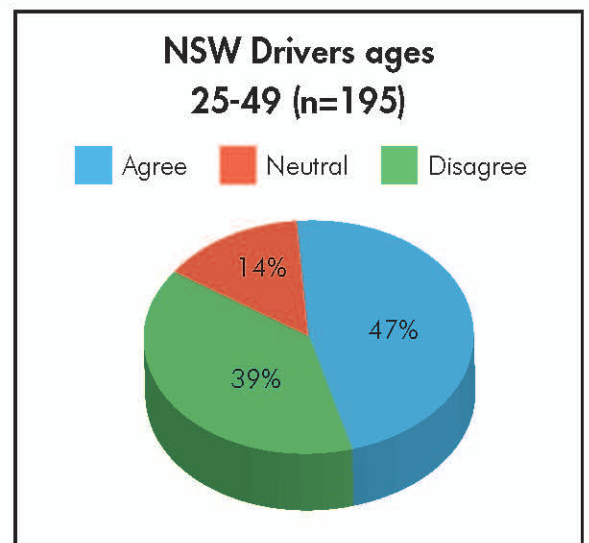
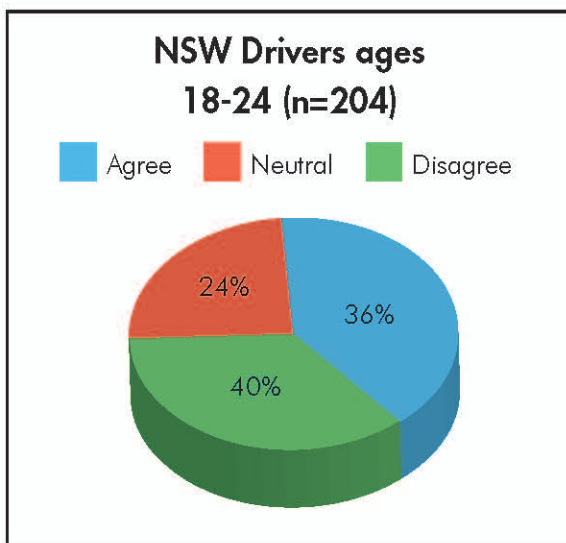
AAMI is particularly concerned about the high proportion of NSW drivers (12%) that indicate they use their iPhone or other mobile phone for navigation purposes. AAMI notes that iPhones do not include audible turn-by-turn navigation as a default, suggesting that a large number of NSW drivers are taking their eyes off the road to determine their next turn.

With regard to future uptake rates AAMI anticipates that as drivers purchase new devices with greater functionality, the number of devices in cars will significantly increase. However AAMI believes, that with the right encouragement, device manufacturers could incorporate safe driving technology into their products and in turn improve road safety in the future.

## Regulatory means of enforcing harm minimisation caused by such devices

Regulation is a practical tool for reducing risky driving behaviour and is proven to help minimise danger on the roads. AAMI supports current NSW laws restricting use of mobile phones whilst driving, particularly the complete mobile ban (including hands free use) for learner and P-plate drivers.

In the 2011 Crash Index, NSW drivers were asked if they agreed with the statement "Using a mobile phone whilst driving, including hands-free should be completely banned." The response was overwhelmingly positive. In NSW half (50%) agreed with a complete mobile ban, 13% were neutral and 37% disagreed. Older drivers were significantly more supportive of the mobile phone ban; these graphs show response rates by age group.





These responses suggest that drivers are learning the dangers of being distracted by electronic devices in the car and support stricter regulation in this regard. AAMI suggests that a 'distracted driver' offence may be preferable to a specific ban on mobile phone or device use.

Changing terminology and approach from the current 'mobile phone ban' to a broader 'distracted driving ban' is a more flexible regulatory approach that has a variety of benefits:

- Drivers would be prompted to consider "*am I driving distracted*" as opposed to "*can I use my phone while driving?*" The key benefit being that other less common, but equally dangerous forms of distracted driving, such as application of make-up or eating, would also be reduced.
- It is a technology agnostic approach that accounts for future technology advancements, such as the planned in-dash facebook app from Mercedes-Benz.<sup>2</sup>
- Drivers may continue hands-free use of mobile phones, provided they are confident their use is not distracting them from driving. This has particular benefits for professional drivers that have completed advanced driver training.
- Reference to the ban in the media, road safety campaigns and via word-of-mouth will build the public image that distracted driving, in all its forms, is dangerous and against the law.

Safe driving requires total concentration and any activity that diverts the driver's attention from the road should be restricted. Research from the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute has found that nearly 80% of crashes and 65% of near-misses involved driver inattention shortly before the incident.<sup>3</sup>

AAMI suggests the ideal regulatory approach would be to place emphasis on 'driver distraction' with a non-exhaustive list of examples of the distracted driving offence provided. In this way all forms of distraction are captured in the ban and the focus is placed on driver behaviour, rather than on specific activities or technologies.

If this approach were to be taken, it would be important to carefully word the ban. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many drivers interpret the current legislative wording '*if a device causes you to lose proper control of your vehicle*' to mean a ban on phone use that leads directly to an accident, rather than the intended ban on phones causing improper (distracted) driving. Wording as a ban on '*any activity that distracts you from safe operation of your vehicle*' may be more effective.

In support of the focus on distracted driving, AAMI would also advocate *take control and stay in control* road safety messaging that encourages drivers to minimise distractions by muting their phone prior to getting behind the wheel.

## Technological solutions to managing the harmful consequences of distraction

AAMI strongly supports the use of technology to minimise driver distraction and to improve overall road safety. Regulatory enforcement can only go so far in minimising risky behaviour and AAMI believes that technological solutions can play a greater role in improving road safety in the future.

In 2007, AAMI partnered with the University of Sydney to study the use of GPS tracking systems to encourage safe driving. The study found that technology combined with financial incentives can significantly reduce speeding on the road.

Throughout the study 148 Sydney drivers volunteered to have a GPS tracking system fitted to their vehicles. After an initial 5 week 'before' period these drivers were told they could earn money by reducing the amount of kilometres they travel, avoiding night driving and obeying speed limits. Drivers were given the following 5 week 'after' period to change their driving behaviour and earn money for safe driving.

As part of the project a website was developed to allow participants easy access to the information collected about their driving. The website showed statistics regarding when, where and how they were driving and provided an ongoing tally of the rewards they had earned through safe driving.

<sup>2</sup>Over-the-Air Updates Help Car Tech Keep Up, Douglas Newcomb, 09/04/2012, available: <http://editorial.autos.msn.com/blogs/autosblogpost.aspx?post=b5db5f69-63c3-4b3b-9b49-b46807197b7d>  
<sup>3</sup>100-Car Naturalistic Study – Fact Sheet, Virginia Tech Transportation Institute, available: [http://www.vtti.vt.edu/PDFs/100-Car\\_Fact-Sheet.pdf](http://www.vtti.vt.edu/PDFs/100-Car_Fact-Sheet.pdf)

A key finding of the study was that the number of kilometres spent exceeding the speed limit reduced by 40% in the after period, with more than three-quarters of participants in the study reducing their speeding. Post-study interviews found that safer driving behaviour was likely to be a combined result of drivers being made aware of how often they sped (via the website) and the ability to earn money by obeying the speed limit.<sup>4</sup>

Following the success of this research AAMI recently implemented an ongoing 10% premium discount for users of the "Better Driver" system developed by Mercurien. The Better Driver system provides data on individual driver behaviour for variables such as acceleration, braking, speed, driving routes and times on the road. Initial fleet trials show that the Better Driver system can reduce crash rates by as much as 38%.

While not directly related to distracted driving, this research indicates how relatively simple and affordable technological aids can raise awareness of risky behaviour and improve road safety.

AAMI considers that a key step in reducing driver distraction will be encouraging telecommunications providers and device manufacturers to incorporate driver assistance technology into their products. AAMI has observed several vehicle manufacturers moving to introduce driver assistance technology into their vehicles<sup>5</sup> and believe that a similar commitment to road safety could be sought from telecommunications providers and mobile device manufacturers.

A simple example of technology that could be implemented is 'driving mode' whereby drivers can elect to have their calls and text messages automatically responded to with an 'I'm driving' message. Ideally, the caller would be given the option to either leave a message for later delivery or request the driver pull over and call them back. This 'driving mode', envisaged by journalist Molly Wood, is just one of many driver assistance technologies device manufacturers and telecommunications providers could explore in the name of safer roads.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup>*Analysis of a Financial Incentive to Encourage Safer Driving Practices*, Stephen Greaves and Simon Fifer, Institute of Transport and Logistics Studies, University of Sydney, available: [http://www.atrf11.unisa.edu.au/Assets/Papers/ATRF11\\_0161\\_final.pdf](http://www.atrf11.unisa.edu.au/Assets/Papers/ATRF11_0161_final.pdf)

<sup>5</sup>See for example: <http://www.ford.com/technology> and <http://www.holden.com.au/holden-innovation/safety/randd-and-future-tech/future-crash-avoidance-technologies>

<sup>6</sup>Hey, phone makers: Where's 'driving mode'?, Molly Wood, CNET, 29/01/2011 available: [http://news.cnet.com/8301-31322\\_3-20003824-256.html](http://news.cnet.com/8301-31322_3-20003824-256.html)

## Further Assistance

As mentioned earlier, AAMI has a long-standing commitment to improving road safety. As a national insurer AAMI believes it has a role, and a social responsibility, to encourage safe driving. AAMI already conducts a variety of road safety projects each year; however, it is always searching for new and innovative ways to improve road safety.

AAMI would be interested in developing a cooperative road safety strategy in partnership with Government, industry and community organisations. In particular, AAMI would support a working group that further investigates technological solutions that supports safe driving.

## About the Research

Statistics and research referred to throughout this report have been drawn from the 2011 and 2012 AAMI Crash Indexes. This research is conducted on behalf of AAMI by independent market research firms. Details of each index are:

- **2011 AAMI Crash Index**

Newspoll Market & Social Research conducted an independent internet survey of 3,740 Australian drivers, 18 years of age and older, across all states and territories in 2011. 600 drivers 18 years and older were interviewed in NSW. Data was collected in line with ISO 20252 - Market, Social and Opinion Research and has been weighted in line with current ABS population demographics to ensure any extrapolation of results is representative of age sex and area.

- **2012 AAMI Crash Index Research:**

Newspoll Market & Social Research conducted an independent internet survey of 3,706 Australian drivers, 18 years of age and older, across all states and territories in 2012. 599 drivers 18 years and older were interviewed in NSW. Data was collected in line with ISO 20252 - Market, Social and Opinion Research and has been weighted with current ABS population demographics to ensure any extrapolation of results is representative of age sex and area.