

INQUIRY INTO YOUNG DRIVER SAFETY AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS

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enquiries refer
Natalie Chapman
in reply please quote

Road Safety



4 December 2007

Mr Geoff Corrigan MP
Parliament of New South Wales
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Mr Corrigan

Re: Inquiry into Young Driver Safety & Education Programs

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission for the aforementioned inquiry.

Ballina Shire Council has been involved in the Local Government Road Safety Program for over 10 years now and has a keen interest in the safety of all road users.

Young drivers continue to be overrepresented in road crashes and fatalities in NSW and Ballina Shire is no exception.

A response to the Terms of Reference of the Inquiry is provided on the following pages, with particular reference to statistics and programs for the Ballina local government area.

Again thank you for this opportunity and please do not hesitate to contact me on 6686 1256 if you would like any additional information.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'John Truman'.

John Truman
Group Manager
Civil Services Group

Attach.

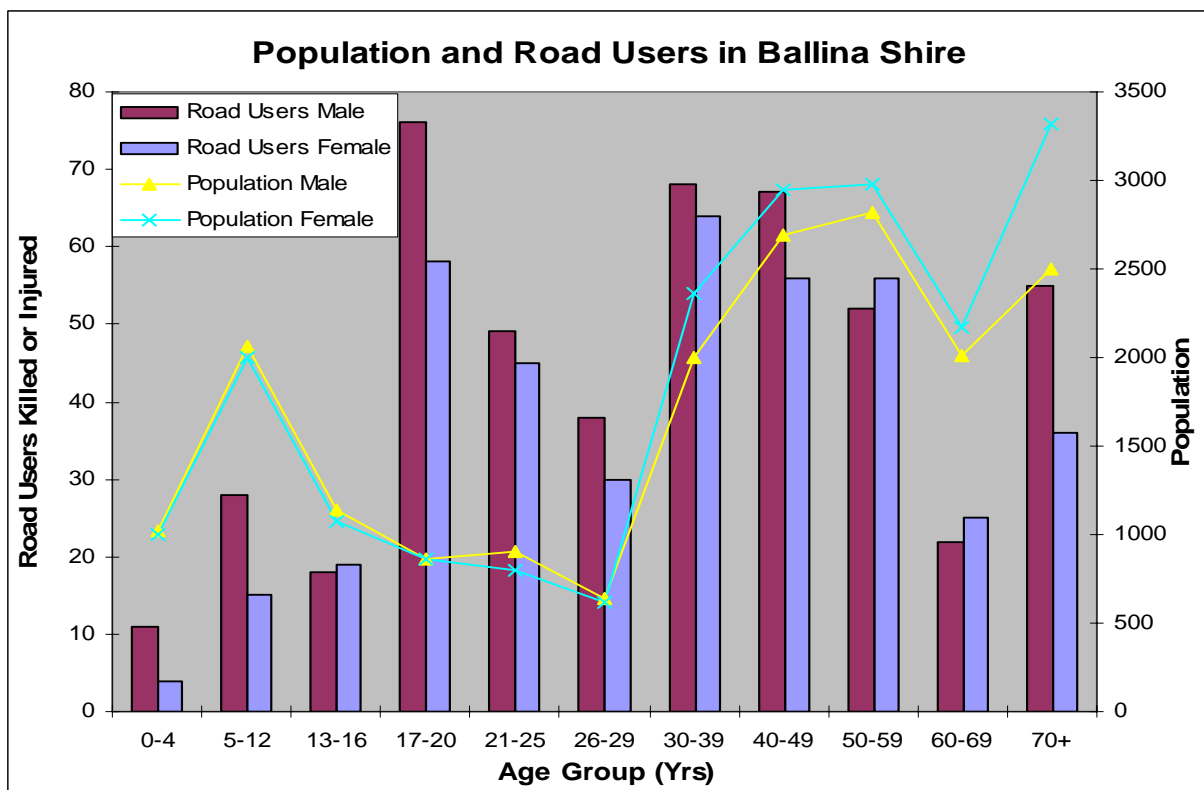
TERMS OF REFERENCE

Inquiry into Young Driver Safety & Education Programs - Ballina Shire

a) The current incidence of road crashes involving young drivers in NSW

Council has recently developed a 5-year Road Safety Strategic Plan which involved significant community consultation and crash data analysis to identify local road safety issues.

Analysis of RTA crash data (2001-2005) revealed that around 25% of all casualties in Ballina Shire were young people aged between 17-25 years. Within this grouping, young people aged 17-20 years represented a significant number of the casualties (59%). In fact, more people aged 17-20 years became casualties as the result of a crash than for any other group in Ballina Shire. The figure below depicts the disproportionate involvement of this age group relative to the percentage of the population that they represent (Source: RTA Crash Data 2001-2005 and 2006 Census Data).



b) Underlying risks and major factors contributing to such crashes

It is a well known fact, that risk taking is accepted as "normal" behaviour for young people. Adolescent risk taking associated with alcohol, drugs, driving and celebrating results in unacceptably high levels of injury and trauma. Young people are over-represented in every category of risk taking behaviour resulting in injury (Elkington 2000).

Young people are typically overconfident and think they are bullet proof; "it won't happen to me" mentality. These characteristics coupled with peer pressure, passenger distraction, inexperience and poor hazard perception skills all contribute to their involvement in road crashes.

c) Differences in driving behaviour, crash outcomes and relevant trends in urban and rural areas of NSW

Young people in rural areas are typically required to drive longer distances and in higher speed environments than their urban counterparts. Often rural roads are narrower, lack lane markings and adequate road shoulders and have more bends than urban roads. These factors all lead to an increased risk of head-on type crashes or loss of control particularly on bends. There is also an increased risk of rural drivers hitting a wild animal that strays onto the road and perhaps an increased involvement of driver fatigue due to the distances that need to be covered by rural drivers.

In short, young people in urban areas typically have greater access to public transport, they tend to drive shorter distances and this occurs predominantly in lower speed environments, often on divided roads, which would all help to minimise the risk of harm to an inexperienced driver.

d) The availability and appropriateness of current diversionary and educational programs for young offenders involved in serious traffic violations

There is currently no such program within Ballina Shire. Perhaps there is scope for Council's Road Safety Officer to work in with Police to establish something of this nature modelled on successful programs that may already exist elsewhere.

e) The efficacy of young driver education programs and the potential for development and expansion of these programs, subject to proper evaluation

Ballina Shire Council is involved in a road safety / drug education program called RRISK, targeting year 11 students on the north coast. RRISK is an acronym for Reduce Risk - Increase Student Knowledge and is an intersectoral partnership between North Coast Area Health Service, NSW Department of Education, Catholic Education Office, Lismore City Council, Tweed Shire Council & Ballina Shire Council. The partnership is also strongly supported by Police, Ambulance, SES, RTA, Southern Cross University, NRMA, MAA, and local media.

RRISK is a health promotion program that addresses risk taking behaviour amongst year 11 students on the North Coast of NSW. First developed in 1999, the RRISK program has grown rapidly in response to demand, initially involving 300 students from 9 high schools and now attracting over 2000 year 11 students from 26 schools in northern NSW. This year, the program has also expanded to the mid-north coast area and will reach in excess of 3,500 students from 45 schools throughout November and early December.

RRISK is relevant to the social life, developmental stage and concerns of adolescents. It extends the school based drug education and road safety curriculum by providing opportunities for senior high school students to develop knowledge, attitudes and skills to reduce risk taking and develop safer celebrating strategies. The program includes a well-designed, multi-strategic seminar day, preceded and followed by a range of in-school activities. It incorporates factual presentations on risk taking, alcohol, drugs, safe driving and vehicle safety, and is enlivened by drama, life stories and role models. Student-led activities include peer-facilitated small groups discussing potentially risky situations and a crash scenario, which involves students, police, ambulance, SES, and the Lismore Crown Prosecutor. The seminars have been supported by community meetings, newsletter inserts, art competitions and professional development sessions for teachers. RRISK also uses keynote presenters from NDARC (National Drug & Alcohol Research Council), the RTA and Youthsafe.



Each school that attends RRISK nominates a coordinator who is responsible for organising and promoting the aims of the program within their school. Young people are involved in comparing the seminars and facilitating discussions. Students are involved in planning and presentations to ensure that RRISK is relevant and empowering to adolescents. Over 200 students are trained each year as peer educators to help other students understand the risks, make informed decisions, plan ahead and look after their mates when socialising.

A comprehensive outcome evaluation, funded by the NSW Motor Accident Authority (MAA) in 2002 has demonstrated that RRISK is positively influencing student knowledge, attitudes and behaviours. Annual process evaluations of students, teachers and stakeholders allow the committee to refine and improve the program's quality on an ongoing basis.

RRISK is successful because of its relevance to adolescents; it complements the school curriculum; it is considered core business by partners; is well supported by peak organisations; and receives good media coverage. The committee has also successfully had articles published in peer-reviewed journals and has been a finalist in Excellence in Road Safety Awards and National Drug and Alcohol Awards. This is a great program, but sourcing funding to run it each year is always an issue.

Through the Local Government Road Safety Program, Ballina Shire also regularly provides free workshops for parents who are supervising a learner driver '*Helping Learner Drivers Become Safer Drivers*'. The workshops provide practical advice on supervising a learner driver, how to provide effective driving practice and the importance of teaching low risk driving skills. The new licence restrictions and the requirements of the Learner Driver Logbook are also discussed. These workshops have been very well received and well attended by parents and others who are keen to do all they can to assist their young drivers to develop into safer drivers. Council is keen to continue to provide these workshops for the community.

f) Other initiatives to improve young driver safety

Keeping young people safe on the roads is a complex issue and there is no clear-cut solution. Young people will always be risk takers, but somehow we need to help them get through their adolescent years intact.

The development of driver mentoring programs and a requirement for road safety to be more prevalent in the school curriculum would no doubt be of benefit.

The Council has a Road Safety Strategic Plan and participates in the RTA's Road Safety Program. The Council, through its Road Safety Officer has the skills and experience to deliver local programs to support improvements to young driver safety. However resources limit the program. For example, the RSO role is currently part time. Therefore additional government resources to this program would assist in the delivery of more activities and enhance the Council's ability to implement the Strategic Plan, which identifies young drivers as a key target group.

g) Any other relevant matters

The recently introduced requirement for learner drivers to complete a minimum of 120 hours of supervised on-road driving experience prior to being eligible for the RTA Driving Test presents a very real challenge, if not impossibility to a number of people. Many young people are socially and / or financially disadvantaged and have nobody who can fulfil the role of supervising driver to complete their driving hours with, nor do they have access to a vehicle. For these same people, it is out of the question to pay a driving instructor to supervise them because they lack the necessary finances.

Addressing this issue becomes increasingly important for rural and semi-rural coastal communities because transport or lack thereof, is tied in heavily with employment. Without access to a licence and a car, many young people find they can't get to work and therefore cannot maintain meaningful employment.

This issue could be addressed by the development of a young driver-mentoring program in the community, but it would need to be appropriately resourced in terms of qualified driving mentors, vehicles and insurance. This could be linked in with an employment agency to not only meet the licensing issue but also improve employment prospects of young people.

As with all good programs, there is always a question of appropriate funding and resources to sustain them; road safety for young people is no exception and would clearly benefit from more funding to implement local level initiatives that are supported across the state.