

INQUIRY INTO YOUNG DRIVER SAFETY AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Organisation: Junee Shire, Coolamon Shire & Wagga Wagga City
Councils

Name: Mr Steve Ross

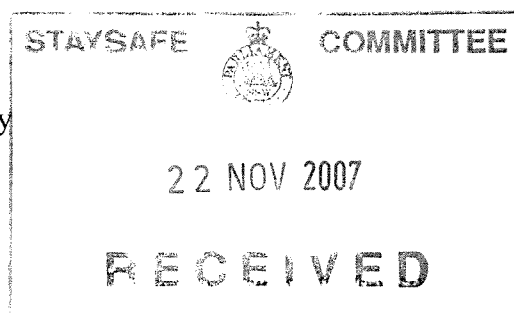
Position: Road Safety Officer

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14 November 2007

Geoff Corrigan MP
Chairman
The Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety
Parliament of New South Wales
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000



Dear Sir

RE: Young Driver Safety and Education Programs

The New South Wales (NSW) road toll at the end of December 2006 (496) was the lowest and the first to be under 500 deaths since 1945. However, whilst this is seen as an improvement, the death rate in the 17 to 25 years age group rose dramatically from the previous year to 143 deaths, 36 more than 2005. Of the 143 deaths, 70 were between 17 and 20 and 73 between 21 and 25 years. The deaths in this age group defy the lowest death rate on our State's roads in 61 years.

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

At 30 September 2007, the road toll in NSW stood at 329, this being 51 less than for the same period in 2006. These figures are very encouraging, however even more encouraging is that the death rate in the 17 to 25 years group has fallen dramatically to record 47 less deaths in the same period. Why? One possibility is that the road toll last year concerning this age group was extremely high. Numerous reports were made of the tragic lose of young lives and measures needed to prevent such lose in all forms of media, both sides of Parliament and at local levels.

On 1 July 2007, new legislation was introduced with a number of restrictions, including suspension of licence for P1 drivers caught speeding, one passenger under 25 years between 11pm and 5am and the non use of mobile phones in vehicles.

In the six months leading up to the new rules, an average of 7.5 deaths per month occurred (45 deaths in all) in the relevant age group. In the three months that followed an average of 7 deaths per month occurred (21). Maybe a reason for the lesser number of deaths could be that this age group did take notice of the media coverage of the tragedies surrounding the deaths of young people from the previous year.

The "little finger" campaign in my opinion has not been the success that it has been made out to be. My experience is that young people like the advertisement mainly for the connotation of the little finger more than the message it is actually trying to deliver. From a fatality point of view, there has been no real change in the figures before, during and after the campaign.

b) Underlying risks and major factors contributing to such crashes.

Complacency is a big issue we need to be alert too. Whilst it appears the message has reached the younger drivers this year, we need to keep reinforcing it. With the road toll at such a low level we can not afford to drop our guard, the message must keep going. While the death rate among younger people has dropped, all the messages were concentrated at them and little at other age groups. As at the end of September there have been seven more deaths in the 40 to 49 years group, six more in the 70 plus group and in the 50 to 59 years group there have been 17 more deaths than at the same time last year. We can not afford to become complacent, we need to continue delivering the road safety message and reminding drivers of all ages of their responsibilities when driving.

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

Deaths occurring in Country urban (speed limit <80 kph) at the end of 2006 were 106 which is the same as the previous year. Deaths in Country non-urban (speed limit >80 kph) were 186 – 17 less than the previous year. Again figures at the end of September 2007 show for Country urban there have been 90 deaths – 14 more at the same period last year, however Country non-urban, there have been 112 deaths – 30 less for the same period.

There is a definite problem in the Country urban areas of this State. Why? It is obvious that there is a greater traffic volume in the city or towns' network of roads. This means there are numerous intersections, changing speed limits, road signs and traffic control signals. Records may show that a driver failed to stop at a 'stop sign' or a red light or did not give way at a 'giveaway sign', however I strongly believe that in most cases, driver distraction is the actual cause of an infringement or a crash.

I define driver distraction as;

“Anything that draws away the mind or attention of a person, who is at the time, driving or otherwise in control of a vehicle from driving or controlling such vehicle.”

There are many causes of driver distraction - here are just 10;

- All forms of mobile phone use
- Eating/Drinking
- Loud music
- Changing radio station/CD
- Applying makeup
- Shaving
- Reading
- Smoking
- Person/s or object outside the vehicle.
- Passengers/Kids – talking/behaviour.

All of the above distractions divert the driver's concentration away from driving. I would suggest a study/research into driver distraction and I am confident we would discover the real reason as to why a driver did not stop or give way as mentioned above.

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

I am not familiar with such programs.

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

In my role as Road Safety Officer, I have conducted numerous Graduated Licensing Scheme Workshops. The contents of the workshops are prepared by the Roads and Traffic Authority and aimed at parents/carers who supervise learner drivers and is a very effective program. The importance of supervising learner drivers, understanding and completing the Learner Driver Log Book and understanding the benefits of supervised on-road driving practice are covered. I encourage the learner driver to also attend these sessions. The sessions are popular and I have received good positive feedback from participants. A new updated workshop which includes the new legislation of 1 July, is about to be released.

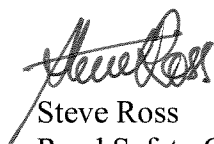
f) Other initiatives to improve young driver safety;

My personal opinion is that the following points should be included in the learning phase before obtaining a P1 licence;

- That the final 20 hours of the compulsory 120 hours recorded in the learner driver's log book must be with a qualified driving instructor.
- As part of the learning process, learners should attend lectures on driving attitudes including aggression. These sessions could also include a crash victim to tell his/her story of their crash. I have been involved in this area, one male, one female both of whom were close to the age of the audience at the time of their crash – this has an enormous effect.
- About one month before the learner is to take the driving test, a psychological test should be undertaken. The aim of this is to detect the aggressive person. Further action would only be needed if aggression is detected.
- That a reward scheme be considered for those young drivers whom do not commit an offence during their Learner Licence, P1 and P2 Licences phases. One example could be that no fee be charged for the first two years of their Unrestricted Licence. I believe this could act as an incentive which would result in more young drivers driving sensibly and safer.

g) Any other relevant matters.

Nil.



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Junee Shire Council,
Coolamon Shire Council &
Wagga Wagga City Council.