

**Submission  
No 31**

## **NON-REGISTERED MOTORISED VEHICLES**

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# Combined Pensioners & Superannuants Association

OF NEW SOUTH WALES INC



Submission to the NSW Staystafe (Road Safety) Committee's

## Inquiry into Non-Registered Motor Vehicles

April 2013

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*CPSA is a non-profit, non-party-political membership association founded in 1931 which serves pensioners of all ages, superannuants and low-income retirees. CPSA has 130 Branches and affiliated organisations with a combined membership of over 29,000 people living throughout NSW. CPSA's aim is to improve the standard of living and well-being of its Members and constituents. CPSA depends for the majority of its funding for core activities as a peak body on a \$440,000 grant from the NSW Government and a \$68,000 grant from the Australian Government. CPSA engages in systemic advocacy on behalf of its constituency and also auspices four services which receive Government funding: the Health Promotion Service for Older People, the Older Persons Tenants' Service, the Park and Village Service and a Community Visitors Scheme. CPSA acknowledges the potential for conflict of interest arising for CPSA and the NSW and Australian Governments as a result of this funding arrangement. CPSA is committed to managing any conflict of interest issues in an ethical manner.*

## Key points

- The growing use of mobility scooters is an opportunity for our community, not a problem to be dealt with through heavy-handed regulation.
- Any regulation of mobility scooters should be based on evidence, not perception and prejudice. New South Wales should not duplicate its discriminatory treatment of older drivers in the area of mobility scooters.
- Systematic and sustained data collection in the areas of mobility scooter user experiences and needs, road design and road safety should be a planning priority.

## Submission

CPSA advocates that policy makers' response to mobility scooters should:

- be based on evidence, not perception and prejudice;
- reflect that the widespread use of mobility scooter use is an opportunity for positive social and environmental change;
- enable rather than obstruct people's decision to use mobility scooters.

The terms of reference for this inquiry refer to the "increasing use of non-registered motorised vehicles, including mobility scooters, electric bicycles, Segways and quad bikes on public roads..." CPSA will confine itself to comments on mobility scooters.

CPSA is concerned that the Staysafe inquiry into non-registered motorised vehicles could focus on the use of mobility scooters specifically by the elderly, with all the attendant perceptions and prejudices about the ability of the elderly to participate in road traffic filling the current evidence void. Efforts to gather information and data about the use of mobility scooters remain limited and their results clearly do not represent a body of evidence on which to base policy development.

The lack of information and data is particularly worrying in New South Wales. New South Wales is one of the very few jurisdictions in the developed world that still uses mandatory health and on-road testing for elderly drivers of registered motor vehicles, in the face of scientific evidence that mandatory aged-based testing is not predictive of crash risk and does not lead to increased road safety. Also, across the developed world mandatory health and on-road testing is regarded as unreasonably age-discriminatory and detrimental to the well-being of older people.

In other words, New South Wales' mandatory age-based testing regime for drivers of registered motorised vehicles is entirely based on perception and prejudice. The risk is that policy development for non-registered motorised vehicles widely used by older people will fall prey to the same type of perceptions and prejudices, especially in the absence of reliable information and data, that the use of registered motorised vehicles by elderly drivers has fallen prey to.

If New South Wales unfairly discriminates against elderly motorists when it should know better, the prospect that New South Wales would unfairly discriminate against elderly drivers of mobility scooters is plausible, especially in the absence of meaningful evidence.

The first task of NSW policy makers in relation to mobility scooters, therefore, is to collect evidence.

A recent report<sup>1</sup> estimates, on the basis of extrapolation, that there are around 231,000 mobility scooter users in Australia, 51 per cent aged under sixty and 49 per cent over sixty and half of all mobility scooters used outside capital cities. Without being critical of this very helpful report, these statistics, based on a telephone survey of 2,406 people and a further 515 self-selected mobility scooter users, is the extent of our demographic knowledge as it relates to mobility scooters.

When it comes to the safety performance of mobility scooters, a 2011 study commissioned by the ACCC<sup>2</sup> demonstrated the current lack of data collection in relation to accidents involving mobility scooters.

Given the lack of data, it would be completely premature to attempt to regulate mobility scooter design, performance and use. The policy development focus should in the first instance be on systematic and sustained data collection in the area of user experiences and needs, road design and accidents involving mobility scooters.

The policy development trap in this area is to focus on the negative, ie. on the risks associated with mobility scooter use rather than on the benefits. The benefits of mobility scooter use on public roads and private property are many and diverse. The use of mobility scooters by older people has the potential for significant improvements in mental health outcomes as people are enabled to move around at will in their community, breaking their social isolation and reducing their reliance on formal or informal carers. Scooters enable people to do their own grocery shopping, attend medical appointments without the need for community transport to become involved. They can further enable people to self-regulate driving their registered motor vehicle, reducing their use of, and reliance on it.

Also, given the likelihood of mobility scooter use increasing as the population aged over 65 increases both in nominal and proportional terms, New South Wales has been handed a golden opportunity to reassess the configuration of its urban and suburban road infrastructure in favour of community-friendly set-ups.

CPSA urges policy makers to view the growing use of mobility scooters as an opportunity rather than as a problem to be dealt with through heavy-handed regulation.

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<sup>1</sup> *Mobility scooter usage and safety survey report*, ACCC, NRMA Motoring & Services, CHOICE, Enable NSW and Flinders University, September 2012.

<sup>2</sup> *Targeted study of injury data involving motorised scooters*, Monash University, Department of Forensic Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences, Accident Research Centre, March 2011.

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