

**Submission
No. 54**

DRIVER EDUCATION, TRAINING AND ROAD SAFETY

Name: 
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PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY IN TO DRIVER EDUCATION, TRAINING & ROAD SAFETY

As a concerned citizen, I am pleased that this Parliamentary Inquiry is looking in to aspects of Road Safety to prevent deaths & tragedies on our roads. I have addressed a number of topics which highlight why incidents occur and given several strategies to lessen or eliminate them. The examples of incidents I have given, in this submission, I have firsthand knowledge of.

I am glad that Australian drivers, on the whole, are good drivers. However, I am concerned that due to the implementation of some rules/regulations, our standards are being eroded. Australian licences are well regarded around the world for our rigorous testing and competent drivers and we need to maintain these high standards.

Background

I hold a class HC licence & motorbike licence and have had a good driving record throughout my 40 years of driving. I spent several years in the Australian Army and was employed primarily as a Truck Driver and then a Vehicle Testing Officer. During this time, I have undertaken many courses to upgrade my licence codes plus teach & test on driving courses on various vehicles. I have been trained in many facets of driving including convoy driving, four wheel driving, driving over difficult terrain, navigation, driving using night vision goggles, blackout driving, camouflage & concealment of vehicles, operational requirements of vehicles etc. Over the years, I would have discussions with various people about driving habits, road rules, driving attitudes, vehicle maintenance, driving tests, Army vs civilian culture etc. I currently have two teenage children who I have been instrumental in teaching them how to drive a manual car. This has also benefitted me in relearning forgotten skills/rules. My husband migrated to Australia in 1970 and has been driving regularly over these many years and has a good driving record. However, he has **NEVER** undertaken a driving test in Australia as he came from a country where we have a reciprocal arrangement to convert their licence to ours. Who's to say he was a good driver in his old country? We just accept their licence on face value? Unfortunately, over the years, I have seen a downturn in our driving culture where people are too busy to drive and are complacent, distracted & arrogant.

Driving Skills Test

It is inconceivable to me, that in this day & age of modern motoring, that a driver can undertake/pass a driving test at around 17 years of age and **NEVER** be required to pass another practical test until they are 85 years old – and this test is a short/modified test. This is more than **SIX** decades later that they get retested!! Ridiculous!!

Driving is like any skill: it requires constant repetition to become proficient at it. However, there is no Agency or Person monitoring these skills, apart from the Police when they do something wrong. This is regulated under “crisis management” and only addresses the problem once it has happened, rather than preventing the incident before it happens. Regular testing would ensure drivers are up to date with road rules & their skill level is acceptable.

Motorists should be regularly tested for a multiple of reasons:

- Prior to **standardised testing**, drivers undertook a practical test with an Assessor on any roads, at their discretion. I undertook my test in 1977 and took the assessor to the shops to pick up his lunch. Since then, I have undertaken extensive training to get my HC licence, but for regular drivers, this is not the case. There are many drivers still on the road that passed their test under this scheme, which was minimal & poor. Not many of these drivers would have sought out extra training to increase their skill level ie. Defensive Driving, vehicle maintenance, higher class of licence, hence they could stay at this skill level, introduce bad habits over time or even go backwards through lack of regular driving.
- There was **corruption** pre 1980 and drivers were able to purchase a licence by bribing corrupt officers. Even though this has been addressed for all new drivers, the motorists under the old regime have not been tested since then buying their licence and are currently driving around on our roads and could pose a danger to other motorists.
- Previously, **driver testing** in regional areas of NSW were examined by the local **Police**. However, these tests were basic and were not carried out under testing situations with traffic & hazards present, yet their licence would enable them to drive anywhere in NSW, including the major cities, indeed, anywhere in the world!
- Prior to photo licences, **driver substitution** was present where one driver would undertake the test, the testing officer would process the paperwork and pass it to the counter staff and another person (new driver) would present to the counter to sign the licence. These motorists are still driving on our roads and have never been required to undertake a real test.
- **Bad habits creep in over a period of time:**
 - lazy steering (hands inside steering wheel, driving one handed, driving with just a wrist or two fingers, driving with their knees, NO hands on steering wheel whilst talking/driving etc,)

- poor posture (lounging on one side, too far forward risking injury from steering wheel & air bags, seat too far back etc),
- clutch control (clutch coasting, slipping the clutch, riding the clutch, knocking the gearshift out of gear whilst moving, etc)
- whilst driving, attempting to eat, drink, shave, apply make-up, brush hair, get dressed etc
- **Drivers do not keep their knowledge of road rules up to date.** Even though there is notification of road rule changes through pamphlet distribution, posters, signage, media dissemination etc, drivers are not checked or enforced to acknowledge their existence until it is too late & an incident occurs (ie. Roundabout rules, pelican crossings). After six decades, many road rules have changed or been introduced ie. Halt/stop signs, yield/give way signs, vehicle hand signals/trafficators/indicators, freeway countdown markers, pelican crossings, school vs pedestrian crossing rules etc.
- **Driving attitudes have changed over these six decades** (ie. two generations). Gone are the days where people just want to go for a Sunday drive, take the car out of the garage to drive to church and the laid back attitude of a yesteryear. Drivers are more aggressive and short tempered. We are moving in a fast paced world where people just want to get from A to B. They are in a hurry to get to work, the need to drop the children at school/daycare, just want to get where they are going or running late for an appointment and tend to push the road rules with speeding, tail-gating/following too close, overtaking dangerously, double parking, cross double solid lines etc. This is demonstrated in road rage incidents which can range from small rude gestures, to vehicle intimidation, to vehicle damage, to assault causing personal injury, to assault causing death.
- **Skill levels** can change over the 60 plus years of holding a licence. For those who undertake further training ie, advanced driving courses, road safety programmes, upgrading to a higher licence class, their skill level should increase making them a safer driver. For those who are content to just scrape pass their driving test and only drive once a week to go shopping 2km down the road, their skills would probably deteriorate. These drivers are more than likely to cause an accident or be involved in one themselves, through lack of skill to avoid one. Yet these drivers are still deemed competent to drive through the middle of Sydney in peak hour or drive anywhere overseas on their current licence if they wish. An example of skill deterioration, my friend (Miss R) passed her driving test from L to red Ps (late 70's) and was a regular drinker so decided to wait another 12 months for her licence to automatically go from provisional to unrestricted (prior to graduated licencing, Green P's and further computer testing). Once on full licence, she went to a party, drank a little, drove home and straight in to a glass shop front causing \$'000s in damages. She realised she wasn't very good at driving so doesn't drive much but still holds a driving licence so at any time can resume driving without any further lessons,

courses or tests. I'm sure there are other drivers in a similar situation, who through a bad experience have elected not to drive, but still hold a current licence.

- **Drivers from overseas** who can transfer their licences from their country to a NSW driving licence without undertaking a road rules test or a practical driving test. Who's to say they were a competent driver in their own country, yet we permit them to drive on our roads putting my family's lives at risk. In addition, some of the countries who have this reciprocal arrangement with NSW, are open to corruption to obtain a genuine licence but not be able to drive, they also drive on the opposite side of the road to Australia, have vastly different road rules and don't even use the same alphabet as us ie. South Korea, Greece, Japan. I have driven overseas in a country who drive on the opposite side of the road and found it extremely difficult to "rewire" my brain to keep left, keep right, turn in to the correct side of the road etc and fortunately, it did have signs in English so I did not have an extra layer of complexity to my already heightened concentration level of driving in a new country.
- **Drivers become complacent.** When driving a vehicle, it is easy to "let your mind wander", thinking about shopping, planning what to have for dinner, collecting children from school, prioritising work schedules/jobs, where to go on the weekend etc. They also relax almost to the point of going on "auto-pilot" so the vehicle is allowed to almost drive itself, ie. eating with one hand whilst having a conversation on the hands free device and adjusting the air conditioning etc. Cars have evolved in to a micro climate of comfort & distraction to the point where driving is almost secondary to other tasks, thus perhaps running up the back of another motorist, taking evasive action for not paying full attention to driving etc.
- **Not being tested for operating vehicle controls.** Unfortunately, a driving test is not always fair or equal. As the driving test is only conducted during daylight hours and at whatever the weather is currently, many drivers may not be required to operate certain vehicle controls, so they have an advantage of not being tested for these. Also, the reverse is true, where the test requires the operation of controls for safety reasons in poor conditions, such as wipers, demisters, air conditioners, headlights etc and the applicant is not able to use these functions effectively and so ultimately fails as they are unfamiliar with the use of them. This can cause a serious safety incident (unable to see out of the windscreen) or a breach of road rules (when they turn on their high beam when operating the indicator and are unaware or unable to turn it off or dip the headlights within 200m of an oncoming vehicle).
- **Accident Testing.** When a driver has demonstrated that they have something lacking in their driving skills and are involved in an accident, they should be required to undertake a practical driving test within 3 months (or similar) of the incident. This would single out motorists whose skill level has deteriorated and need to be retested to keep our roads safe.

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- **P-Platers** should be required undertake another practical test before gaining an unrestricted licence. All too often, once a driver gains their P1 (red P's) licence and progresses to their P2 (green P's), a growing percentage of drivers disregard all they were taught to drive and obeying road rules. Their attitude changes to one of arrogance, self importance and inflated egos believing they are better drivers than they actually are. They also display irreverence and disrespect for law enforcement. A practical test would reinforce to these drivers that they have to be a competent driver to advance to a full licence holder.

If Road Safety Committees and Governments were committed to road safety, they would introduce a system whereas all licence holders undertake a practical driving test on a regular basis, **say every 10 years**. Common belief is that this would be an unpopular decision for a Government, but how much is a life worth? This would be pro-active approach to reduce road tolls rather than being re-active as we do nothing unless the Police deem they should be retested. If regular interval testing is not introduced, they might as well issue the licences for 60+ years until the driver is 85 year old when they are obliged to pass a practical test to retain their licence. Drivers need to demonstrate they still possess the skills to hold a valid driver's licence not just use it as identification.

Retesting may present a problem with providing extra Assessing Staff, but this could be solved with recruiting & training personnel and expanding the current testing centres. We need to look at the whole of life training & education to save lives.

Regular retesting would capture all those drivers who have never undertaken a NSW test due to overseas licence conversion, driver substitution, purchased their licence, hold a fraudulent licence etc. It would also refresh the current drivers of road rules & how to maintain their skill level. It would curb attitudes knowing they are up for retesting and need to learn again how to behave on the road.

Driving Instructors to be retested for knowledge & practical skills.

Professional Driving Instructors have a huge responsibility. There is a poor level of training with some instructors having students fail numerous times plus sending students for a test when they are not ready. Some of these tests seem to be driven by money or “we’ll just give it a go” attitude putting the lives of Testers & other road users at risk. It also erodes the self esteem of the new driver who is told they have failed time & time again.

Introduce a regulation where Driving Instructors should be reassessed if multiple students fail in a certain timeframe ie. 10 students in 6 months/ 10 students in 12 months/ 5 students in 3 months etc. This would ensure they only present drivers who are ready to undertake a driving test.

Attempting the Driving Test for new Driving Instructors should be limited. 3 or 5 attempts? (I know of one instructor who attempted the driving test 7 times and the quality of applicants who are presented for a test is reflected and shown in the poor results from the teaching of this instructor).

Driving Instructors should have access to a Body/Authority who can clarify any teaching point. Once they pass their training, unless they join a motoring body or association, they don’t have any official channel they can ask questions. The Driving Instructors should also have access to refresher training as some have been doing this job for 40+ years and others are new and this would assist in keeping up to date with teaching practices, road rules, testing requirements etc. This is done with large driving schools like ABC or Trent, but private operators need support to keep the teaching standards high.

Re-introduce the compliance body that oversees Driving Instructors so they are held accountable for their training & conduct. Many Instructors don’t keep records, write up lesson plans for students or related documents which in the past used to be mandatory for auditing purposes. I am aware of an instructor who trades lessons for sex. Rogue operators should be disciplined for misconduct, poor training, bad practices etc. and this should be monitored through this Body/Authority.

It is common place for driving Instructors to give lessons with multiple students in their car and giving credit to all log book holders as an hour each when the trainees are not actually driving, merely passengers. This one hour lesson can then be counted as three hours with the “3 for 1” driving lesson credit scheme with a driving school, when the student has not physically been behind the wheel and driving. This falsifies the Log Book and it is detrimental to the student driver.

Also, a lot of Instructors will teach the overseas drivers how to pass the test. By only using certain testing facilities which they know the test circuits and just drive over these roads over and over again, but can’t drive on any road they are not familiar with.

Applicants for Driving Tests, DO NOT have to read, write or understand English to attempt a test.

Applicants for a Driving Knowledge Test (DKT) can undertake this computer test in their own language. If their language is not set up on the computer system, they can request an interpreter sit with them to undertake the test. This interpreter is arranged and paid for by RMS/Service NSW and if the applicant doesn't turn up, there is no penalty for the applicant and they can rebook again for another test. This is a waste of government funds/taxpayers money – my money! I'm not happy that anyone can undertake a road rules test in any other language than English. For them to drive on our roads, they must have to understand a road sign written in English, just like I do. This is not fair and not an equal test. These tests probably don't have road signs in them that don't have the international symbol as this would appear to be discrimination!! I'm interested in road safety, not a political do-gooder that doesn't want to offend a minority.

I have witnessed a person taking a screen shot of every correct answer of the practice computer test online and memorising the answers for every possible combination of questions in the data bank.

Applicants take the computer test multiple times to learn the questions & answers “rote learning” until they pass. I am aware of one applicant who passed the computer test after 17 attempts.

Drivers should have a basic understanding of English

We are enabling people NOT to learn English if we allow tests to be taken in a language other than English.

Drivers can undertake practical driving tests without understanding any English. The test is performed in English with hand signals by a Driving Assessor. Usually they come with an “interpreter/support person” who will give some insight as to what some of the hand signals mean (left, right, 3 point turn, reverse parking etc). This kind of test is very difficult for the driver & Tester and many incidents have occurred causing dangerous situations for them and with other road users.

Without a basic understanding of English, people are unable to communicate in the case of an accident to exchange details, unable to respond to Police when undertaking breath testing, law enforcement, following directions etc. My friend, Miss J, was hit from behind by a truck driver who couldn't speak English. She was trapped in the car & had to be cut out and she was calling out to him to call an ambulance. Instead, he stood there looking at her and was calling his boss in Arabic and then attempted to leave the scene without rendering assistance. Fortunately, other motorists detained him.

Road Signs

Drivers who are unable to read English cannot understand many road signs. Not all road signs have an international symbol accompanying them ie:

- Do not overtake unless safe to do so
- Wrong way Go back
- Turn left anytime with care
- Left turn permitted on red after stopping
- Speed limits enforced on road works

In addition, emergency vehicles have scrolling warning signs

- Breath testing
- Incident ahead
- Merge left/right

Tunnel Management also use LED warning signs to alert traffic of dangers or incidents in a road tunnel.

Motorist who use our roads without basic English, either ignore these signs or lose concentration from driving when trying to read and interpret what the signs mean.

NSW has one of the highest driving standards in the world and we need to maintain this rating by reforming the current education & training to achieve an optimal road safety environment.

Time frame for driving on an Overseas Licence

In NSW, we only require people to convert their overseas licence within 3 months of becoming a Permanent Resident (PR). So if they are a visitor, tourist, temporary resident, etc, they can drive for an unlimited time on their overseas licence without knowing the road rules/undertaking a knowledge test or undertaking a practical test to check their skill level.

In New Zealand, you can only drive for a maximum period of 12 months from the date you arrive in that country. This would be a good law to introduce in to our country, as it would force drivers to hold an Australian licence.

Many drivers from overseas don't want to convert their licence as there are no demit points attached to them. They can have many charges & infringements to their name & overseas licence and they can't be disqualified or suspended from driving. This is unfair to the NSW motorist who is subject to the demit point system and can suffer restrictions or loss of licence for the same incident.

Just recently, I am aware of the driver who undertook his practical driving test after 10 years of being in Australia. I also know of a driver who can convert his UK licence without a driving test, but refuses as he would go on the demerit system. We shouldn't have an open-ended licence conversion system. We should have a limit on the time they are in Australia and when they have to convert their licences like in New Zealand.

With technology, fraudulent licences are getting more sophisticated and overseas drivers obtain these and drive on our roads without the knowledge or skills required. If they are stopped by Police, it is very hard to verify these by the naked eye and these drivers continue to drive on our roads.

Overseas licence holders should have a higher standard of passing the driving test, than the driver going from an L to P1.

Time & time again, drivers from overseas present their full licence for a driving test. Even though road rules vary from country to country, these drivers have difficulty with basic motoring and have questionable skills. They are unable to unlock the door, unable to start a car, don't realise the automatic car won't start unless in P or N, can't judge braking distances, lane positioning, cornering, speed management, are over-cautious with traffic & hazards, show only limited control over the car plus many more. This would indicate they have had minimal driving time (in any country) yet scrape through the test and are handed a full NSW licence to go and drive like this on our roads. Whereas, the under 25yo log book holder completes their 120 hrs of training, drives confidently, observes & reacts to traffic situations and passes the driving test. This driver is issued with a provisional licence and now has to go through the graduated licencing system until they get their unrestricted licence. The current testing system doesn't allow for the difference in an overseas driver going for an unrestricted licence test and a Learner going for a Provisional licence test. Many times there is a huge disparity in the driving skills of these two groups of drivers. People applying for a full licence ie. have had their licence for over 3 years, should have to pass at say 95% as they are "experienced drivers", rather than 90% for our learners.

I know of a case where a driver (Miss P) paid for 10 lessons to drive in an overseas country, undertook the first lesson and was then given their licence. This was over three years ago, they then undertake the basic DKT (not in English), go for a few lessons on our roads, attempt the test and if they pass, get a full unrestricted licence in NSW.

There are many stories of fraudulent licences, drivers going back overseas once they have their provisional licence and get a fraudulent licence backdated to convert them to unrestricted once they return to NSW to bypass the graduated licencing system, which gives them more benefits ie. higher demerit point allowance, allowed to have some alcohol in their system, go faster on some roads, rent cars etc.

Drivers can also manipulate the test to some degree, usually with the help of a driving school. For example,

- choose a regional test centre
- choose a 7am test
- select a quiet time ie School Holidays
- select a test centre located around an industrial area and choose the Christmas break so there is less or no business traffic

By selecting a combination of the above, you can undertake the test with minimal traffic, no school zones, less hazards, the test takes less time, etc and scrapes through the driving test without being put in a “testing” situation. Whereas, some other drivers have to negotiate peak hour traffic, observe school zones, negotiate lunch time/pre Christmas pedestrians, plus the test takes longer to drive around with the extra hazards & traffic.

Driving tests can also be manipulated to a certain degree. Undertaking a test with a speedometer that can't be seen (ie. sunken, covered with a visor, angled so only the driver can see it), guarantees that NO speed errors (fast or slow) are marked. Even a speeding ticket from the Police, can't be marked on the test and fail the applicant. This makes it unfair for those people who bring a vehicle with a digital readout that is visible by both driver & passenger (tester) and marked for speed errors, either fast or slow, which could result in failing the test. Assessors should have a device that is used in all tests to monitor speed so all vehicles, drivers & tests are assessed fairly and equal.

LOG BOOKS

“Heavy Penalties apply for making false entries in the log book” which is printed in the Log Book for under 25 yo drivers. Who enforces this? I am not aware of anyone ever been prosecuted/fined for this. I believe that the toughest penalty in serious cases is to block the learner from taking the test for a few weeks. Driver Testers should have the right to refer fraudulent cases to the Police for punishment or Driver Testers/RMS to issue further penalties. My friend (Mr K) only did 50 hrs of training/driving and just added all the other entries to make up to 100hrs day & 20hrs night and undertake a test. I don't believe that the new “app” on the smart phones will be foolproof. The phone can just go for a ride whenever a mate/partner/parent drives to work, shopping etc.

TOWING LICENCE

Drivers should be licenced to tow another vehicle ie. caravan, boat, trailer etc. This could be done through undertaking a course demonstrating operating the combination safely, speed management, reversing competently and instructed in how to handle this attachment in adverse conditions, high winds, rain, swaying etc.

REPORTING BAD DRIVERS

Just as there is a scheme launched to “Dob in a Tosser” for littering, there should be a system to report bad/unsafe drivers. I tried to report a bad driver once, and was given the red tape run-around. It appears that you can report a bad driver, BUT you have to KNOW them, have their LICENCE number & personal details to put on the form. There should be a system where I can report any incident on the road, with a time, date & registration number and expect this could be followed up by Police or RTA.

Alternatively, Driving Testers, Driving Instructors, Lollipop people & Council Rangers should be able to report bad drivers via a website, written form, phone complaint etc. as these professions are exposed to these motorists daily and could be relied on to be objective and not target drivers for personal reasons. Bad drivers are often seen driving dangerously around Learner drivers, pedestrians/school children, display poor road etiquette, bad behaviour & blatant disregard for road rules. Bad drivers should be reported to Authorities, investigated and sent back for retesting if required.

AGE TESTING

The current system is to test drivers who reach 85years of age. Once again, their last test would have been 60+ years ago on a bare minimum skills test and driving rules and the culture has changed. Age testing should be brought down to 75 as skill levels deteriorate earlier than 85yo. This would be in line with their medical assessment. Family members & doctors take the attitude of they don't want the responsibility/burden of taking away the elderly person's independence and just let the RMS handle it. My friend, (Mr A) has not reached 85 years yet, but he has had minor accidents, quite often can't remember where he was going, reaction time to traffic & hazards is poor, however, he is still allowed to drive on the road with me and my family!! I am interested in Road Safety for everyone, not just one individual who might lose a level of independence or self esteem and perhaps become isolated. However, there are social schemes for this and there are rules for road safety.

Sample Group for Testing

I would like to challenge the Inquiry/Committee to get a group of drivers and have them undertake a practical test or DKT. This would give an insight as to whether an ordinary driver could pass the test again. The Group could be around 100 people of mixed ages & cultures, who are not involved in road safety, driving schools, work for RMS, participate on a similar Committee, etc. A random group from a TAFE class, community college, members from a Gym etc or smaller groups from a variety of areas in Sydney and rural NSW. My perception of drivers today, there would be only a 5% pass rate, which is why I would suggest regular testing to keep our **standards high** and our **road toll down**.

These statistics from the sample group could be used to highlight the fact that once drivers pass their initial driving test, they become complacent, arrogant & ignorant and their skills quite often deteriorate as they realise there is no need to keep abreast of a changing driving culture.

Suggested Retesting

As a bare minimum, drivers should undertake a practical driving test:

- every 10 years
- within 3 months of being involved in an accident
- progressing from P2 (green P's) to full licence
- age testing from 75 years old
- poor/bad drivers as required

SUMMARY

This Committee has a great opportunity to reform our Driver Education & Road Safety culture. To implement some of the changes I have recommended, it would raise driver awareness, increase driving skills and ultimately reduce the road toll.

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22/02/2017