

**Submission
No 9**

SUPPORT FOR RURAL AND REGIONAL LEARNER DRIVERS

Organisation: Gwydir Shire Council

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Parliament of NSW Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety (Staysafe)

Support for rural and regional learner drivers

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment to the Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety regarding the inquiry and report into rural and regional learner drivers.

Gwydir Shire Council strongly supports the Committee's efforts for the provision of better support for learner drivers in rural and regional areas. Road safety is of significant importance and the education and skill development of learner drivers needs to be at the forefront of any initiative to improve safety on our roads.

At a recent presentation to Council staff by the Westpac Rescue Helicopter Service it was disclosed that half of the incidents they attend in our area are the result of preventable motor vehicle accidents. This statistic can only be improved by better education and awareness.

The challenges faced by learner drivers to acquire satisfactory training and driving experience to obtain a driver's licence in the Gwydir Shire area include:

- A very limited number of professional driving schools within the regional area. This community is fortunate to have Gwydir Learning Region (GLR) Training provide driving tuition within the shire, although trainer resources are limited. There are very few driver training schools operating in rural and regional NSW. The GLR Training organisation is the Registered Training Organisation of the Gwydir Shire Council.
- Access to vehicles. Some driving schools in our area do not provide training in a manual vehicle.
- Financial hardship, rural NSW has been devastated by one natural disaster after another in recent years resulting in many local families experiencing financial hardship, and in turn unable to afford professional driving tuition.
- Time is also a challenging factor. Many families consist of both parents working full time jobs and struggling to balance time and focus between work and family commitments, therefore finding it difficult to complete the 120 hours of supervised driving.

A practical option to improve the access of rural and regional learner drivers to driver training opportunities would be the establishment of funded school based driver training programs. The majority of learner drivers are aged between 16 and 18 and are still attending school. Incorporating the development of this 'life skill' into the school curriculum would better equip learner drivers with the essential characteristics to become safe competent drivers.

As outlined in the Staysafe 2017 Report, the value of professional driver training is understated. New technologies including digitisation, simulation and interactive driving tools no doubt have a beneficial impact on road safety, however exposure to professional driving tuition gives learners the opportunity to acquire practical skills so they are more equipped to respond to 'real life' hazards and situations.

Obtaining a driver licence is not a luxury, it is a necessity in rural and regional areas.

Unlike the services available to our city counterparts, public transport is all but non-existent. People may be forced to travel large distances simply to attend work, medical appointments or participate in recreational activities.

Max Eastcott

General Manager

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