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Committee Secretariat
Legislative Council - Committees
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Committee Secretariat

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE FOR INQUIRY INTO STRATEGIES TO REDUCE ALCOHOL ABUSE AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Inquiry into *Strategies to reduce alcohol abuse among young people* on Monday 29 April 2013.

I write in response to the question on notice that was highlighted in the draft transcript for proceedings and is outlined below.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: The evidence for zero blood concentration to the age of 22, are there any international jurisdictions that have looked at doing that and found that there is another problem that results such as those people will go to other forms of drug or risk taking?

Professor FARRELL: Do you mean drinking and driving?

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Yes.

Professor FARRELL: I am not sure.

Professor CONIGRAVE: I am not aware of that.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: Is it your submission that talked about raising the level of drinking to age 21?

Ms GIORGI: Twenty-five.

Professor CONIGRAVE: In relation to the level of drinking when you are driving.

Ms GIORGI: So not raising the age at which you can drink but making it a zero blood alcohol concentration. It is about inexperience in driving being associated with increased risk of harms. There are other jurisdictions that do this and I would have to have a look and get that information to you.

The Hon. JAN BARHAM: I put that on notice.

My response to the question on notice is provided in the text below.

In all states and territories in Australia, drivers are allowed a Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) of 0.05 for full licence holders, and zero for learner (L) licence holders. However jurisdictional laws vary

for maximum BAC for provisional licence holders (P-platers). The majority of states and territories enforce a zero BAC limit throughout the entire provisional period only. However in Western Australia, a 0.02 BAC limit is applied to provisional drivers who have held a licence in Australia or anywhere else for over two years.¹ In the Northern Territory, drivers under the age of 25 are subject to one further year of a zero BAC limit after completing their provisional driving period.²

Internationally, BAC laws vary significantly. In some countries, the same BAC limit is applied to all drivers regardless of age. In the United Kingdom, drivers have a BAC limit of 0.08³ whereas in Norway, the BAC limit is 0.02.⁴ Other countries, like Australia, have special limits for younger drivers. In the United States of America the BAC limit is 0.08, however the limits for drivers under 21 are lower and vary by state (of around BAC 0.01 and 0.02).^{5 6} Ontario in Canada enforces a zero BAC for drivers 21 or under, with older drivers allowed up to 0.08.^{7 8}

The policy of applying a lower BAC to young people exists because young people are disproportionately represented in road traffic accidents. In 2011 in NSW, 21 per cent of all drivers and motorcycle riders involved in fatal crashes were aged 17 to 25 years old, despite this age group accounting for only 14 per cent of licence holders.⁹ It is most likely for this reason that insurance premiums are higher for drivers under 25, regardless of what licence they hold.

The evidence clearly indicates that any reduction in BAC level makes a difference, particularly for young people. There is a large body of national and international evidence indicating that the lower the BAC limit, the greater the reduction in road fatalities.¹⁰ New Zealand research has found that drivers in their 20's were more than five times as likely as drivers in their 30's to have a crash, even with BAC levels as low as 0.02.¹¹

Crash data from Victoria shows that 25 per cent of all drivers aged 18-20 who were killed had a BAC over 0.05, yet this increased to 40-50 per cent for drivers aged 21-25, corresponding to the age at which young drivers tend to achieve their full licence.¹²

An Australian study undertaken by Hall and associates estimated that if all Australian jurisdictions had required a zero BAC for drivers until the age of 21 years in 2003, then 17 young Australian lives could have been saved as they aged from 18 to 21 years. If a zero BAC is applied to people under the age of 25, it is estimated that 50 lives will be saved among those aged 18-25 years.¹³

I trust that this information will be of use to you.

Yours sincerely,

CATERINA GIORGI
MANAGER, POLICY AND RESEARCH

¹ Department of Transport, Driver and Vehicle Services. (2013). *Drive safe: A handbook for Western Australian road users*. Western Australia: Department of Transport, Driver and Vehicle Services.

² Department of Lands and Planning. (2009). *Road users' handbook: Driving in the Northern Territory (4th ed.)*. Northern Territory: Northern Territory Government.

³ Department for Transport. *Drink driving: it's not worth the risk*. <http://thinkdirect.gov.uk/drink-driving.html>. Accessed 6 May 2013.

⁴ Assum, T. (2010). Reduction of the blood alcohol concentration limit in Norway—effects on knowledge, behavior and accidents. *Accident Analysis and Prevention*, 42, 1529-30.

⁵ California Department of Motor Vehicles. (2011). *California Driver Handbook—Actions that result in loss of driver license*. http://www.dmv.ca.gov/pubs/hdbk/actions_drink.htm. Accessed 6 May 2013.

⁶ New York State Department of Motor Vehicles. (2013). *Alcohol, drugs and DWI*. <http://www.safety.ny.gov/zero-tol.htm>. Accessed 6 May 2013.

⁷ Ministry of Transportation, Ontario. (2010). *Fact sheet: Drinking and driving trends*. <http://www.mto.gov.on.ca/english/safety/impaired/fact-sheet.shtml#bac>. Accessed 6 May 2013.

⁸ Munroe, S. (2013). *Legal drinking age in Canada*. <http://canadainline.about.com/od/canadianlaw/a/drinkingage.htm>. Accessed 6 May 2013.

⁹ Centre for Road Safety, Transport for NSW. (2011). *Road traffic crashes in New South Wales. Statistical statement for the year ended 31 December 2011*. <http://www.rsa.nsw.gov.au/roadsafety/downloads/crashstats2011.pdf>. Accessed 9 January 2013.

¹⁰ The George Institute for Global Health. (2013). *Blood Alcohol Concentration Limits*. <http://www.youngdriverfactbase.com/the-issues/restrictions>. Accessed 9 January 2013.

¹¹ Keall, M.D., Frith, W.J. & Patterson, T.L. (2004). The influence of alcohol, age and number of passengers on the night-time risk of driver fatal injury in New Zealand. *Accident Analysis & Prevention* 36, 49-61.

¹² Royal Automotive Club of Victoria (RACV). (2005). *Young driver licensing*. Victoria: RACV.

¹³ <https://www.racv.com.au/press/connect/07c9fd00da9bb89a305fb54a1b459393/ACV-Young-Drivers-Licensing.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CACHEID=47c9fd00da9bb89a305fb54a1b459393>. Accessed 6 May 2013.

¹⁴ Hall, W.D. et al. (2010). How can we reduce alcohol-related road crash deaths among young Australians? *MJA*, 192, 464-466.