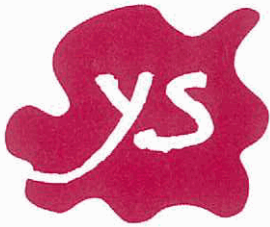


**Submission  
No 4**

**INQUIRY INTO REVIEW OF THE MAA AND THE MAC -  
EIGHTH REVIEW**

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16 August 2007

The Hon Christine Robertson MLC  
Chair, Standing Committee on Law and Justice  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Ms Robertson,

**Re: Eighth Review of the exercise of the functions of the MAA and the MAC.**

Thank you for inviting Youthsafe to make a submission to the Standing Committee on Law and Justice in relation to the 'Eighth review of the exercise of the functions of the MAA and the MAC' under section 210 of the *Motor Accidents Compensation Act 1999*.

Youthsafe, is a not for profit organisation and the peak body in NSW for prevention of serious injury in young people (aged 15 to 25 years). As such Youthsafe's submission to the review is with respect to the road safety and injury management functions of the MAA, particularly young road users.

Road trauma remains a major cause of death and disability amongst young people and young people continue to be over represented in road trauma statistics. Particularly notable are statistics relating to novice drivers indicating that they have a three to four times higher crash risk than other road users, especially young males.

Over the last six years or so there has been a substantial increase in available literature relevant to this issue. Yet it is still a significant challenge to find effective, complementary counter- measures and build on safety measures already in place in NSW. Contributing to this challenge is the fact that research is often focused on one, or a limited number of strategies and often the research has been undertaken in a context or culture different to that of NSW.

Effecting change in young road user safety is complex, particularly given the range of risk factors that come with being young, such as:

- The still maturing adolescent brain - recent neuroscience research has identified that the adolescent brain is still developing and not fully mature until young people reach their twenties. The prefrontal cortex is a late maturing part of the brain responsible for reasoning, self control and making better judgements.
- Propensity to experiment and a desire for thrill seeking.

- Young people's attitudes and patterns of behaviour related to safety – these are established through parental/family and local community influences from an early age.
- Societal expectations that young people take dangerous risks and are irresponsible.
- Belief structures about inability to influence safety, particularly amongst lower socio-economic groups.
- The very strong significance and influence of peers during adolescent years.
- New levels of independence that come with adolescence.
- Fatigue – this is often associated with the busy lifestyles of young people which can include a combination of study, work and socialisation activities.
- Inexperience with activities that may impact on the safety of young people on the roads eg use of alcohol or drugs.

Additional risk factors for young drivers include:

- Inexperience with driving – this is more than just a matter of vehicle handling skills, it relates to inexperience in managing the complexity of mental and physical tasks associated with driving, such as identifying hazards and making decisions while controlling the vehicle.
- Exposure on the roads – this includes the overall amount of time spent driving and also exposure to hazardous conditions such as night time driving, rain etc.
- Youth motivation for driving – driving is often considered a form of entertainment.
- The significance of driving – a sense of identity can be linked to a vehicle and driving in some youth sub-cultures.

Other potential societal and cultural influences may include a greater propensity for *young people to use older vehicles with fewer safety features; a motor vehicle centric*

society where this is the preferred mode of transport; a highly mobile youth population with limited alternative transport options; busier parental lifestyles where there may be a reduced willingness or ability to assist in transporting young people.

Young people as a whole are a vulnerable road user group, however young males are even more likely than females to be involved in road trauma. Apart from the above risk factors there could be additional influential factors contributing to this such as parents tending to be less protective of males than females; male role modelling, for instance in films, entertainment, advertising and sport, that equates masculinity with risk taking; and effects of the surges of male hormones in adolescence.

Apart from the significant range of factors contributing to the risk of road trauma amongst young people there are numerous 'sub-cultures' within the youth population so that a unilateral strategy has little likelihood of making an impact on young road users as a whole.

There is also a delicate balance in road safety as changing one element to address a specific road safety concern can produce a flow-on effect that creates other problems eg designated drivers have a place in reducing drink driving problems but exacerbate the problem of young drivers with multiple peer passengers.

Against this background Youthsafe supports the following approaches in seeking to achieve improvements in road safety for young people:

- A considered and evidence based approach – this involves careful review of research findings that demonstrate the effectiveness of proposed strategies and assessment of the practical application of those strategies in the NSW context, including

assessment of the potential for any changes to precipitate new problems. This may also require new research initiatives where evidence is lacking.

- A multi-strategic approach – this recognises the number and complexity of risk factors and influences and the range of youth sub-cultures. It involves a combination of legislation; enforcement; environmental protection; public campaigns; driver, parent and passenger education programs and information.
- A whole of community approach – this involves engagement of young people, their parents/family, the wider community and policy decision makers in co-ordinated, complementary activities with a common purpose. It should be inclusive of the needs and values of the entire community and relevant to the views and attitudes of young people.
- A positive supportive approach – this is an approach that recognises the value of young people and uses youth-friendly strategies and policies based on national and international evidence.
- An integrated risk management approach – this involves addressing dangerous risk taking in relation to normal activities in which young people engage, which also invariably involve travel to and from these activities, for instance social events, sports activities and work.

It is noted from the 2005/6 MAA annual report that some steps have been taken towards 'Promoting road safety to young people' and 'Working with other organisations to support road safety' and the MAA is to be commended for these efforts. It is also noted that in the 2006 to 2009 MAA corporate plan 'Priority 5' is 'Supporting injury prevention initiatives', including 'Reduction in the number and cost of crashes caused by young drivers'.

Youthsafe strongly supports an ongoing and active MAA role in road safety and injury prevention, including:

- Continuing to recognise the road safety and injury prevention needs of young people as a high priority.
- Supporting relevant research and the practical implementation of research findings.
- Providing grants for community based initiatives that support improvements in the safety of young people on the roads.
- Working with other stakeholders towards a co-ordinated and multi-strategic approach to injury prevention in young people.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like further information or if discussion of the issues raised would be of value.

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I look forward to the outcome of the review.

Yours sincerely

Anne Deans

Executive Officer

Youthsafe