

Submission regarding

Inquiry into Personal Choice and Community Impacts

By  
Jeanne Ward

To whom it may concern,

I am writing in regards to the Senate Committee's inquiry on personal choice and community impacts.

I grew up in the Netherlands, where cycling is an accepted and very frequently used mode of transport. Regular cycling has many benefits, healthwise, environmentally and economically.

Whenever I ride my commuter bike, wearing my normal clothes, and I toddle along the road to the supermarket, I really don't feel that I need a cycling helmet. I do not cycle fast. In the case I might get hit by a car, I am more likely to break bones, than that I fall in such a way that a helmet protects my brain from injury (which is the only thing they are designed to do). However, when I am mountainbiking I feel much more comfortable wearing a helmet.

Therefore, it should be left up to the individual to decide whether to wear a cycling helmet, or not.

There are many reasons why cycling in Australia is not as common as it is in the Netherlands, one of which are the mandatory helmet laws. Even though they were introduced with the best of intentions to protect cyclists, they have not had that desired effect. In essence, cycling has been marginalised and is now limited to the dare devils. Cycling safety comes in numbers.

In the 25 years since Australia and New Zealand introduced the cycling helmets, no other country has followed suit. The reason is that there is no evidence that helmets increase safety. One has to look at the safety per km cycled, or per cyclist to obtain a good indication, as total cycling accidents has been declining as there has, for long, been a declining number of cyclists.

Even though there is no compelling evidence arguing that helmets have increased cyclist safety I understand that it is very difficult for any politician to remove a safety measure. Statistically, they will be proven right, but every cyclist who will have a head injury will be seen as proof that the politician was wrong.

Therefore, it is only a Senate's inquiry such as this one that could potentially make a difference.

Regards,

Jeanne Ward