

Chapter 4

Comprehensive data set

4.1 The committee recognises that the efficacy of bicycle helmets is contentious as demonstrated by the considerable evidence provided to it during the course of this inquiry. The lack of comprehensive data has added to the contention.

4.2 Submitters on both sides of the argument recognised current limitations in the data set which have contributed to varying interpretations of the available data.¹ Associate Professor Olivier informed the committee that there was inadequate data to undertake a cost-benefit assessment of MHL in Australia and that:

We do not have any idea how often people cycle – how much they cycle. In countries like the Netherlands they collect that data routinely. Australia does not.²

4.3 For these reasons, Professor Ivers noted that there were different sources of data, some of which are imperfect, as well as different interpretations of that data. She continued:

One of the things you have to say is that it is difficult to understand the impact of legislation on cycling participation rates in Australia because we have very poor data. There are studies that have shown that it has had an impact, and there are equal numbers of studies that have shown that it has not had an impact and that cycling participation is increasing.³

4.4 Conversely, Mr Curnow noted that the data was insufficient to measure the decline or level of discouragement of cycling in relation to adult cyclists.⁴

4.5 The Queensland parliamentary committee also raised concerns regarding data. In its 2013 report, the committee noted that:

... while the actual relationship between cycling rates, injury rates and safety risk is largely unknown it appears from the evidence that the severity of injury and risk of fatality substantially increases for on-road bicycle use and/or where a motor vehicle is involved.⁵

4.6 The Queensland parliamentary committee recommendations 3 to 5 addressed the issue of data collection. Recommendation 3 stated:

1 Mr Chris Gillham, private capacity, *Committee Hansard*, 16 November 2015, p. 11 and 14.

2 Associate Professor Jake Olivier, Australasian College of Road Safety, *Committee Hansard*, 16 November 2015, p. 31.

3 Professor Rebecca Ivers, Australasian Injury Prevention Network, *Committee Hansard*, 16 November 2015, p. 40.

4 Mr Bill Curnow, Cyclists' Rights Action Group, *Committee Hansard*, 16 November 2015, p. 2.

5 Transport, Housing and Local Government Committee, *A new direction for cycling in Queensland*, Report No. 39 – Inquiry into Cycling Issues, p. 16, www.parliament.qld.gov.au/documents/committees/thlgc/2013/inq-cyc/rp-39-29nov13.pdf (accessed 16 October 2015).

The Committee recommends that the Department of Transport and Main Roads work with other relevant agencies to address the current lack of centralised data collection and reporting for on- and off-road cyclist injuries and fatalities.⁶

4.7 And Recommendation 5:

The Committee recommends that the Department of Transport and Main Roads develop a strategy to better document the incidence of bicycle-related injuries on roads in order to target appropriate interventions more effectively.⁷

4.8 The Queensland parliamentary committee also noted that the lack of consistent and quality data in regards to injury trends had made the task of improving cycling safety difficult. The small number of cyclist injuries actually reported and the lack of consistency in reporting parameters such as different statistical terminology, reporting timeframes and categories of injury types, made it hard to determine safety issues and solutions.⁸ Furthermore, the lack of cycling participation information made it difficult to analyse cycling injuries and fatalities in the context of population size and participation rates.⁹

4.9 In terms of national data, the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development (department) clarified that there is currently no nationally consistent collection of data on serious injuries from road crashes.¹⁰ While indicating that there is evidence of increases in serious injuries from road crashes among vulnerable road user groups, particularly motorcyclists and cyclists, the department recognised that further investigation was required to fully interpret apparent trends in the hospital data.¹¹

4.10 The department also noted that beyond the *Australian Cycling Participation Survey*, there were limited sources of data relating to cycling participation rates and the extent to which people choose to cycle. It recognised the limitations regarding the Australian Bureau of Statistics census data which is usually collected late in winter.¹²

6 Transport, Housing and Local Government Committee, *A new direction for cycling in Queensland*, Report No. 39 – Inquiry into Cycling Issues, Recommendation 3, p. 17, www.parliament.qld.gov.au/documents/committees/thlgc/2013/inq-cyc/rp-39-29nov13.pdf (accessed 16 October 2015).

7 Transport, Housing and Local Government Committee, *A new direction for cycling in Queensland*, Report No. 39 – Inquiry into Cycling Issues, Recommendation 5, p. 17.

8 Transport, Housing and Local Government Committee, *A new direction for cycling in Queensland*, Report No. 39 – Inquiry into Cycling Issues, p. 16.

9 Transport, Housing and Local Government Committee, *A new direction for cycling in Queensland*, Report No. 39 – Inquiry into Cycling Issues, p. 16.

10 Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development, *Submission 394*, p. 2.

11 Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development, *Submission 394*, footnote 1, p. 2.

12 Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development, *Submission 394*, p. 10.

4.11 ACRS, AIPN and RACS recommended ongoing research be conducted to develop an evidence base for potential road safety countermeasures to reduce cyclist injury and promote increased participation, while maintaining MHL in Australia.¹³

4.12 On the other side of the argument, Mr Gillham suggested that a proper assessment of participation and injury rates be undertaken in a particular jurisdiction to provide hard evidence.¹⁴

Committee view

4.13 The committee takes the view that a consistent and comprehensive national data set should be established. Such data would inform any evaluation of the outcomes of cycling safety programs and enable a cost-benefit assessment of MHL to be undertaken.

4.14 The committee recognises that the ongoing debate regarding the relationship between MHL, cycling participation rates and road injuries (including the seriousness of injuries) will continue until such time as nationally consistent data is available. While the committee recognises that there is growing public support for a relaxation of MHL, as exemplified by the Northern Territory legislation and recommendations of the Queensland Parliament's Transport, Housing and Local Government Committee, it takes the view that analysis of nationally consistent data should be obtained before any recommendations for reform are made.

Recommendation 1

4.15 The committee recommends that a consistent and comprehensive national data set be established. The data set should provide nationally consistent information on cycling-related injury trends as well as cycling participation rates. The committee recommends that the Department of Health in cooperation with the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development and state and territory counterparts develop the national data set for application across all states and territories.

4.16 The committee recognises that it is only once such nationally consistent information is gathered and assessed that a national assessment of the impact of mandatory helmet laws can be undertaken.

Recommendation 2

4.17 The committee recommends that the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development in cooperation with the Department of Health conduct a national assessment of mandatory bicycle helmet laws once a national data set of sufficient quality has been established. The impact of the Northern Territory legislation should form an important part of the overall assessment. In addition to safety concerns, this assessment should consider the relationship between

13 Australasian College of Road Safety, Australian Injury Prevention Network and Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, *Submission 257*, p. 21; Mr David Healy, Co Vice-President, Australian College of Road Safety, *Committee Hansard*, 16 November 2015, p. 29.

14 Mr Chris Gillham, private capacity, *Committee Hansard*, 16 November 2015, p. 11.

bicycle helmets and cycling participation rates, drawing on the experience of bike share schemes and other initiatives directed at improving cycling participation rates.

Senator Chris Ketter

Committee Chair