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On 6 December 2017, the Senate moved that the following matters be referred to the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee for inquiry and report by **20 September 2018**:

The need for regulation of mobility scooters, also known as motorised wheelchairs, including:

- a. the number of deaths and injuries attributed to accidents involving mobility scooters in Australia since their introduction;
- b. the causes of these accidents;
- c. any current regulations governing the use of mobility scooters throughout Australia;
- d. comparison of Australian regulations with international standards;
- e. what support structures are in place to ensure the safe operation of mobility scooters;
- f. the regulatory role of government and non-government bodies; and

g. any related matter

Thank you for the chance to write to this matter. I wish to address the terms of reference **c**, **e** and **f** in particular, as an individual citizen.

Background:

I suffer from ME/CFS and fibromyalgia, which limits my mobility substantially. When I first relapsed badly in 2003, I was principal of one of Adelaide's leading high schools, Brighton Secondary School. I returned to work in 2004, using a large mobility scooter to get around the school grounds. At that time, two year 8 students in mobility scooters enrolled at the school, so I was able to experience the issue of scooter usage as the site manager as well as a user. However, my health worsened and I had to retire from work that same year. Since then I have owned several mobility scooters and travelled to every Australian state with a portable scooter, as well as several countries overseas (most recently Spain, Portugal and Malta). I own a portable travel scooter and a larger heavy model. I also drive a car.

I am restricted to about twenty or thirty metres walking at a time, so my scooter is my lifeline to a normal existence, allowing me to shop, socialise, and attend functions, sporting events, family events etc.

I should point out that it is *misleading* to state that mobility scooters are "also known as motorised wheelchairs". Generally speaking, a motorised wheelchair is a motorised wheelchair, and a mobility scooter is a mobility scooter. That is, they are different vehicles. However, the usage of the vehicles currently might be considered as similar. This point should be made in the report of the inquiry.

Term of reference c. any current regulations governing the use of mobility scooters throughout Australia;

This is an issue which should be addressed sensibly and sensitively. At the moment, it is possible for an Australian person to buy a mobility scooter (e.g. over the internet) with *no restrictions* at all. Hence, it could be reasonably assumed that some people are

using these scooters without the necessary capacity to operate them safely. With the numbers of mobility scooter users increasing, this will become an even more important issue. As a user, and someone who speaks with other users frequently, I am sure few of us would have concerns (for example) about there being a medical approval needed for the usage of mobility scooters in public places.

One of my scooters is called a *Travelscoot*. It is a remarkable invention, very lightweight and portable with an outstanding battery range, and it allows me to achieve what most other, able-bodied people also in their sixties do by walking. However, to achieve its light weight and manoeuvrability, it requires some dexterity of the user. For instance, the scooter has hand controls similar to a motorcycle, requiring the capacity to twist and hold a grip. This is a matter which I would hope a potential user and/or their carers would discuss with a doctor or health professional before purchase. But there is *no requirement* to do so, currently. There *should* be requirements of medical involvement in the purchase of a suitable vehicle for the patient.

I have never received training in the use of my mobility scooter. As an experienced driver, and having owned a mortar scooter previously, I did not need much induction into the use of my scooters, but it *should* be a requirement for usage on public thoroughfares that one has had *training in the safe use of the vehicle*. This is a reasonable expectation of a citizen in a community.

Term of reference e. what support structures are in place to ensure the safe operation of mobility scooters;

While there should be requirements put in place to make our pathways and public spaces safe for all, we should be careful not to make it too onerous for those of us with disabilities who find their scooter a lifeline. Let us not regulate for the sake of regulating. An instance of this over-regulating approach was the suggestion floated in SA several years ago that *riders of mobility scooters wear helmets*. This makes little sense, given that mobility scooters generally speaking are limited in speed to a fast walking pace, about 6-7 kph*. If we require mobility scooter users to wear a helmet at these speeds, it would beg the question why we don't require joggers and runners (or indeed anyone moving above a walking pace in the course of their daily lives) to wear a

helmet. They are after all moving at a *faster* pace than a mobility scooter - and on public thoroughfares.

On the other hand, I think it entirely proper that the inquiry looks at the general issue of *speed* of mobility scooters. If we are to share footpaths with pedestrians, I believe our mobility scooters should be speed-limited. Some vehicles being imported currently are able to travel at 15kph or thereabouts, a speed not suited to the use of the vehicle by people with disabilities and those using footpaths. It is also possible to alter many machines to override their speed limitations. This needs to be prevented.

About Others: The other side of the coin, not often discussed, is the lack of awareness of people in wheelchairs and scooters by *other* users of footpaths and public spaces. As someone who often attends events (eg AFL matches) in crowds, I can give you examples of very unsafe behaviour of many people, particularly when inebriated. It never fails to astonish me that many people leaving a crowded venue walk forward while looking *backwards* and speaking to someone behind them. They have no awareness at all of someone approaching from left, right or in front, and require the wheelchair or scooter user to be especially alert and ready to take evasive action continually. This suggests the need for a public awareness campaign. (As a former teacher and school principal, may I suggest NOT another *school education* program. This is more about adults than children, and schools already have crowded curricula.)

Term of reference f. the regulatory role of government and non-government bodies

I believe that state governments should have a role in assuring the safe passage of all on our footpaths and roads. In relation to mobility scooters this should include:

- a requirement of registration of riders;
- a requirement of licensing and/or initial training of riders; and
- spot checks of vehicles for speed limiter controls.

There is also a role for government or road safety bodies to address training, not only of mobility scooter users, but also of other users of public spaces. A public awareness

campaign to make pedestrians (i.e. most of us at some stage) aware of people in chairs and scooters would be useful to us all, and help prevent many mishaps.