

January 2020

## Submission

# Joint Select Committee on Road Safety Inquiry: Road Safety in Australia

Prepared and submitted by:



**Australian  
Road Safety  
Foundation**

## **Joint Select Committee Inquiry on Road Safety**

The Australian Road Safety Foundation (ARSF) has been invited by the Joint Select Committee on Road Safety to provide a submission for its upcoming inquiry and report on road safety.

As per the terms of reference, the inquiry will focus on the following:

- a. the effectiveness of existing road safety support services and programs, including opportunities to integrate Safe System principles into health, education, industry and transport policy;
- b. the impact of road trauma on the nation, including the importance of achieving zero deaths and serious injuries in remote and regional areas;
- c. the possible establishment of a future parliamentary Standing Committee on Road Safety and its functions;
- d. measures to ensure state, territory and local government road infrastructure investment incorporates the Safe System principles;
- e. road trauma and incident data collection and coordination across Australia;
- f. recommending strategies, performance measures and targets for the next National Road Safety Strategy;
- g. recommendations for the role of the newly established Office of Road Safety; and
- h. other measures to support the Australian Parliament's ongoing resolve to reduce incidents on our roads, with a focus on the recommendations from the Inquiry into the effectiveness of the National Road Safety Strategy 2011–2020.

The ARSF is supportive of all current road safety activities and is of the view that these activities, such as better vehicle safety standards, improved roads, improved medical response and increased policing etc must all continue to reduce the road toll and the impact of road trauma.

However, in order to keep improving, additional activities and programs need to be implemented to work cohesively and collaboratively with the current systems.

The ARSF welcomes the opportunity to share its views and provide this submission for the Committee's consideration.

## Background

***Every six seconds someone is killed or seriously injured on the world's roads.***

Of all the systems with which people have to deal every day, road traffic systems are the most complex and the most dangerous. Road Trauma places enormous social and emotional costs on the community.

The Facts:

- Currently there are around 1200 deaths each year in Australia alone;
- Annual Global Road Fatalities equal 1.3 million people;
- Land transport accidents accounted for 0.7% of all hospitalisations and 9.8% of hospitalisations due to injury in Australia during 2008/09;
- The mean length of stay in hospital for persons seriously injured in road vehicle traffic crashes was 4.9 days;
- Nationally, and in each jurisdiction, the age-specific rates of serious injury due to land transport accidents were highest at ages 15 – 24 years;
- The annual economic cost of road crashes in Australia has been estimated to be more than \$30 Billion;
- This is in addition to the social and community cost

The Australian Road Safety Foundation (ARSF) is a not for profit organisation dedicated to increasing awareness on the health impacts of road trauma, reducing road fatalities and injuries. It achieves this through innovative road safety awareness programs, driver education, advocacy and research assistance.

Possessing more than 30 years of road safety experience, Russell White created the Foundation in 2010 and in this time the ARSF has established a well-known national presence and reputation with strong support from the Federal Government, private sector, State governments and the Police for its initiatives, programs and events across Australia.

The ARSF's vision is to drive the safety of every road user, every day, to achieve significant year-on-year reduction in road deaths and injuries nationally.

The Foundation's key focus of work to promote road safety and principal objective of promoting better health outcomes in the community by reducing the physical and mental illnesses which arise from death or injury occurring on our roads.

The ARSF operates across a number of key channels, including:

- Increasing awareness on the long term health impacts and illnesses that result from road crashes;
- Expansion of our road safety advocacy position via media operations;
- Implementation of a national road safety education program for school students and lobby for its integration into the curriculum in each State;
- Provision of additional support for various community road safety activities
- Provision of training resources for both school students and parents;
- Identification for new road safety research opportunities, both nationally and internationally;
- Further development of the Australian Road Safety Awards Program;
- Further expansion of the Rural Road Safety Month initiative;
- Further expansion of the Fatality Free Friday national road safety initiative.

The ARSF is in a unique position to offer recommendations and perspective on the points raised in this submission.

**A. The effectiveness of existing road safety support services and programs, including opportunities to integrate Safe System principles into health, education, industry and transport policy.**

Historically, Australia has performed reasonably well with its approach to reducing road trauma and there has been some significant improvements. The number of road fatalities has been substantially reduced from 30 per 100,000 in 1970 to around 8 per 100,000 – In 2014, the national road toll was 1,153. Whilst this was our lowest since 1945 our rate of improvement has plateaued over the past decade.

The reason for the successful reduction of the road toll over the past 30 years has been the result of a number of strategies that have been progressively adopted over that time.

Some of these developments have included, the introduction of Australian Design Rules (ADR's), compulsory wearing of seatbelts, the overall improvement of vehicle reliability and safety, enhanced road law enforcement, better trauma response and treatment, policing as well as improved road engineering and design.

However, despite all these advancements it is clear that a critical piece of the puzzle is still missing because the deaths, illness and injuries from road crashes continue.

The only area that has not significantly improved relates to the biological component in the road safety puzzle...The Road User.

Currently, despite the graduated licencing systems introduced by the States, these licensing systems fail to address areas such as the higher order skills and human factors that can contribute to vehicle crashes.

There is also no incentive to undertake additional learning and little opportunity for professional development.

Obtaining a license is recognized as the minimal level of competency. Generally speaking, most drivers are taught how to pass a test, not how to drive in a holistic sense. This means that drivers take to the road in a totally under prepared state. As a result, road crashes are a daily occurrence, some of which have fatal consequences.

This approach has also established a set of cultural paradigms that determine how road safety is viewed by the general population. It could be argued that there is a need to expand the cultural focus of road users and to look at opportunities to include aspects such as "Pro Social Driving Skills and Human Factors into the overall driver education system.

Safety on our roads should be a significant priority for everyone. However, it would appear that the current paradigms tend to create the view that governments, police and other road authorities are the only groups responsible for addressing road safety.

Ultimately, there needs to be a shift from this belief to a new paradigm of community ownership of the issue. This will help to foster a new road safety culture.

The incidence of road trauma impacts negatively, both socially and economically on our society.

Every serious vehicle incident has a number of undesirable outcomes:

- The physical, psychological and economic toll on those who are injured in road crashes
- The potential for long term illness and other health issues
- The physical and psychological toll on families dealing with the death and/or serious injury of loved ones
- The financial toll on families dealing with the death and serious injuries of loved ones
- The psychological and potential physical toll on first responders, emergency services personnel and medical staff who treat the injured and deal with their families
- The economic effect on the state due to factors such as delays to the transport industry, worker's compensation, tax revenues, demands on hospitals and emergency service staffing

The fundamental aspect of road safety which has not been adequately addressed is 'the human factor'.

Whilst this area is possibly the most difficult to address, it is also the area that can potentially provide the greatest gains.

This approach will need to focus on a number of key areas. This will include issues such as:

1. Exploring opportunities to create community engagement
2. Establishing principles for a new road safety culture
3. Marketing and promoting to drive community awareness
4. Working with community and business leaders to promote road safety
5. Activity to increase the awareness of "Work Related Road Safety" and compliance under the Chain of Responsibility legislation
6. Treat road safety as a national public health issue
7. Review how pre and post-license training is conducted nationally
8. Establish a national school based road safety program
9. Redefining the overall approach to driver training and road safety education
10. Embedding a greater focus on driver bio-mechanics, situational awareness and human factors training into the licencing system

**B. The impact of road trauma on the nation, including the importance of achieving zero deaths and serious injuries in remote and regional areas.**

It is well established that Australia has progressively lowered its annual road toll since it peaked in 1970. That year 3,798 people were killed on the nation's roads. This figure equated to 30.4 fatalities per 100,000 of population.

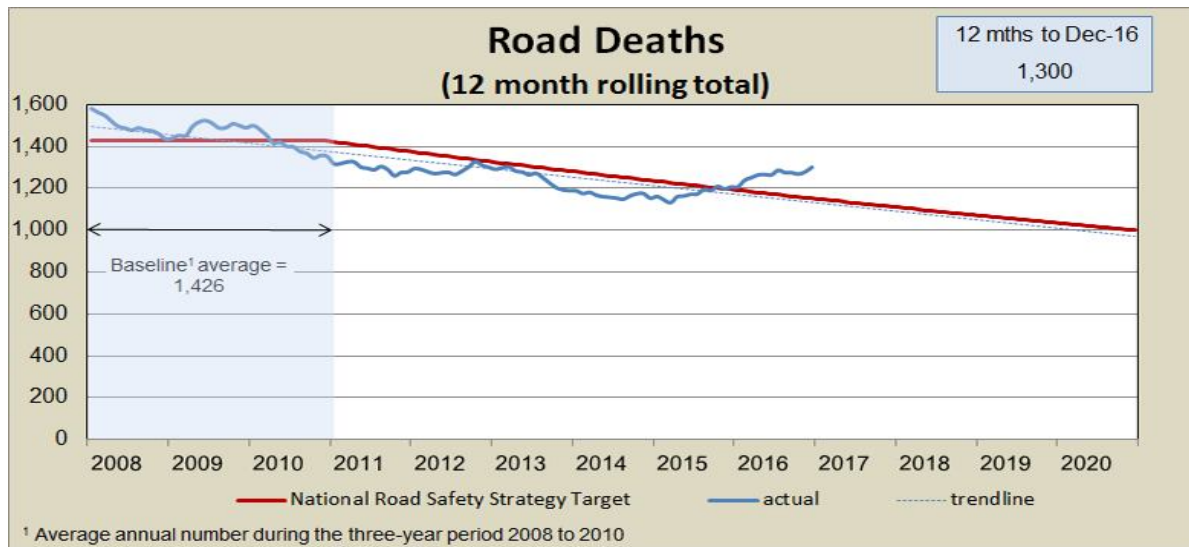
In 2017, the nation's fatality rate per 100,000 population was 4.98.

Between 2008 and 2017 Australia's fatality rate per 100,000 population declined by 26.4 percent. Over the same period, the OECD median rate declined by 32.3 per cent.

Since this "high water" mark, many ongoing safety countermeasures have been introduced including Australian Design Rules, lowering blood alcohol levels and random breath testing, compulsory wearing of seatbelts, improved vehicle design, greater enforcement, improved road design and construction, awareness campaigns and enhanced vehicle safety technology.

Whilst these countermeasures have resulted in the road toll trending downwards, there has been an increase in fatalities since 2015.

### Performance Against the National Road Safety Strategy Target



### Road Deaths by State

	NSW	Vic	Qld	SA	WA	Tas	NT	ACT	Australia
2008	374	303	328	99	205	39	75	14	1,437
2009	454	290	331	119	191	63	31	12	1,491
2010	405	288	249	118	193	31	50	19	1,353
<b>Baseline average<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>411</b>	<b>294</b>	<b>303</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>1,427</b>
2011	364	287	269	103	179	24	45	6	1,277
2012	369	282	280	94	183	31	49	12	1,300
2013	333	243	271	98	162	36	37	7	1,187
2014	307	248	223	107	183	33	39	10	1,150
2015	350	252	243	102	160	34	49	15	1,205
<i>12 months to Dec-2016</i>	<i>384</i>	<i>292</i>	<i>250</i>	<i>89</i>	<i>193</i>	<i>38</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>1,300</i>
<b>Dec-2016 % change to baseline</b>	<b>-6.6%</b>	<b>-0.7%</b>	<b>-17.5%</b>	<b>-20.5%</b>	<b>-1.5%</b>	<b>-13.6%</b>	<b>-13.5%</b>	<b>-40.0%</b>	<b>-8.9%</b>

Source: Australian Road Deaths database as at 13-Jan-2017

The number of road deaths per 100,000 population in NSW has dropped over the past four decades, from 28.9 in 1970 to 4.1 in 2014. The latest figures are the lowest since records began early last century, when in 1908 there were 7.6 deaths per 100,000 population.

Road safety research has continued to evolve of the past few decades. But it could be argued that the research community has, to date, never been able to completely explore all the combinative facets involved with enhancing driver safety performance or define the precise formula for delivering a complete driver technique.

### Rural Road Safety

Despite making up only 16.5 percent of the nation's population, regional road deaths account for a staggering two in every three of the national toll.

In basic terms, rural road crashes account for 65% of the Australian road toll.

The road crash fatality rate per population is over three times in rural areas than in major cities and the rate of serious road-related injury among residents in rural areas is nearly twice that of those in major cities.

The issue is far greater than the figures report. Many fatal and serious injury crashes in rural and remote areas are not recorded in official road crash data, including crashes on public land and private property. In addition, incidents involving vehicles accounts for 71% of farm fatalities (not recorded in road toll)

The Australasian College of Road Safety suggests that rural road use and associated crashes have a number of common characteristics including:

- Generally higher travel speeds and consequently a greater risk of resulting fatality or serious injury in the event of a crash
- Longer travelling distances
- A more varied road environment including a higher proportion of unsealed, dirt roads
- A more varied vehicle population, with more heavy, agricultural and mining vehicles
- A higher representation of single vehicle crashes, particularly run-off-road crashes

In addition, driving on rural roads also involves issues such as fatigue, animals on the road, and road users being unfamiliar with different road environments including unsealed dirt roads. Remoteness of the crash location means that emergency services are not as close by as they are in metro areas, and therefore getting help can take time.

The Australian Road Safety Foundation has also conducted its own studies into the attitudes, cultural beliefs and behaviors of road users on the topic of rural driving as part of the Rural Road Safety Month Campaign.

The findings from the 2019 program were as follows:

#### **GENERAL STATISTICS:**

- 1 in 3 Australians admit they are more likely to break a road rule when driving on rural roads
- Drivers are 1.5 times more likely to speed on rural roads than they are on city or suburban streets
- Australian road users are twice as likely to overtake on a double line if driving on a rural road, compared to city or suburban streets

- More than half of drivers who admit they are more likely to break rules on rural roads would do so because they are less likely to be caught by police
- 1 in 4 drivers believe that rural road rules should be relaxed to allow for higher speed limits, higher blood alcohol limits and mobile phone usage
- However, 1 in 3 road users believe a shift in driver attitudes and behaviours would have the biggest impact on the rural road toll

#### **METRO V REGIONAL DRIVERS:**

- Worryingly, 1 in 2 rural drivers admit to speeding, using their mobile phone or driving distracted while their own kids are in the car, compared to 1 in 3 metro drivers
- Added to this, 34 percent of rural road users admit to taking risks behind the wheel while someone else's children are in the car, compared to 28 percent of metro road users
- Metro residents are more likely than rural residents to drive under the influence of drugs or alcohol, drive fatigued, not wear a seatbelt and speed
- Metro drivers admitted that they were more likely to break a road rule on rural roads, compared to local drivers
- What's more, metro drivers cited they were more likely to engage in risky behaviour on rural roads because they were less likely to get caught, less speed cameras and fewer dangers, while fatigue could lead them to accidentally break the road rules
- Mobile phone use, driving under the influence and driving distracted were the three biggest differences between rural and metro drivers:
  - 1 in 2 metro drivers admit to either touching or looking at their mobile phone while driving, compared to 1 in 3 rural drivers
  - 1 in 4 rural drivers have driven under the influence of drugs or alcohol, compared to 16 percent of metro drivers
  - 39 percent of metro drivers admit to driving distracted, compared to 31 percent of rural drivers

Whilst we, as a nation need to continue with the current work on building better road infrastructure, enforcement, medical response and vehicle safety, it's critical that we consider new innovations and the human factors associated with road safety. The challenge facing governments and the road safety industry is the complexity of the road safety issue in general.

Dealing with the social norms and the general community beliefs, providing consistent systems across the state and dealing with the needs of the individual are just some of these factors.

Clearly, there are also significant differences between road users in metropolitan and regional areas. But given the fact that having a licence to drive is about mobility, it's unlikely that a metro driver will only ever drive in a metro area and that rural drivers will only ever drive in a rural area. Therefore, there is a need to look at holistic training and education systems or campaigns that address all of these areas.

Metropolitan drivers have to deal with a more confined environment. Whilst speed limits are generally lower, metro drivers have to contend with denser traffic flows, pedestrians, cyclists and a greater amount of start/stop traffic.



Rural drivers generally operate in areas with higher speed limits, travel on roads potentially with a lower level of roadside maintenance in terms of general road condition, location of roadside obstacles such as trees etc and the potential for animal strikes. Many main stream interventions adopted in metro areas have not been effective due to a lack of direct community relevance and involvement in their design. Interestingly, rural road crashes are not decreasing at the same rate as urban trends. (CARRS-Q rural and remote driving fact sheet)

There are also potentially some significant differences in social and cultural views between these two groups.

Rural drivers may have slightly improved visual scanning habits and a better understanding of general vehicle dynamics compared to metro drivers. However, rural drivers may also have different risk levels around drink driving, speeding and seatbelt use.

Finally, rural drivers may also have limitations in accessing driver training and education programs compared to metro drivers. This could be due to issues such as remoteness and general access to resources.

Any approach to enhancing driver education across the states and territories needs to address these factors and issues around access and equity.

### **C. The possible establishment of a future parliamentary Standing Committee on Road Safety and its functions.**

It has been well established in the international road safety community that road safety requires two things – the need to improve the transfer of information and the establishment of a firm leadership structure.

This is why the appointment of a dedicated Road Safety Minister, Parliamentary Standing Committee and the Office of Road Safety are critical to expanding the focus on road safety and the health and wellbeing impacts on the nation.

Although there are a number of programs that attempt to address the problem of road trauma and promote road safety, we need to have greater collaboration across all road safety stakeholder groups to form a united front to eradicate deaths, illness and injuries on our roads.

The ARSF is highly supportive of the Standing Committee on Road Safety.

Having a bipartisan approach is critical in order to unite road safety stakeholders and achieve national leadership on this issue.

The Committee's functions should include:

- Establishing future national road safety targets
- Establishing a national leadership position of road safety and road trauma
- Developing scope to ensure accountability for achieving those targets
- Exploring systems and initiatives to expand cultural change into the safe systems approach
- Establishing greater collaboration with all sectors associated with road safety
- Overseeing and enhancing coordination between all levels of government
- Ensuring road safety is viewed as priority across all government sectors

- Ensuring overall accountability for the nation's road safety performance
- Developing greater integration of road safety and road trauma awareness with greater engagement of the health and education sectors
- Developing Australia's capability to influence road safety in the Asian Pacific Region

#### **D. Road trauma and incident data collection and coordination across Australia.**

The Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics (BITRE), currently produce a road statistical annual summary of road trauma in Australia. This report addresses a range of issues including fatalities, injuries etc.

However, there appears to be a number of critical gaps and variations in the way this data is collected and measured.

These gaps include variations in definitions and measuring criteria.

For example, the Australasian College of Road Safety's Rural and Remote Road Safety Fact Sheet suggests that defining where 'urban' areas end and 'rural' areas begin is not always clear. Differing classification systems categorise road crashes according to different criteria, which makes comparisons between individual studies difficult.

As an additional example, the term 'rural' can be considered as those areas with a low population density and without ready access to medical services. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) uses a geographic classification system for locations based on road distances from major population centres.

Classifications of rural crashes using speed limits eg. 100km or greater as a proxy indicator have been used in Australian Transport jurisdictions.

The same issue is also true regarding the life-long health impacts and illnesses that result from road trauma. Whilst the direct numbers of fatalities and injuries are known, there is little information published or collected on the long term impacts of road trauma. These impacts include long physical and mental illness and disease as well as overall quality of life.

A strong case can be made for consistency in this area both nationally and with health related classifications.

There is a need to establish a standardised framework for measuring the full spectrum of the total impact of road trauma. This needs to go beyond basic crash incident data and start to holistically integrate aspects such as the long term illnesses (both physical and mental), impact to the national health statistics and more in depth investigation of crash causation factors.

#### **E. Recommending strategies, performance measures and targets for the next National Road Safety Strategy.**

##### **Focusing on Work-Related Road Safety**

It is well established that work-related road trauma is the highest single contributor to work-related deaths and injuries. Figures indicate that over the last seven years, two thirds of workers killed at work were as a result of motor vehicle incidents (Safe Work Australia 2012). Even though driving a vehicle is potentially one of the most dangerous activities within a workplace, many organisation's risk management practices do not extend the same level of

diligence as they would for other risky workplace activities. It could also be argued that many of the current countermeasures do not fully address the issue from a holistic stand point.

In terms of industry commentators, they are critical of the situation. “Overall, from a societal point of view, and despite the limitations in available data, there is growing evidence that work-related road safety is an important issue which to date has suffered from a ‘scandal of tolerance’.”, says Murray, Newnam, Watson, Davey and Schonfeld (Australian Transport Safety Bureau 2003).

### Fleet Drivers

Data obtained from the New South Wales Road and Traffic Authority suggests that between 50% and 60% of all new vehicles are sold to business organisations or corporate fleets. It has also been estimated that two out of three vehicles on the road are making a work-related trip (Australian Transport Safety Bureau 2003). This highlights the real scope of the issue and the level of overall risk exposure.

In fact, work-related road crashes currently account for about 50% of all occupational fatalities and 15% of national road deaths, with people killed or seriously injured while travelling to and from work. Furthermore, on average, company drivers travel more than twice the annual distance of private car drivers and have about 50% more incidents (Australian Transport Council 2011).

The statistics clearly show a significant problem, with the financial, community and social consequences considered by most to be unacceptable.

In relation to work-related road safety, the ARSF believe that the core issue stems from several factors. Firstly, there is no single entity that has been able take a leadership position to drive improvements.

Secondly, the initiatives that do exist are fragmented, and whilst many are commendable in what they seek to achieve, a great number do not align to good practice and therefore fall short. Lastly, despite legislative requirements outlining obligations associated with work vehicle use and risk management, many organisations still fail to adequately address risks associated with work-related driving.

Therefore, there is a clear opportunity for Federal Government, with support from the ARSF, to take a leadership role in combating this public health epidemic.

In response, it will require leaders from the business community to step up and take responsibility for work-related road safety. Ultimately, those who sit in the boardroom must shoulder much of the responsibility for bringing much needed reforms and embedding a strong road safety culture within their organisations.

### **F. Recommendations for the role of the newly established Office of Road Safety; and other measures to support the Australian Parliament’s ongoing resolve to reduce incidents on our roads, with a focus on the recommendations from the Inquiry into the effectiveness of the National Road Safety Strategy 2011–2020.**

The ARSF is supportive of the key points of action for the Office of Road Safety as listed in the Australian Automobile Association’s Reviving Road Safety Australian document. This document suggests:

*The Office of Road Safety must work with state and territory governments to:*

- *agree on consistent metrics and reporting formats for data*
- *share all data sets – including a full picture on crash causes*
- *integrate data sets - overlaying road crash information with geospatial, road network and health data*
- *share these data sets in an open-source platform and produce up-to-date reports on performance against NRSS targets.*

In addition, it is critical the Office of Road Safety continues to establish a national leadership position on the full impact of road trauma.

This should include a focus on the issue of work related road safety and developing an overall action plan that targets the following:

1. Exploring opportunities to create community engagement
2. Establishing principles for a new road safety culture
3. Marketing and promoting to drive community awareness
4. Working with community and business leaders to promote road safety
5. Activity to increase the awareness of “Work Related Road Safety” and compliance under the Chain of Responsibility legislation

It will also need to act as a central facilitation agency to foster greater collaboration with traditional road safety stakeholders as well as introducing new user groups to contribute their voice to the national strategy.

The Office of Road Safety also needs to be resourced in order to continue expansion of the road safety enabler’s fund and continue its current work with key road safety NGO’s and organisations.

We would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry and we hope that many of the suggestions and recommendations we’ve outlined here will find practical application in future government programs.

Russell White is available for further enquiry and discussion regarding the above recommendations

## REFERENCE DOCUMENTS / SOURCES

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