

Driver Management

- 5.1 In the Committee's view, getting driver's to change their perceptions of risk and appropriate behaviour on the road is vital to creating a safer road environment.
- 5.2 The difficulties associated with changing attitudes, however, are illustrated by evidence received by the Committee. Drink driving remains a problem, especially in rural areas. People continue to be killed and seriously injured when not wearing seatbelts—despite years of public education and law enforcement. Speeding continues to be considered dangerous only when other people do it.
- 5.3 The principal measures impacting on driver behaviour are, education, training and enforcement. All have their strengths and limitations, and all have to be applied in varying degrees to different groups and situations. The National Road Safety Strategy noted that:

Strong synergies exist between education, enforcement and information in developing safe behaviour in road users, and each is of limited effect alone. Education is needed to develop an understanding of why certain behaviour is safe and other behaviour unsafe. Education will be more effective in combination with enforcement which provides incentives for appropriate behaviour. Public information campaigns can refresh the education message and reinforce the benefit of enforcement. Information and education also maintain support for enforcement action.¹

1 ATC, *National Road Safety Strategy, 2001–2010*, p. 5.

Improving Road User Behaviour—the National Road Safety Strategy

5.4 Under the National Road Safety Strategy, education, driver training and licensing, and enforcement, have been identified as the key areas for improving road user behaviour. Public information initiatives are seen as the key to improving the behaviour of experienced drivers, while education and training are targeted at novice drivers. Training and testing of novice drivers will be improved by:

- increasing supervised driving practice;
- trialling and, if proven, expanding school-based learning initiatives and competency-based continuous assessment programs; and
- developing programs focusing on cognitive skills such as hazard perception and conflict prediction.

5.5 Enforcement measures identified under the Strategy ‘will increase the general deterrence provided by police operations and will promote the public perception that compliance “everywhere, all the time” is the best way of avoiding penalties and improving safety’.²

5.6 Under the heading of Licensing and Driver Management, the *National Road Safety Action Plan 2003 and 2004* targets unlicensed driving and mobile phone use. The Plan notes:

Licence suspension is an important deterrent penalty but many recidivist offenders continue to drive without licences.

Among drivers and motorcycle riders involved in fatal crashes at least 5% of drivers and 19% of motorcycle riders do not have a valid licence.

A requirement to display a licence on demand is important to deterrence of unlicensed driving; it is also important to the enforcement of special licence conditions, such as alcohol interlocks and the zero alcohol limit on novice drivers, and to achieving certainty in the application of other penalties.³

5.7 The *National Road Safety Action Plan 2003 and 2004* also focuses on driver impairment, including the effects of alcohol, drugs and fatigue. Regarding drink driving the Plan notes:

2 ATC, *National Road Safety Strategy, 2001–2010*, p. 5–6.

3 ATC, *National Road Safety Action Plan 2003 and 2004*, p. 22.

All jurisdictions have had considerable success in reducing the contribution of alcohol to road trauma, but about 26% of driver and rider fatalities still have a blood alcohol concentration above the legal limit.

- 5.8 Part of the solution is continuing intensive and effective enforcement, maintaining the perception that if you drink and drive you will be caught. Drink driving is identified as a particular problem in rural areas:

This reflects both the difficulties in applying Random Breath Testing effectively in rural areas, and the lack of alternative transport options (such as trains, buses or taxis) in many rural areas. Specially adapted programs are needed to reduce drink driving in rural areas.

- 5.9 Another aspect of the equation is the problem of recidivism:

There is evidence that a substantial proportion of drink drivers—particularly recidivist offenders—have serious alcohol abuse problems, often paralleled by broader psychological problems. Alcohol interlock programs and rehabilitation programs have had some success in changing the behaviour of recidivist offenders who are resistant to mainstream deterrence and publicity programs.⁴

- 5.10 Drug impairment is also seen as an important issue, but the means of identifying and combating the problem are still under development.⁵

- 5.11 Fatigue is regarded as another major contributor to the road toll, but in the absence of effective enforcement measures, public education and road based measures (alerting drivers before they drift off the road or reducing the likelihood of severe impact) are seen as the principal means for reducing the impact of driver fatigue.⁶ The Committee again draws attention to its comments on this matter in its report *Beyond the Midnight Oil: An inquiry into managing fatigue in transport*.⁷

4 ATC, *National Road Safety Action Plan 2003 and 2004*, pp. 17–18.

5 ATC, *National Road Safety Action Plan 2003 and 2004*, p. 18.

6 ATC, *National Road Safety Action Plan 2003 and 2004*, pp. 18–19.

7 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications, Transport and the Arts (HORSCCTA), *Beyond the Midnight Oil: An inquiry into managing fatigue in transport*, Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, October 2000.

Public Education and Awareness

- 5.12 The success of public awareness and publicity campaigns in educating the general public about road safety was alluded to in much of the evidence presented to the Committee. To some extent the statistics speak for themselves, with a dramatic reduction in the road toll during the past twenty years. Evidence presented in Chapter 3 indicated changes in attitude and compliance to speed limits. Perhaps the most dramatic evidence of the success of combined publicity and enforcement is the high level of compliance with car restraint laws. Around 95–97 per cent of drivers wear seatbelts.⁸
- 5.13 Nonetheless, the recent plateau in road fatality reductions and continuing non-compliance with road rules indicate that new approaches are needed.
- 5.14 In his evidence before the Committee, Mr Gary Mahon, Director of Strategic Policy for Queensland Transport, outlined the changing nature of awareness and enforcement programs. Increasingly the emphasis is shifting away from specific issues towards broader cultural change:
- We believe that promoting a culture of road safety on a national basis much more aggressively than we have been has the potential to reinforce appropriate driving practices throughout Australia. The point has been touched on today that, through human judgment and human nature, it is somewhat inevitable that crashes will occur, but many crashes occur that are not just the result of the inevitability of human nature; they are behavioural issues that do need significant treatment.⁹
- 5.15 There is also much more focus on targeting education and enforcement measures at at-risk groups. The focus of sanctions is increasingly towards recidivist offenders and ‘changing the nature of the way we deal with second and subsequent offences—particularly within a period of 12 months—which is the area in which we believe we may be able to return better results in terms of behavioural change’.¹⁰

8 *Transcript of Evidence*, pp. 31, 53.

9 *Transcript of Evidence*, pp. 18–19.

10 *Transcript of Evidence*, pp. 19–20.

- 5.16 The Committee endorses this shift towards creating a culture of road safety, but remains concerned that one of the problems affecting the success of public awareness campaigns is that they are not nationally coordinated or sufficiently sustained. The Committee believes that the Australian Transport Council should take a leading role in providing national coordination of road safety campaigns, and in coordinating the funding of such campaigns. In this way, the best campaigns will have national prominence and be promoted on a long term basis. The Committee is also aware of the evidence of Dr Zoe Sofoulis, a senior lecturer with the Centre for Cultural Research at the University of Western Sydney on the need to engage youth through campaigns which are culturally relevant in form and content (see Chapter 7).

Recommendation 11

- 5.17 **The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work through the Australian Transport Council to establish a system for coordinating and funding road safety campaigns on a national basis.**

Vehicle Advertising

- 5.18 Another factor affecting driver attitudes to road safety is motor vehicle advertising. Evidence presented to the Committee indicated that vehicle advertising was regarded as a significant influence on driver attitudes and behaviour, that it often sent messages appearing to condone unsafe road use behaviour—particularly speeding, and that advertising guidelines were inadequate to prevent this.
- 5.19 Currently, motor vehicle advertising standards are determined by a voluntary code of practice developed by the Federal Chamber of Automotive Industries (FCAI). The code was agreed to by the Australian Transport Council and came into effect from November 2002. Compliance with the code is administered by the Advertising Standards Board (ASB). The ASB operates under the auspices of the Advertising Standards Bureau, a private organisation established by the advertising industry to administer advertising standards.

- 5.20 In its submission, the Roads and Traffic Authority of New South Wales argued the code had not been effective in controlling advertising content, a view supported by the AAA and a number of witnesses appearing before the Committee. This was due primarily to the weak nature of the code and weak enforcement by the ASB.¹¹
- 5.21 Creative devices—motor sport, fantasy, humour and self-evident exaggeration—have been used by advertisers and the ASB to excuse virtually any content in advertisements regardless of the code.
- 5.22 It is the view of the New South Wales Government that the voluntary code should be replaced by a mandatory code that would incorporate tougher controls. It might also be appropriate to have advertisements assessed prior to release.¹² The AAA also proposed investigating more effective arrangements.¹³
- 5.23 Mr Scruby argued that ‘the ASB should be disbanded unless, very soon, someone is put in there who will actually enforce their code’. He suggested replacing the chairman of the ASB with a retired judge, and urged that vehicle advertisements be vetted before being released.¹⁴
- 5.24 On the other hand, Mr Peter Sturrock, Chief Executive of the FCAI, argued that the code was effective, and that while there might be some need to further refine the process, it was fundamentally working well.¹⁵
- 5.25 The Committee notes that not all advertising agencies and vehicle manufacturers are complying with the voluntary code of practice. It believes that the ASB should work with the FCAI to implement periodic reviews of the code to ensure improved standards of compliance. The Committee believes that the images portrayed in vehicle advertisements should reflect real life driving conditions and experiences, within the framework of national regulations. Fantasy and escapist images do not justify non-compliance.

11 RTA, Submission no. 35; AAA, Submission no. 18, pp. 22; *Transcript of Evidence*, pp. 5, 23, 29, 69; Mr Paul Rebula, Submission no. 8, p. 2.

12 RTA, Submission no. 35.

13 AAA, Submission no. 18, p. 22.

14 *Transcript of Evidence*, pp. 74–5.

15 *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 85.

Recommendation 12

- 5.26 **The Committee recommends that the Australian Government ask the Advertising Standards Board and the Federal Chamber of Automotive Industries to review the voluntary code of practice with a view to a more rigorous compliance.**

Driver Training

- 5.27 Another critical facet of road safety affecting driver attitude and performance is driver training.
- 5.28 In its submission, the National Motorists Association of Australia noted that young and inexperienced drivers are overrepresented in road fatalities and recommended that ‘all drivers be required to satisfactorily complete a defensive driving course with an accredited training organisation before progressing beyond (red) P-plates ... The level of training required should be at least equivalent to the successful training provided for motorbike riders’.¹⁶
- 5.29 A similar point was made by the Ulysses Club in its submission to the inquiry. Comparing the standards of training for motorcycle riders and car drivers, it stated:

...motorcyclists have to undergo a rigorous training and testing program in order to get their motorcycle license. Car drivers, on the other hand, can be fully trained by their parents, friends or other members of the family. This method of testing is far below the competence level required to obtain a motorcycle license.

Since the implementation of compulsory motorcycle training the fatality rate of motorcyclists, especially those in the 17 to 29 year age range has plummeted. Motorcyclists in their first year of riding are only permitted to ride machines that are under 250cc in capacity or are under a certain power to rate ratio, depending on which State one is a resident of.

This system obviously works with the rider graduating to a more powerful bike if they want to, after a year at a lower power level. Car drivers, on the other hand, can go straight to a V8 or ‘grey

16 National Motorists Association of Australia (NMAA), Submission no. 5.

import' turbo and be permitted to carry as many passengers as they like, often with dire, well publicized consequences.

5.30 The submission recommended that 'a system similar to the current motorcycle system be investigated so that new drivers would be restricted to lower powered vehicles'.¹⁷

5.31 The Hon. Rick Colless MLC, a member of the New South Wales STAYSAFE Committee supported the idea of structured driver training under expert instructors but emphasised the need for psychological as well as technical training:

I think that something that has to be built into that training program is giving kids the right psychological training to become good drivers, rather than just giving them the expert skills so that they go out thinking that they are good drivers when they still do not necessarily have on-road experience.¹⁸

5.32 This point was elaborated upon in the submission from the AAA. Research into driver training had shown that 'beyond imparting basic car control and road law knowledge skills', driver training programs for learners and pre-learners contributed little to 'post-licence reductions in casualty crashes or traffic violations'. Moreover, there was also little evidence that post licence training reduced risk:

Such training often leads to an increase in confidence and optimism bias (i.e. where novices can believe that they are more skilful than they actually are) and sometimes an increase in crash risk for novices, particularly young males.¹⁹

5.33 The AAA argued instead that there was 'a need to move driver training and education beyond vehicle manoeuvring knowledge and skill, and towards a greater understanding of risks, risk reduction and self-awareness'. It cited the example of driver training programs in Europe:

A driver development program that focuses on higher order skills has been undertaken for new drivers in Finland. This program consists of three parts: a one-to-one in car feedback component; an off-road experiential component to allow insight into personal skills and weaknesses; and a facilitated group discussion. An evaluation of this compulsory program has shown significant

17 Ulysses Club Incorporated, Submission no. 17, p. 5.

18 *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 42.

19 AAA, Submission no. 18, p. 40.

crash reductions, particularly for young male drivers. Although there has been some criticism of the Finnish program's evaluation methodology, this program stands out as one worth monitoring and perhaps replicating in Australia as a potential risk reduction initiative for novice drivers.

Another program that targets optimism bias, over-confidence and attitudinal or motivational factors that influence driving behaviour is "insight" training. The Swedish Insight Program has been subject to ongoing experimentation and any evaluation of this program is worth monitoring as it is soundly based from a theoretical perspective.

- 5.34 The AAA noted that in reviewing these programs it was important to see whether such approaches would work in Australia. 'This underscores the need for the trial or piloting of potentially useful programs in Australia.'²⁰
- 5.35 The Committee concurs with the view that a more comprehensive and structured system of driver training is required, both to give drivers the skills and knowledge required to operate a vehicle safely, but also to inculcate road safe attitudes and responses. It is clear to the Committee that road safety is as much about state of mind as about technical skill. In this vein, the Committee notes the work of Dr Sarah Redshaw from the Centre for Cultural Research at the University of Western Sydney (see Chapter 7). The Committee also notes that the matter of driver training has been referred to the ATC and is currently under investigation.
- 5.36 The Committee believes that training models from Europe which address driver training holistically should be investigated and adopted here. The Committee also supports the idea of graduated licensing, where novice drivers are limited to lower powered vehicles until they have gained a degree of driving experience, but notes the difficulty in implementing such a requirement.
- 5.37 Retesting of drivers is also regarded as an important innovation. Several submissions urged the introduction of periodic retesting for all drivers, about every ten years, to ensure ongoing competency and familiarity with road laws. The NMAA also argued for more frequent testing of older drivers, including tests of medical fitness.²¹

20 AAA, Submission no. 18, p. 41.

21 Mr Mark Cove, Submission no. 19; NMAA, Submission no. 5.

- 5.38 In his submission, Mr Paul Rebula suggested written tests upon license renewal. The tests would not be supervised and would be completed in the driver's own time. The purpose would be to enhance familiarity with road rules.²²
- 5.39 The Committee supports the periodic retesting of drivers as a necessary means to ensure ongoing familiarity with changing road rules and competence in handling vehicles. It believes a system of periodic retesting should be standard throughout Australia. Similarly, the Committee believes that standards of driver testing must keep pace with standards of driver training, and that driver testing must accurately reflect real road conditions. There is little point testing drivers under idealised conditions at low speeds when they are required to drive proficiently at much higher speeds in real traffic conditions.²³

Licensing

- 5.40 The evidence presented to the Committee raised a number of issues with regard to licensing.
- 5.41 In its submission, the South Australian Government urged the development of uniform training and licensing system across all States and Territories.²⁴ In his evidence before the Committee, Mr Allan from the South Australian Department of Transport and Urban Planning, said:
- At the moment, with the best will in the world, there are a heap of different systems in different states. While that may not be the end of the world, perhaps there are some advantages in having some consistency between jurisdictions.²⁵
- 5.42 In its submission, the AAA urged uniform laws requiring the carriage of licences at all times. Such a requirement was an essential tool for law enforcement, especially in dealing with unlicensed drivers and recidivist offenders who had special conditions imposed upon their licenses.²⁶

22 Mr Paul Rebula, Submission no. 8, p. 2.

23 Jeff McDougall, 'Certificate IV: The Road Ahead for Driver Trainers and Licensing Authorities', in Australasian College of Road Safety, 2004 Year Book, *Road Safety Towards 2010*, pp. 17–19.

24 South Australian Government, Submission no. 32.

25 *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 33.

26 AAA, Submission no. 18, p. 21.

- 5.43 With regard to younger drivers, the consensus of opinion favours a system of graduated licensing. In his evidence before the Committee, Mr Allan spoke of the South Australian experience with licensing:

We have introduced some changes to the licensing scheme for young drivers. We have made the learner's test a bit harder and put in a few hurdles for P-platers. It would be fair to say that there will be some other changes to the licensing scheme.²⁷

- 5.44 Several submissions advocated special licenses for four wheel drives and caravans. In his submission, Mr Rebula advocated special license endorsements for four wheel drives as one means to curb their proliferation:

This could be introduced to discourage unnecessary use, and ensure drivers understood and could competently handle 4WD vehicles in all conditions. The standard car (2WD) test would be extended to include 'off-road' driving. People who successfully completed the test would have their license endorsed accordingly and be allowed to drive a 4WD in addition to a standard car. Existing licence holders would also need this endorsement, but could wait until their licence was due for renewal.²⁸

- 5.45 An experienced truck driver, Mr Hannifey alerted the Committee to the anomaly that any car driver could, without any special training, convert their car into an articulated vehicle simply by attaching a caravan. He suggested that at the very least caravan owners should be given a video 'with half an hour on how to load your van, how weight affects it and a tag bit on the end about sharing the road with trucks, because some people are driving vehicles the same size as a semitrailer and there are no licensing requirements for that'.²⁹

- 5.46 The same point was made by Mr Gardiner in his submission to the inquiry,³⁰ and the point is taken by the Committee that it is anomalous to require truck drivers to possess special licenses if other large articulated vehicles—cars with caravans—do not require them.

27 *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 32.

28 Mr Paul Rebula, Submission no. 8, p. 2.

29 *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 93; Mr Rod Hannifey, Submission no. 14.

30 Mr Douglas Gardiner, Submission no. 33, p. 2.

- 5.47 The Committee supports a national uniform licensing system. It also endorses graduated licensing as a way of ensuring that drivers gain experience of vehicle use and road conditions before attaining the privileges of a full licence. It also advocates special licences for different vehicles, such as four wheel drives and caravans. Driving conditions in these vehicles are sufficiently different from those in standard cars to warrant such an approach.

Enforcement

- 5.48 The Committee believes law enforcement is the reverse side of the coin to education and driver training, and an essential element of the road safety matrix. Education and enforcement go hand in hand in creating a safer road environment.
- 5.49 In its submission, the Government of Western Australia stated:
- Effective enforcement is an essential factor along with coordinated education in encouraging and maintaining safer road use behaviour. An investigation of Crash Outcomes in Western Australia in 2001 ... showed that the increasing level and effectiveness of enforcement in the following areas was likely to be associated with improvements in safety:
- RBT activity focusing on testing as many drivers as possible;
 - Speed camera activity focusing on detecting as many speeders as possible;
 - General speed enforcement focusing on detecting speeders; and
 - Red light camera operations.³¹
- 5.50 The Committee received evidence, however, that road law enforcement was both inconsistent in response to unlawful behaviour and, as yet, unable to address the problem of recidivism.
- 5.51 In its submission, the Australian Trucking Association argued that there ‘is a chronic shortage of enforcement resources, especially in regional areas of Australia’.³² This is something the Committee believes should be addressed.

31 Government of Western Australia, Submission no. 37, p. 12.

32 Australian Trucking Association, Submission no. 26, p. 4.

- 5.52 In his evidence before the Committee, Mr Scruby spoke forcefully of the anomalies in the current system of penalties:

If you stop in the middle of George Street in a bus lane it is \$220, three demerit points and \$130 tow away, so put it up on the footpath and it is \$68 and you can stay there all day. Incidentally, for a bit of fun, the parking in most inner-city car parks in the CBD is \$68 a day, so where will you park? And why not just deliver the Coca-Cola at the bus stop? People say, 'Where else is he going to park?' Where else are the pedestrians going to get on and off the bus? The penalty is still \$90 and there are no demerit points.³³

- 5.53 He believed the most effective and equitable penalty for road traffic infringements was the demerit points system:

Demerit points are the most important tool in road safety. They are a socially equitable tool. They show whether or not a person is a bad driver. It is not about dollars. The rich can afford dollars.³⁴

- 5.54 In his evidence before the Committee, Mr Cameron spoke of the success of the use of double demerit points in Western Australia:

The double demerits initiative was introduced in Western Australia in 2002. It has certainly worked to enhance our enforcement and has enjoyed very strong community support. We have extended a trial to June 2004 to determine if there will be any wear-out effect. The pleasing thing when we analysed a wide range of data was that the different data sources showed that drivers reported driving more safely at those times. They told us they were going to drive safely, and they did drive more safely. Police increased the amount of enforcement activity, yet their infringement rate per enforcement hour was down. Our total reported crashes, including serious and fatal, were also down in comparison to reported crashes in the similar periods the year before. So it is being continued on a trial basis. It only focuses on speeding offences, restraints and alcohol offences where you incur demerit points.³⁵

33 *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 71.

34 *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 73.

35 *Transcript of Evidence*, pp. 15–16.

- 5.55 Mr Scruby, however, argued for even stricter enforcement measures for dangerous behaviour and recidivism. Drink drivers should suffer an automatic loss of licence, while unlicensed drivers should have their vehicles confiscated. He told the Committee:

Unlicensed drivers are estimated to be as high as 12 per cent. We must consider the New Zealand system of confiscation of vehicles. There has been a 40 per cent reduction in New Zealand in unlicensed driving. There is no other way to get the recalcitrant driver off the road than to take his or her vehicle.³⁶

- 5.56 The Committee supports the system of demerit points for unlawful behaviour, and believes such penalties should be adopted uniformly across Australia. The logical conclusion of such a system, however, is that serious or repeated infringement will result in loss of licence.
- 5.57 The Committee believes that the holding of a licence should be conditional on demonstrating a capacity and willingness to abide by road laws, and that loss of licence should follow automatically upon repeated or serious failure to abide by those laws. It logically follows, therefore, that those persons who continue to drive unlicensed should receive punishment appropriate to what constitutes an absolute contempt for lawful authority, their own safety and the safety of others.

Recommendation 13

- 5.58 **The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, through the Australian Transport Council, urge the development of a uniform licensing system across Australia, to incorporate:**
- **graduated licences for novice drivers;**
 - **special licenses for four wheel drive vehicles and caravans;**
 - **the use of demerit points to address all major traffic infringements; and**
 - **the suspension or loss of licences to address serious or repeated infringements.**

36 *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 74.

Driver impairment and distraction

Managing Fatigue

- 5.59 The Committee's interest in the question of fatigue is one of long standing. In October 2000, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications, Transport and the Arts tabled its report, *Beyond the Midnight Oil: An inquiry into managing fatigue in transport*. While examining the problem of operator fatigue across the spectrum of transport industries, this landmark report found that 'in terms of cost and human impact the road transport sector constituted the major area for fatigue'.³⁷
- 5.60 This report made a number of recommendations that have been addressed at a policy level by the Third Heavy Vehicle Reform Package, including the NRTC Fatigue Reform and Compliance and Enforcement Reform. Despite this, the evidence presented to the Committee reveals that fatigue in the road transport industry remains a live issue, and that much more work needs to be done.
- 5.61 The problem of fatigue in the road transport sector is very much a matter of management and regulation, the details of which are looked at more closely in Chapter 7. The broader issue of driver fatigue is a much more intractable problem.
- 5.62 Driver fatigue is a major cause of road accidents, but effective remedies are hard to find.³⁸ Most of the evidence received by the Committee pointed to the need to alert the public to the dangers of fatigue, and to provide more rest stops, especially for trucks.
- 5.63 The Committee is of the view that at this stage the best course for fatigue management is to raise public awareness while promoting road environment measures proven to prevent or reduce the impact of run-off-road accidents (see Chapter 4).

37 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications, Transport and the Arts (HORSCCTA), *Beyond the Midnight Oil: An inquiry into managing fatigue in transport*, Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, October 2000, p. viii.

38 *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 4.

Drugs and Alcohol

- 5.64 Drugs and alcohol remain a significant factor in the road toll. In its submission, the Queensland Government reported that in 2002 alcohol contributed to 30 per cent of fatality crashes and 19 per cent of serious injury crashes in Queensland. It is estimated that in 2001 approximately 40 per cent of people killed in fatal crashes had drugs present in their system.³⁹
- 5.65 In its submission, the Western Australian Government noted that about 25 per cent of drivers killed had a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) above .05 per cent.⁴⁰
- 5.66 Queensland research has shown that:
- one in ten motorists admit driving under the influence of alcohol;
 - most did so because they were under the .05 BAC;
 - one in seven motorists admitted to driving when drunk when they did not have far to travel;
 - 15 per cent of motorists admitted driving under the influence of recreational drugs; and
 - 13 per cent of motorists said they would continue driving even if their doctor advised them that their medication would affect driving.⁴¹
- 5.67 Drugs and alcohol remain a problem in Victoria. During 2002, there was a substantial increase in the number of fatalities linked to drink driving, particularly in rural areas. There has also been a substantial increase in drug impaired driving. Mr Howard of VicRoads stated that in 2002 ‘some 27 per cent of driver fatalities had a trace, to some degree, of an illegal psychotropic drug in their bloodstream. That is a fairly sobering statistic’.
- 5.68 The increased fatality rate was met by an increased enforcement effort and tougher penalties, including the introduction of alcohol interlocks for repeat drink-drivers and high-level first offenders. There are now some forty of these in place. Legislation has also been passed providing for the random testing of drivers for use of cannabis and methamphetamine. It is

39 Government of Queensland, Submission no. 31, p. 9.

40 Government of Western Australia, Submission no. 37, p. 10.

41 Government of Queensland, Submission no. 31, p. 9.

expected that all these measures will have some impact upon the road toll.⁴²

- 5.69 In its submission, the AAA argued that alcohol abuse be treated as a public health issue, not simply as a road safety problem, and that the most effective remedies were prevention, treatment and rehabilitation of the underlying problem.⁴³
- 5.70 With this view, the Committee is in full accord. However, there is also a need to focus on more immediate remedies. The Committee supports tougher penalties for motorists found driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol, including immediate loss of licence for serious or repeat offenders, and the use of alcohol ignition interlocks for all repeat alcohol offenders.
- 5.71 The Committee also supports the Victorian approach to drugs outlined in 5.69. This is a critical area of reform. Committee believes that such programs should be coordinated on a national level to maximise their impact.

Recommendation 14

- 5.72 **The Committee recommends that the Australian Government request the Australian Transport Council establish a task force to coordinate the implementation of drug and alcohol road safety strategies, with a view to introducing:**
- **uniform penalties for drug and alcohol infringements;**
 - **tougher penalties for alcohol related infringements; and**
 - **a national approach to detecting and dealing with motorists driving under the influence of drugs.**

42 *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 8; Powerpoint presentation by Mr Howard, VicRoads, Exhibit no. 4.

43 AAA, Submission no. 18, p. 21.

Audio-visual entertainment devices

- 5.73 The committee is concerned at the growing use of distracting entertainment devices by drivers. It considers that video / DVD players should not be visible to drivers while they are driving. The committee has some similar concerns about drivers who become distracted when changing CDs or cassettes but recognises that the use of these devices is more difficult to control without unduly infringing drivers' personal freedom.

Recommendation 15

- 5.74 **The committee recommends that the Australian Transport Safety Bureau review the potential for video devices to cause driver distraction and propose measures to minimise the impact of such devices on driver concentration.**