

**THE LEGISLATIVE SELECT COMMITTEE ON ROAD SAFETY MET AT THE  
NEW SOUTH WALES PARLIAMENT HOUSE, MACQUARIE STREET, SYDNEY,  
ON TUESDAY 3 FEBRUARY 2009.**

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THE COMMITTEE MET WITH **Ms ANNE MORPHETT**, SENIOR POLICY ADVISER,  
ROAD SAFETY, NRMA, SYDNEY.

**CHAIR** (Mr Wing) - Welcome, Anne. Would you please give us an outline of your role and what is happening in road safety? We had some discussions with members of the road safety office yesterday afternoon. Could you tell us some of the main features and any innovations of recent time that may be of help to us in making recommendations about what decisions should be made in Tasmania about road safety?

**Ms MORPHETT** - Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to the committee. I should clarify at this point that, unlike some of the other motoring clubs in New South Wales, NRMA Motoring and Services has no affiliation with NRMA Insurance. We are separate companies, so we have no involvement at all in insurance.

My role within NRMA as a senior policy adviser is to be involved in research in all areas of road safety. We cover everything from child restraints, children, pedestrians, motorcyclists, older drivers, younger drivers and everything in between. In the position that I hold I work closely with our vehicle specialists. I work primarily around human behaviour but I work very closely with the people who work around the safer vehicles. We cover safer vehicles, safer roads and safer road users, broadly. I work closely in the Policy and Government Relations sections with transport economics and traffic engineers, who are also on our team.

NRMA has over 85 years' involvement in road safety and roads in New South Wales. The core part of our business, apart from roadside assistance, as with the other clubs, is involved in road safety. For instance, you met with the Centre for Road Safety at the RTA; we work with the RTA. Our role is as advocates, but we have very tight partnerships with groups like the Centre for Road Safety, the Motor Accident Authority and various universities and also groups such as Kidsafe, so both from a non-government and a government point of view, and some community bodies as well.

**Ms FORREST** - Can I ask how you are funded?

**Ms MORPHETT** - Our members.

**Ms FORREST** - You members fund you.

**CHAIR** - The same as the Royal Automobile Clubs?

**Ms MORPHETT** - Yes. They get additional support, obviously, and income from their insurance arm which we don't have, so ours is purely member-based.

**Mr DEAN** - What share of registered vehicle owners would you have as members of the NRMA?

**Ms MORPHETT** - We have 2.3 million members, and in more than 85 per cent of households in New South Wales there is a member.

**Ms FORREST** - Do you have family memberships as well?

**Ms MORPHETT** - Sorry, I don't work in membership, but yes, there are business members that have small fleets, and then there are individual members. You might get two or three memberships per household because it's generally per vehicle.

**Mr HARRISS** - That was the same question, but I have another one flowing from that - just when the association was formed. It must be years and years ago to have built up that kind of credibility.

**Ms MORPHETT** - The early 1920s. It is over 85 years, I know.

**CHAIR** - It's not really relevant to road safety, I suppose, but I am wondering why the name of your organisation is NRMA whilst in most, if not all, other States the equivalent body is RA then whatever initial of the State is. RACQ, RACV, RACT, and so on.

**Ms MORPHETT** - It stands for National Roads and Motorists' Association.

**CHAIR** - Yes, I understand that, but there seems to be some uniformity in the naming of equivalent organisations in other States, but yours is different. Do you know the history of that? It doesn't matter if you don't.

**Ms MORPHETT** - I think it goes back to the fact that there is also a Royal Automobile Association.

**CHAIR** - Oh, there is?

**Ms MORPHETT** - Yes. One was formed before the other and it was to distinguish the name, then some of the other clubs aren't as old as NRMA. So there were changes in where they were based.

**CHAIR** - And is there total reciprocity between the two?

**Ms MORPHETT** - I don't know. Between the clubs there are, in all the clubs you have reciprocal rights for roadside assistance, and you show your card and save, so there are member discounts around Australia. That is built into the arrangement. Then the AAA is the peak body, so all the different clubs contribute based on their membership to form the AAA which is based in Canberra.

**CHAIR** - Yes. We are meeting with them in Canberra. Yes, thank you for that.

**Ms FORREST** - Just on the national body, do you actually have members from outside New South Wales, or just New South Wales?

**Ms MORPHETT** - No, that's the awkward bit. We are called the National Roads and Motorists' Association, but we only have membership within the ACT and New South Wales.

**Ms FORREST** - I thought that was the case, but it was to clarify.

**Ms MORPHETT** - Yes. The name is misleading, but -

**Ms FORREST** - It's been around for a long time.

**Ms MORPHETT** - Yes, it's a historical anomaly.

**CHAIR** - Good Now, if you would like to proceed with your presentation.

**Ms MORPHETT** - Just to talk a little bit more about the role. Research is a very important part of what we do and we use it as a basis for our policies and education material, our media campaigns and generally all our internal and external communications. So the research aspect of NRMA is substantially why we are well respected and trusted by other stakeholders as well as the community and our membership, because we have been involved in research since our inception.

It also ensures that we stay on top of all the latest developments. That is incredibly important because of the cost of research, some of which we do internally, some we might engage consultants to work with us. We develop the briefs but at other times we will work with other agencies where we have identified a road safety problem and then we will look at which are the most appropriate bodies to in fact pool resources, both staff as well as financial contributions, to develop the research. That is what we have done in the case ANCAP, the used car safety ratings, where there are something like 17 stakeholders in ANCAP now.

We certainly do fund research, some of which goes over a number of years. For instance, I know that young drivers is an issue at an international and certainly at a national level so we have been a contributor to the DRIVE study which was conducted by the George Institute. That involves primarily the RTA, NRMA as funders, or funders with in-kind support. So that is the largest study of P-plate drivers in the southern hemisphere.

**Ms FORREST** - What were you looking at with those drivers?

**Ms MORPHETT** - Everything. I am waiting for the final report from the George Institute because it has gone on for more than four years. It was a core group from when the graduated licensing scheme was changing, so they wanted to see if there was going to be a difference. So it is a very detailed survey of those young drivers who were willing to participate and have their driving history tracked by the RTA to look at traffic infringements, injuries and fatalities for that participating group. So that is the role of the RTA; they were providing that support. It looked at mental health; driving experience; who taught you to drive; how many hours with parent, friend or guardian or how much with a professional driving school; there were some drug and alcohol questions; schooling; gender; residence and cultural background.

**Ms FORREST** - Did it look at the type of car they were driving or not?

**Ms MORPHETT** - No. I think in the end that was because they had changed cars so many times at that period. The motoring clubs are involved in another piece of research that was looking at the injuries that were sustained by people in crashes and what kind of rating that was and the vehicles involved.

Young drivers are probably where a large part of my time and investment from the company goes because in New South Wales it has been an area with a particularly high profile. We have had very public campaigns, changes to the graduated licensing scheme and we have some quite different licensing regulations compared to other States.

**Ms FORREST** - Do you know how many participants were in the study group?

**Ms MORPHETT** - There were 20 000 at the start of that study and then they were tracking them over that time. Then there was a follow-up survey with only a percentage of that 20 000.

**Ms FORREST** - Do you know why there was a considerable drop-off?

**Ms MORPHETT** - Partly in tracking because at that age young people move. They change phone numbers, e-mail addresses -

**Ms FORREST** - Just the problem of tracking them?

**Ms MORPHETT** - And then a willingness to participate, so we were trying to interest them. That was costly because they had some incentives initially to do that.

**Ms FORREST** - There are limiting factors, then. The ones who might have disappeared from the system are the ones whom you would like to know more about, who perhaps weren't really compliant.

**Ms MORPHETT** - No, I don't think that was the case. I think it is often such a period of change for people. They don't care so much about changing their phone numbers and e-mail addresses as probably people who are older and who find it more convenient not to change those things.

It has also been noticed at a national level by other groups that although all States have a problem with younger drivers in terms of being over-represented in serious injury and fatalities, there have also been extensive media campaigns waged by the press. Unfortunately, from a serious research position, it has been misleading to the public about the main causes of crashes and better ways of addressing the road safety problem with young drivers.

**CHAIR** - When you say 'media campaigns', are they organised in conjunction with road safety authorities or have they just taken it up to sensationalise the situation?

**Ms MORPHETT** - It is difficult because there has been some good out of the campaigns that have been waged. One of the State newspapers did sensationalise high-speed crashes, which just reinforced a myth that most young people are killed in high-speed crashes,

which is not the case. There were a couple of tragic crashes, including a multiple fatality, that changed the way in which young people were seen as drivers and that was misleading. There was also the unfortunate fact that it took the debate away to being a knee-jerk reaction from letting us look at what the data is telling us and looking at better ways of addressing that problem. What it did do at least was draw attention to the fact that this was a serious issue for communities, families and for the individuals concerned and that we needed to put resources and attention into the matter.

**CHAIR** - When you speak of newspaper campaigns, do you mean that they set about to help with road safety rather than get news value out of the situation? Do they have a program of certain matters that they targeted together or are the different areas of the media operating differently? I am not quite sure what the campaign was.

**Ms MORPHETT** - It was referred to often as a campaign. It was the *Daily Telegraph* and it was front-page stories of horrific crashes. Unfortunately at the time there were a number of horrific crashes in one 18-month period - an anomaly compared to the improving road safety gains in that age bracket. In fact the RTA data shows that there is a trend going down. There was a period of 18 months where a couple of single-vehicle crashes had multiple fatalities. If you have four or five people killed in one crash that changes the annual statistics for that group, so it was an anomaly and it was awful but it was not actually an accurate pattern of what was happening for that age group. In fact many of the other serious injury and fatality crashes were not at 120 kph or more. They happen in the 60 to 80 kph range. Unfortunately, those headlines mislead the public. Then they ran ongoing stories saying, 'We want to see things changed'. They put pressure on the parliament as well. Ministers will become involved because they feel under pressure. Unfortunately that is when sometimes the real problems are not necessarily addressed. In New South Wales it meant that there were changes to the licensing system and we did not support a lot of the changes to the licensing system. We supported some.

**Mr HARRISS** - Are there any chief points among those that were particularly unsavoury to your association and yet this public/media pressure forced the hand of the Government?

**Ms MORPHETT** - There was a large debate; we were part of a panel that the Government convened and we raised our concerns. We presented the evidence that we had. Particularly of concern were peer-passenger restrictions. I can supply the evidence that we provided to the New South Wales panel if you would like. That looked at what was different between the New South Wales situation and, for instance, New Zealand or the US and Canada. It was hotly debated. We had concerns because, although peer passengers are at times a distraction to a young driver, they are the group that we have spent decades educating about the risks of alcohol. We know that there are a lot of designated drivers who take it in turns, whether it is drugs or alcohol, and young people have become the best demographic group at not drinking and driving. That is borne out by the statistics. Our problem is that we do not measure how many people get home safely and yet I know from the focus groups and surveys that we have run and anecdotally how many people tell you that they are happy their kids got home safely because they are being responsible. We had a concern that if we now stop young people having the ability to carry more than one passenger of their age that would mean more cars on the road, which is the case, and also where we may be gaining in saving lives around alcohol we are now exposing them to greater risks. That one of our key concerns.

The other was very practical. There is a shortage of public transport in New South Wales, especially in the outer areas of Sydney, Wollongong and the Hunter Valley. We know that young people need their cars, not just for socialising, which is a valid reason to use your vehicle, but also for study and work. We had representations from young people and parents saying that it would create stress for their family if their sons and daughters were unable to drive. Our country members were also concerned. At this point fuel has gone down but fuel prices have been particularly high in the last couple of years, and it has made a difference, particularly farming families who pick up friends on the way into town, whether to go to school, university, soccer, church or whatever. Young people need their vehicles and this law it was placing stress on the families.

Also, sometimes young people can be a good influence. We all know that they often race one another, but also at times they calm one another. We know that there are gender differences. That was one of the key things that we were concerned about.

**Mr HARRISS** - Anne, following the introduction of the changes, has the association undertaken any post-change analysis on the effect of what happened?

**Ms ELLIOTT** - There was a commitment from the RTA to do an analysis afterwards. That has not happened. It has been about 18 months since the changes and we are asking for that to be reviewed. One of the other participating groups in the panel was the Commissioner for Children and Young People who gave evidence to the panel. One of the things that they have been reviewing is the implication of that now that the implementation has gone forward.

Concerns were also raised by the Labor Council because of the number of young people in part-time work through late high school and certainly university. It was going to have an effect on their getting home safely. One of the other concerns was that a lot of young people take their car to get home safely, whether from work or social or educational areas because it is unsafe on public transport, particularly for a young woman on a train.

The other issue that has been very public in Victoria is a knee-jerk reaction after particular crashes and looking at vehicle restrictions. In New South Wales it was not about power-to-weight ratio, it was the engine capacity. At first there was a list about 80 pages long of vehicles that were to be banned. We were concerned because we participate with the RTA and all the other stakeholders in the ANCAP research and the used car safety rating research. We know that in the first two years of driving drivers are most at risk of being involved in a crash because experience is what makes a difference to young people. If you are going to be involved in a crash, whether it is your fault or someone else's, we want you to be in the safest possible vehicle. At the time, and still, a lot of the cars were six-cylinder family cars such as Commodores and Falcons. They had a higher safety rating than a lot of the cars that young people were driving; the smaller, four-cylinder vehicles tended to be older and certainly less safe. They did not have electronic stability control, seatbelt pretensioners or air bags. Our line has always been to parents, with the value of a car maybe I will just put them in the older car because if something happens it is not going to cost us much, but in fact it is the cost of the son and daughter's life, and they should be in the safest vehicle. The best car that you have and the greatest safety features is what we would encourage parents to agree to. Quite a lot of the cars that appeared on the banned list were ones that had better safety features and so there was a debate about that. Young people do not need to be in super turbo-charged

vehicles but they do need to be in safe cars and there was no actual evidence to say that young people are involved in more crashes in the other cars. That is where the evidence should have been that drove the debate rather than a headline.

**Ms FORREST** - There is another disincentive there, too, for parents who struggle and young people who are trying to buy a vehicle. To buy comprehensive insurance is hugely expensive and so if you buy a good car and do not insure except for third party and if there is a crash your money is gone, basically, but to buy a good car without comprehensively insuring it is not a particularly good idea in most people's minds so you have that double whammy in a way, haven't you?

**Ms MORPHETT** - It is difficult because parents pay a higher levy when they have someone under 25 driving their vehicle.

**Ms FORREST** - Unless they are a learner.

**Ms MORPHETT** - Learners are the safest group on the road because they have the supervising driver so it is not an issue when they are a learner but once they are on their Ps and they are solo driving it does become a problem.

**Mr DEAN** - Is your group of the view that many parents out there do not really look at the issue of the safety of the vehicle that their children are driving and that there should be more promotion of it and that more emphasis should be placed on vehicle safety than has been?

**Ms MORPHETT** - Yes, certainly, and that is where I would work with our vehicle safety people from all the clubs and our communication officers as well because we know that that fact is not well known and that a lot of people do not necessarily buy their cars because of their safety features, so we talk up safety features as much as possible. We talk about it simply so that they understand, they are not put up in automotive technospeak, so that they understand lives are saved and injuries are reduced by the number of air bags that you have. You cannot have too many air bags and correctly putting on your seatbelt makes a difference. Putting your child in the rear seat makes a difference and using a child restraint and a booster seat makes a difference.

**Ms FORREST** - With the seating position in the vehicle, some of these young people have a seat lying back, my son being one of them. I was told that with the correct driving positions they actually have control and with arms slightly bent you have room to move if you need to and things like that. A lot of parents probably do not even know that either but simple things like that could make a difference for young people if they were taught to sit properly in the car.

**Ms MORPHETT** - I am currently running a lot of material. We developed fact sheets and one called 'The driver's seat' was to try to explain to people why you have your seat up and that your head restraint is not a neck rest, that having it at the correct position reduces the risk of neck and upper-back injuries. The cool seating, the way that a lot of the young people want their car, is a risk. It is probably easier to educate the parents and get them to try to instil it because they are the first driving instructor that a young person has because they are the role model. Often with the statements that are seen in the media we talk about that. We talk about the parents being the key role model. They do not become

a driving instructor when their son or daughter turns 16, it is from when they are in the child restraint and they are observing all their behaviour. They are a sponge and soak up what you do, what you say and how you drive and that is one of the key messages we have.

Trying to keep road safety communications simple is really important. Unfortunately, road safety is often seen as being boring and it sounds as if you are the beast because it is always 'No, no, no' and 'Don't, don't, don't' rather than engaging people. So that is an area in which we have been trying to work with our members and other groups, getting communications to a point of interest, getting them into the media in a way that is interesting - selling a story that makes people understand that this is interesting and can make a difference. I guess with young people one of the partnerships that we have developed - and it falls into that innovation that was mentioned at the beginning - a number of years ago we were approached to work with Westmead Hospital's trauma unit. A lot of the trauma cases in New South Wales are road crashes, motorcycles, drivers and trucks. They were sick of just trying to save lives; they wanted to be involved in education and prevention. They worked with us and all the other key stakeholders - police, ambulance service, the CareFlight helicopter - to provide a youth and road trauma forum. Last year we saw about 12 000 students over three days. We do a crash re-creation. It is the largest of its kind in Australia.

**Ms FORREST** - What age groups?

**Ms MORPHETT** - Years 10, 11 and 12. It is right when they are on Ls and Ps. It is targeted in a way that engages with them. The crash scenario is theatrical in the sense that it is very real. All the services involved - police, fire brigade, ambulance, crash investigators from the police unit - are real. In the scenario they are doing what they do when they attend a crash. They cut the vehicle open. There is a CareFlight doctor who explains what is happening in the scenario, the role of each of the emergency services.

**Ms FORREST** - Do you use actors in the vehicles?

**Ms MORPHETT** - There are young people who are actors in the vehicle, but it is very real. After that we do stopping-distance tests on an arena floor, which is more realistic than the ads on TV. We have found young people see that because they know at the cinema and on TV you can fake anything. When they see a car stopping and braking in front of them - you put down a witch's hat and say, 'Wet or dry, where is this car going to stop when it is doing 50 kph?' and they get an idea about braking distance, stopping distance, reaction time. These are messages that are really important for all drivers, but particularly that age group.

**Ms FORREST** - You only show them? You don't get them to do it?

**Ms MORPHETT** - No, we only show them.

**CHAIR** - Is Rotary International involved in that? They have a similar scheme as far as stopping distance is concerned.

**Ms MORPHETT** - Some of the groups do that, where there is a smaller group. We provide resources and at times have helped fund some of the rider groups such as U-Turn the

Wheel. There is a range of different groups working in the community in partnership so we have been involved in those.

This one is much larger. It is held out at the Olympic site. Because they are young adults and we are trusting them in cars we need to trust them to take themselves around the arena and visit whatever stall they are interested in. They can talk to the trauma doctors about what they do; they can learn some basic first aid that makes a difference at the scene of a crash. We are attempting to do some research with that group. You can't pin down whether there is one thing that makes a difference to these crash outcomes. It is the education; the role model of the parent; the quality of the driving instruction they are getting, whether it is the parent or a professional; the messages that are being reinforced by the community; visible police presence, which is one of the key things that we are concerned about. On that point I would say technology is really good and speed cameras have a place, but we very strongly believe that greater police presence makes a difference. There is research to back that up, that it makes a difference to all road users not just the high-risk group of young drivers.

**Ms FORREST** - Anne, when you said at the beginning that you do everything pretty much based on evidence and research you have conducted, what are the main factors we should be focusing on and what is the NRMA's position on things such as open road speed and rural and urban speed, alcohol levels, fatigue, mobile phones and those sorts of things? These are things we constantly hear are the major factors in crashes.

**Ms MORPHETT** - We lobbied to have a zero limit for L and P-plate drivers in New South Wales. It used to be 0.02 and we said that was sending the wrong message. It should be none because measuring blood alcohol, other than with an accredited device, is misleading. Everyone metabolises alcohol at a different rate so the old science of three drinks in the first hour and men can drink more than women is misleading. This is very hard and this is as science and knowledge change. It is why research is really important because that used to be what people believed. Now we have more technology at hand, we have testing devices that are more accurate, and we know that everybody metabolises alcohol at different levels and that what you metabolise on one day can be very different from the next because you are more tired or you are on a different medication or you have not had sufficient to eat. So we said zero alcohol for young drivers.

**Mr DEAN** - If you say zero alcohol for young drivers because we know that any amount of alcohol impacts, why don't we have the same position with other drivers - with senior drivers or people on a full licence? What is the difference? What does the NRMA say about that?

**Ms MORPHETT** - We know that it was a cultural shift to even bring in a blood alcohol level initially. We know that then it changed from 0.08, which is what it was when I was young, to 0.05. We know that drinking and driving used to be acceptable. It is not now; there has been a cultural shift. It does take quite a lot of time to get a society to change its behaviour and its attitudes. Looking at what is happening overseas, we see that some countries that were further behind Australia, some of the European countries, are now looking at zero for all drivers. They have a history of having wine with meals, so France and Italy are looking at changing their levels. I think it will come.

Our policy has been that if you plan to drink then plan not to drive, that you should use a designated driver, you should use public transport, you should stay over with whomever is hosting the party. We do what we can to encourage not drinking and driving.

We also have been involved in providing breathalysers to some small clubs which are in areas where we know there was a high rate of drink driving and also there was almost no public transport. We did that one year. We provided the wall-mounted ones. We provided them and then the club picked up the cost of having them -

**Ms FORREST** - Maintained.

**Ms MORPHETT** - The maintenance is absolutely critical to maintaining the Australian standard. We have also have worked with a company to sell breathalysers via our on-line shop that meet the Australian standard.

**CHAIR** - At what cost?

**Ms MORPHETT** - They are about \$300 for members. It is one of the drawbacks people have had in not buying them. We have met with the Department of Fair Trading because you can sell breathalysers that don't meet the Australian standard in New South Wales.

**CHAIR** - A friend of mine bought one for about \$85 and thought it was quite helpful.

**Ms MORPHETT** - Yes. The problem is they may only be accurate for a short time. They all need to be sent back to a factory to be recalibrated and if they are not then they can be inaccurate. At the moment that is the kind of cost - between \$200 and \$300. There are one of two on the market that do meet full Australian standards. It is interesting - there has been a greater number of them on the market because there has been a cultural shift. People want to do the right thing. They want to check if they are safe but the education side of it is that really it is much better if you are not having any alcohol when you are driving.

**Mr DEAN** - The position put to us and by one group was that if you see a need to test your alcohol level then you shouldn't be driving - as simple as that.

**Ms MORPHETT** - Some people test themselves after one drink because they understand the risks. It is quite clear that you can be under the limit and still be affected. Everyone is affected when they drink. That is why we are saying it is not about what the reading says; it is about the fact that if you feel in the slightest that your reaction times are different then you should not be driving.

**Ms FORREST** - Say I am feeling a bit tired, I have had a big day at work, and I stop at the pub on the way home for a beer. My reaction time is slowed down because of the beer or because I am tired?

**Ms MORPHETT** - It is probably a combination of the two and it is probably better to have a beer when you get home rather than on the way home. That is where we are trying to get the message across about planning. People want to socialise but they need to be aware that planning is a critical part of that.

**Ms FORREST** - When you look at those other issues, speed and distractions, what is the NRMA's view on those?

**Ms MORPHETT** - We understand that mobile phones are a distraction and legislation has come into every State now about use of hand-held mobile phones. We have supported that but we keep saying to people that they are not the only thing that distracts you - looking at street directory, changing music, eating, doing your make-up, shaving - anything you see people doing in the morning in traffic. All of those things are dangerous because they take your attention away. Driving is a complex task; it requires all your attention. Anything, not just a mobile phone, is a distraction so do not do it. If you want to make a call, pull over and make the call then. We funded quite a bit of research, we followed the research around the world. There has been quite a lot of research in Australia on mobile phones. The more complex the discussion and the more emotive it is, the higher the risk. Those conversations should not take place while someone is driving and you should not continue driving if you have just had an argument with someone.

**CHAIR** - Do you have any recommendations for drivers not to look at passengers when they are having a discussion and for passengers not to be looking at the driver if they are in the front seat?

**Ms MORPHETT** - We do and particularly around holiday times we put out a lot of safety tips for drivers. One is that the passengers, whether they are adults or children, can distract the driver. Make sure that everyone in the car is engaged, and make sure you take sufficient rest stops. It is not just about driver fatigue; it is so that people do not have an opportunity to have discussions that might distract the driver, and it makes the journey more pleasant for everyone. We are a motoring club; we want people to enjoy their driving but we want them to be as safe as possible when they are doing it.

**CHAIR** - Do you specifically advise drivers not to look at passengers? Because often in discussions a driver will look at the passenger, backwards and forwards all the time.

**Ms MORPHETT** - Yes, we say keep your eyes on the road. You should be using all your vision. Your peripheral vision is critical. It is important to look out for pedestrians. Driving on the road is unexpected. People talk about the difference from racing car drivers. They are in fact in a much safer position, driving at high speeds but they are all driving in the one direction with drivers whose attention is totally focussed on driving. When we drive on a public road we are in far more danger than that. We are going at slower speeds but there are a whole lot of other risk factors out there.

**CHAIR** - Such as roadside furniture?

**Ms MORPHETT** - Yes.

**Ms FORREST** - The concentration of other drivers?

**Ms MORPHETT** - Yes. If they are distracted they are likely to be edging into your lane, which takes your attention away from perhaps a child about to cross the road with a parent. Perhaps there is somebody on their mobile phone or their iPod and they are not paying attention. Although we are mostly talking about drivers, it is the same for

pedestrians. We have a greater number of fatalities and serious injuries among pedestrians - about a fifth of our road toll, and that is a worry. If you observe pedestrian behaviour you can see why. Intoxication is one problem. We were involved in a research project analysing the crash data a number of years ago, looking at alcohol levels and fatalities. In urban areas, drivers are driving at lower speeds, which changes the outcome of the crash for a pedestrian. In country areas people say to leave your car behind and you are okay to drink. But you, as a drunk pedestrian, are at great danger. In country areas, probably less likely in Tasmania because of your weather, people go to sleep on the asphalt because it is warm.

**Ms FORREST** - It happens in Tasmania. We have had a number in the country areas up in the north-west.

**Ms MORPHETT** - I did not know that it would be warm enough.

**Ms FORREST** - They have not always been killed but certainly they have been run over. It was on country roads. They have just had a little sleep on the way home.

**Ms MORPHETT** - Yes, we have that quite often and also because the vehicles are driving at high speeds you might not expect a pedestrian out on the highway. Outside of townships has actually been where there were quite a number of crashes.

**CHAIR** - I would like to hear more about the program that you conduct at the Olympic site. I assume that is voluntary?

**Ms MORPHETT** - We got those 12 000 students just by sending one letter out to each high school in New South Wales and the ACT. Primarily schools came from the greater Sydney basin, the Hunter and the Illawarra, but we did have a school travel for a three-day excursion to get there and they came from far north-west New South Wales because it was an issue for them.

**CHAIR** - So how long did the students stay on average?

**Ms MORPHETT** - They basically arrive about 9.30 a.m. and it runs until 2 p.m., so we arranged it so that, whether they were travelling or not, they have the bulk of the day there and then enough time to get home, but not be too awkward for transport home from the school when they return.

**CHAIR** - How often is that being held?

**Ms MORPHETT** - We have been doing it once a year in New South Wales.

**CHAIR** - Do you have any literature on that?

**Ms MORPHETT** - I can send you a report and a CD so that you can see the visuals.

**CHAIR** - Thank you very much.

**Ms FORREST** - Would that provide some review of the outcomes of the program? Do you actually research the impacts?

**Ms MORPHETT** - We have some but we have also approached the MAA to fund a study and they are running some focus groups with students.

**CHAIR** - Would you like to see something like that made compulsory for learner drivers? Not necessarily all on the one day at one site but a program that is established to give learner drivers information on the basis they would be required to attend to see films and hear lectures of an information nature for, say two or three hours before being able to get a P-licence?

**Ms MORPHETT** - I think it has value. I think the impact and the memory of it has value. Its core messages are the same as U-turn the Wheel, the rider driver program. Everyone knows what are the messages that need to reach young people. The type of agency and staff involved is fairly consistent. For the first year we ran it one of the most impactful comments that students reported was that there are young people who have an acquired brain injury as a result of being involved in a crash and they spoke as part of their rehabilitation, saying how they want to prevent anyone else having the same experience. It was interesting because students said you could lose interest in a police officer talking, but do not take these speakers out. This is what made a difference. So quite a lot of the programs around New South Wales are also involving young people with acquired brain injury because they are used to seeing Paralympians, they are used to seeing people who survived crashes with physical injuries but they are not used to seeing something that lasts a lifetime that may in fact change their ability to have an independent life.

**CHAIR** - And the Road Ready program includes that?

**Ms MORPHETT** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - I have seen it. Very effective. It has quite an impact.

**Ms FORREST** - Is there any cost involved?

**Ms MORPHETT** - For the young people? There hasn't been. No.

**Ms FORREST** - So it is all funded through the membership?

**Ms MORPHETT** - It has been NRMA and then Westmead Hospital has found funds not from the hospital but from other donors and other financial means.

**Ms FORREST** - But no government support then?

**Ms MORPHETT** - There hasn't been in cash except that the MAA is contributing some money for the research project. For all of the other agencies, most of which are government agencies like the police and ambulance service, that is a large cost to them but it is an in-kind support. It is not a financial support.

**Ms FORREST** - So they do support it in that way.

**Ms MORPHETT** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - So I take it that it is fundamental that you believe in conducting such a program, that young people at 10, 11 and 12 level are quite receptive and will benefit from such a scheme? We have heard some evidence that it's not worth trying to influence young people of that age because they feel they know everything, it's a matter of teaching them much earlier or wait until they mature. I don't subscribe to that, I really like the sound of this program, but I wasn't aware of it.

**Ms MORPHETT** - Oddly enough the RTA is the only group who haven't supported the program. There has been discussion that we have had with them and they said it's an excursion, it's an event, it's not learning. We completely disagree on this matter. My concern, too, is that P-platers, more than any other group, and young novice drivers are not a homogenous group, they are very different. Many of them are sensible and drive appropriately. Yes, some of them drive badly, but some of every demographic group drives badly.

**CHAIR** - But most of them I believe would drive responsibly and benefit from it.

**Ms MORPHETT** - Having been involved in a lot of youth road safety, I think one of the reasons they enjoy the Youth and Road Trauma forum is that it is engaging, it treats them like young adults, which they are, and it also gives them an opportunity to ask very frank questions and to meet the police. So the emergency services, the police, the ambulance service, the trauma surgeons, they enjoy the day because they get a chance to say what it's like for them. The CareFlight doctor says, 'I'd like to meet you, but not on a Saturday night when I want to spend it with my family. I want to meet you socially, I don't want to meet you in the course of my work because I find it distressing. I have children'.

So they get an opportunity to say that the police don't want to book every P-plater they see, they would really like to meet young people in another manner. One of the strengths of this is that it's not that you must, it is treat them with respect and engage with them. I think that is different to a lot of the other programs.

**CHAIR** - Yes. Interesting that the RTA are not participating because in my experience public servants are the ones who are not supportive of schemes such as this, which is surprising, and not only in Australia but even in Sweden. So I am very pleased to hear what you are saying about this. Do you have any other comments on that?

**Ms MORPHETT** - Just closing on that point, I think in all of these areas of road safety we should be trying everything. If it saves one life then it's worth it; if it changes the attitudes of half a dozen of those people in the room and they think twice about getting into the vehicle with someone else, they feel more encouraged to say, 'Slow down, I feel uncomfortable', then it has value. I don't believe in just blanket saying there's no value in those types of programs.

**CHAIR** - Could you organise such a program on a statewide basis, not necessarily all at once at one venue in Sydney, if the authorities were prepared to make it compulsory for learner drivers to undertake such a program for, say, three hours or whatever time you think is appropriate?

**Ms MORPHETT** - It's a matter of costs, and we have looked at what it would cost to do a smaller scale. That's why we support some of the smaller projects. There is a smaller

version of it at Tamworth that has been running for about nine or 10 years. The core of it is the same but it is slightly different. Coffs Harbour has run one recently with support as well. It could be done, but it would require quite a lot of funds which our agency couldn't -

**CHAIR** - No, I am thinking of the Government providing that, and perhaps the learner drivers paying some small fee towards it. That's if governments could be persuaded to legislate to require it. Do you think that would have benefit if the Government were prepared to do that, or should it be entirely voluntary, and do you think it's better to have it conducted permanently on the basis that you are?

**Ms MORPHETT** - I think anything is better if it is voluntary rather than legislated. We have had calls from parents saying, 'I'm disappointed my school didn't see value in it. I saw the media coverage'. We have had requests to run it in other parts of the State but we can't for financial reasons.

**Mr WING** - On what date will the next one be conducted? I would be quite interested to see it.

**Ms MORPHETT** - It will be on 17, 18 and 19 August, I think.

**Ms FORREST** - What did the research show about speeds on the open road and on rural roads? What are the views of your organisation in relation to that, based on the evidence you have?

**Ms MORPHETT** - In general the posted speed limit should be based on the appropriate conditions of the road. That takes into account looking at where some of the speed limits have either been too high or too low. We mentioned the issue of roadside furniture. If you look at the data at a national level, certainly at a State level, there is an increasing number of serious and fatal crashes with trees. We don't think knocking down every tree within 10 metres of the road is the answer. We think that identifying areas of the road with a crash history, then looking at improved line marking, roadside barriers, use of wire barriers, can reduce the crash risk, and perhaps reducing the speed in those areas.

**Ms FORREST** - In the absence of some of those improvements to the road, what do you think the speed limit should be? Obviously the best thing to do would be to fix up all those problems but it takes time to achieve all of that. In the interim, what do you think the limit should be on those roads?

**Ms MORPHETT** - I don't believe that there is a problem with the speed of the roads at the moment. It becomes a matter of driver behaviour and then, if something goes wrong, the condition of the road. It is often a combination, where the driver has poor judgment and drives usually faster than the posted speed limit. Again, that gets back to visible police presence and having the opportunity of being caught in the back of their mind changes driver behaviour. We know in New South Wales it is in rural areas where there is a higher crash risk, but then it is a combination of factors. It is speed, but it is often not wearing a seatbelt and drink-driving. Part of that is greater police presence but it is also to improve communications to try to get those identified groups to change their behaviour.

**Ms FORREST** - What is your speed limit on rural roads?

**Ms MORPHETT** - It depends, but it is 80-100 kph. It is a 50 kph urban limit and then we have 40 kph school zones and some 40 kph high-pedestrian zones.

**Ms FORREST** - So your open limit is 100 kph but there are some 110 kph?

**Ms MORPHETT** - Yes.

**Mr DEAN** - I guess Tasmania is similar to here in that there are a lot of motorcycle deaths - on-road and off-road. What is the NRMA doing in that area with educational programs? What do you feel should change?

**Ms MORPHETT** - We have been involved in a number of areas with motorcycle safety. We fund the safety pages on the New South Wales Motorcycle Council. They have some excellent information for motorcyclists. We did that because motorcyclists are one of the highest user groups using the web site. The Motorcycle Council of New South Wales has something like 28 000 members, so they are an organised group. We have also worked with the MAA and some university groups on research projects. We have just funded one - a rider survey on safety and clothing. We do the research and then the idea is to provide communication to the key groups and work with them. We are aware that there is some material being developed by the ATSB - which has a new name, but it was Australian Transport Safety Bureau. There is a project that they have been running and we will be able to print their material and make sure they are seen in areas utilised by motorcyclists. We have worked with them looking at trying to encourage the Road and Traffic Authority to look at areas where there are high crash rates for motorcyclists, because they are most popular rides - through the national park, up to Mount White, areas that have a large number of weekend riders.

**Ms FORREST** - Because they are more generally casual riders, are they more at risk, do you believe?

**Ms MORPHETT** - Yes. I used to ride a motorcycle and I do not anymore, not because of how I ride but because of everybody else on the road and because you are really vulnerable; they are called 'vulnerable road users' for a reason. One of the things that we are looking at at the moment is the huge increase in motorcycles sold, particularly the smaller Vespa scooter-type machines. People riding them do not understand the risk for injury a lot of the time. They particularly think that you can just have a small skirt or business shirt, city shoes - not protective clothing. That is one of the areas that we are looking at, trying to improve people's knowledge of it. It may not look cool, it may look overdone but if you come off a bike it really makes a difference.

**Ms FORREST** - If they go to get a licence, whether it be for a scooter or for a bike, is that part of the training that they undertake - the clothing side of it?

**Mr MORPHETT** - No; they get advice on it and that is improving because the training for motorcyclists is good. We do not have any debate about that, but it is raising awareness. That is why we are trying to reach novice riders with more information about the type of clothing to buy. It is not necessarily what looks best and what is most expensive; it is getting a piece of equipment that suits your needs but will improve your safety.

**Mr DEAN** - Anne, it was suggested to us by one group that perhaps there ought to be different riding rules in relation to the smaller cycles, scooters in particular, that you should not need the same level of licence that you require for a large, high-powered motorcycle, for instance.

**Ms MORPHETT** - No, I do not support that. It is very different in Queensland. If you go to Queensland, particularly around the Gold Coast, people get off a plane and go and pick up a little scooter and they can ride anywhere just on their normal licence.

**Mr DEAN** - Yes, they can. My kids have done that.

**Ms MORPHETT** - Yes, it is a nightmare to watch. Queensland has had a terrible rate of motorcycle injuries and fatalities in recent years. I think that is a contributing factor but I do not follow all of their data at the same depth.

I would not support that because you need a different set of skills when you are riding. You need to be far more alert because you are so vulnerable and also you are not as visible. You are physically vulnerable if anybody bumps you. It is very different from a car. The outcome can be death from a quite minor bump from a vehicle. It is the size differential. You need the same training. When an ex-rider sits for their car licence they find it is really easy to drive a car. It actually takes a lot more to stay alive on the road on two wheels. It makes you a better driver later on for all the head checks and using your peripheral vision. I am a better driver because of it. I learnt to ride and drive at the same time when I was young; they are skills that are really valuable to people.

**Mr DEAN** - My next question is on double demerit points in New South Wales. Does the NRMA support that? Do you really see value in it when the statistics show there are not more accidents during public holiday periods?

**Ms MORPHETT** - We have supported double demerits but only recently. In December the Minister for Roads, Minister Daley, announced some changes and we have actually said that we would like to see it reviewed. It is time for a really thorough review; rather than just double demerits, the whole demerit system needs to be reviewed. Again, it goes back to what I said before. We would like to see greater visible police presence rather than a reliance on a demerit system or speed cameras because police judgment comes into it when a police person is on the road. If you talk to people from a learning perspective, they do not even remember necessarily the offence they committed when they get a fine in the mail for a speed camera offence, but they could tell you about being pulled over years ago and how any time they see a blue light they change their behaviour.

**CHAIR** - They take extra care, we all do, and that is coming through consistently to us. The time has expired. Would you like to make any comments of a concluding nature before we finish the session, which has been very interesting and very helpful?

**Ms MORPHETT** - Thank you for the opportunity to speak. The other thing is that a large part of the work that we are doing, apart from younger drivers, now is a focus on older drivers. I can provide more information on that, if you like.

**CHAIR** - Thank you.

**Ms MORPHETT** - At a national level they are the next area. They are not the high-risk group but because of the changing demographics of Australia, this will be an issue that all road safety groups need to consider. Like young drivers, it is not an homogenous group and there are a lot of myths in the community about older drivers.

**CHAIR** - We have been told that New South Wales and Tasmania have the strictest requirements for older drivers in Australia, I think, so we would be very interested to have any material on that that.

**Ms MORPHETT** - I am more than happy to send a paper.

**Ms FORREST** - They were also called 'draconian'.

**CHAIR** - Yes, that is right.

**Ms MORPHETT** - They were developed without being based on the research which is why we have been quite outspoken on the changes to the licensing system.

Also, in New South Wales we have a Staysafe committee. I am not sure whether you have talked to members of that committee.

**CHAIR** - No, I did not know about it.

**Ms MORPHETT** - It is a good model. I, on behalf of NRMA, have given evidence to various hearings they have done on young drivers and driver education. That material is on the web site, the findings of their panel. From our point of view, it gives an opportunity to speak to a range of parliamentarians to raise both the good and the bad of what is going on, make suggestions. As an advocate organisation, we do meet regularly with members of parliament at a local, State and Federal level on both sides. It is a good model and the work of Staysafe is very useful. There has been a call for submissions on heavy vehicles in the last week. They have just finished young drivers and driver education to which we gave evidence there and that was really useful to be able to talk on that and to look at what other groups have to say.

**Ms FORREST** - Have they prepared a report on young drivers and driver education?

**Ms MORPHETT** - Yes.

**Ms FORREST** - Is that available on a web site?

**Ms MORPHETT** - Yes, it is on the Parliament of New South Wales Staysafe web site.

**CHAIR** - Nathan, could you make a note and we would like to see that.

Thank you very much. You have an amazing grip on this subject and it has been very helpful for us to have you sharing that with us. Thank you very much for giving us your time, we do appreciate that.

**Ms MORPHETT** - You are most welcome. I am glad that you are very interested.

**CHAIR** - We are, indeed.

**THE DISCUSSION CONCLUDED.**