

**THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL SELECT COMMITTEE ON ROAD SAFETY MET
AT NSW PARLIAMENT HOUSE, MACQUARIE STREET, SYDNEY, ON MONDAY
2 FEBRUARY 2009.**

DISCUSSION WITH MR WILL HAGON, JOURNALIST

CHAIR (Mr Wing) - Mr Hagan, Thank you very much for being with us. We have heard your views on radio from time to time and we wanted to try to make contact with you. It was not easy, actually.

Mr HAGON - I have done myriad things, from studying accountancy to running a service station, to working at two car companies - Leyland and Volvo. I notably and perhaps notoriously launched the P76. I was the PR man then. It was much better in a lot of areas than a lot of people think - people who become experts on it but who have never driven one. I toured Europe for two months with two children and my wife in a 2CV Citroen in 1976 and then lived in England for a further 15 months commentating at most motor racing tracks over there.

One of the problems with road safety - and there are a lot of problems with it - is that a lot of people who really do have experience and who perhaps have some very valuable stuff to contribute - I would like to think perhaps I come into that area but perhaps I am on the fringe of it - do not get to talk in an official way because they feel it is a no-win situation. I have remonstrated with car companies and said, 'Why don't you talk about it?' They make their cars, the European manufacturers for instance, in countries where the traffic conditions are much denser, where the weather is often inferior to Australia's, where visibility is often worse, yet they have higher speed limits. They, in many instances, insist that getting a driving licence is a privilege to be respected and they therefore want fairly high standards of training and testing, which we do not seem to have the courage to do in this country. These car companies who will not speak out have driver trainers whom I know do not support a lot of what goes in Australia under this label of road safety because a lot of what goes on in Australia, let us be conservative, is that 85 per cent is really setting speed limits and monitoring it.

I have spoken to people like Geoff Brabham, who is a pretty experienced driver and who drove around Le Mans very successfully without crashing and who thinks that what goes on in this country is pretty poor. He does, on behalf of BMW, official driver training. This country has, to me, a most curious thing in that, come Christmas/Easter holiday time, we go into a national count of how many people have been killed that year and how many people have been killed over the holiday period. The truth of it is, as the road traffic people and police usually eventually admit, that deaths and accidents in holiday periods in terms of numbers of people carried, distances travelled and number of vehicles on the road is probably less than at normal times, but it is put forward as this disastrous thing. I find it curious as a citizen who only wants to go away. If I happen to be driving and have to drive over those periods, which I do not find pleasant because of the weight of fear and fines towards us, I curiously just want to do what I have done in most other holiday periods - I want to get home safely. However, I am being warned by the police, by the transport ministers and everybody else, 'You're all lunatics and we'll get you'. Actually, if you think about it in a legal sense, it is almost an admission that the people who are

running the system are not administering it very well. I am not running the system; I am a victim of it, I am part of it. I am just a motorist. Like the previous gentleman whom I heard say gets passed by all sorts of vehicles, so do I yet I was once, under different conditions, a very quick driver on the open road. I have done speeds that would horrify you folk and I have not crashed at them. It is an interesting thing that in these holiday periods when we are being told again that speeding is this dreadful thing, that some P-plater was doing this speed and somebody else was doing that speed and so on, we very rarely hear of them crashing. We do hear of lots of other people crashing. I could pull out a file of lots of people in the last three or four months who have been thrown out of vehicles and killed, and almost certainly they were not wearing seat belts. As a person heavily involved in road safety with Holden until reasonably recent times said, if we could eliminate the unlicensed drivers in the non-registered vehicles, not wearing seat belts and perhaps affected by alcohol or other drugs, we would eliminate at least one-third of the fatalities. But the other aspect of that is that Australia rates badly in fatalities. Again, Transport ministers have been delighted to tell us we have the lowest road toll since 1948 nationally and all the rest of it, as though it has a lot to do with road traffic rules and their enforcement. That is probably one of the least important factors. There are communications, better medical techniques, faster response to crashes, mobile phones, helicopters - myriad things; at least 20. The crashability of cars, the crash survival of occupants in modern cars, et cetera, all play a significant part.

I will go back to the holiday road period and to young people involved in lots of crashes and who have a bad driving record, as is also claimed for motorcyclists. If I can generalise, and with some percentage error in the generality, in Australia, and I tell this to the executives of European car companies that I run into, that motoring in this country is quite different to motoring where they make their cars - in France, Germany, Italy or wherever. There, people buy a car suitable for an alternative means of transport, perhaps to go to their equivalent of Bathurst or Orange or Kempsey or wherever, or longer distances and dart back again. Executives do that. In Australia people do not. They buy cars to position themselves in society, and I am generalising, and the main range of driving people aged 25, 30 onwards to 60-65, drive to and from offices, perhaps children's recreation, visiting within their city, probably, or to an airport. The BMWs, Mercedes Benzs and Audis and so on, which are made with good dynamics, good high speed fuel efficiency, good aerodynamics and all the rest of it to be relaxing, to be an alternate expedient means of transport, are not used for that. So it is a bit curious.

Then we go to the young people at the other end. I reckon, in general, the people doing long-distance driving in Australia are young people and older retired people. The young people will suffer because they are driving longer distances and they probably have more people in their vehicle, and they are often in older vehicles which are more likely to crash, probably because of inferior brakes, lighting et cetera to modern cars, but also if they do crash they are more likely to be killed or injured.

As I got a coffee on the way here this morning I told a woman I know at my local coffee place that I was going to talk to this committee and she said, 'Oh, good luck'. That is the problem with road safety in Australia. It needs to build respect and it needs to build acceptability. I will just very briefly summarise some points out of Britain. The Department for Transport, Great Minster House, Marsham Street, London, lists as key points: 'Speed limits should be evidence-led, self-explaining and seek to reinforce people's assessment of what is a safe speed to travel. They should encourage self-

compliance and not be seen by drivers as being a target speed at which to drive in all circumstances.'

CHAIR - You made this point on radio didn't you?

Mr HAGON - To a degree. I have not quoted that because I have only just -

CHAIR - No, but similar.

Mr HAGON - In general terms. I just throw in a question there about the way that safety is being enforced in this country, that the speed limit is this, adhere to the speed limit and you will be right and suggesting that driving is simple and easy. I would say, and this is a point I have made on radio, that we should turn road safety right around in this country and not be saying it is easy but that it is very difficult to drive safely and well. Driving safely sometimes is seen as driving well and it is not necessarily the same thing.

I did a helicopter trip about two years ago. The chap had been a cabinet-maker but he had his helicopter pilot's licence and he was now a commercial pilot. Pilots of fixed-winged planes and others tell me that flying a chopper is much more difficult than a fixed-winged plane and we regard flying a plane probably as fairly difficult.

This chap came up high through a cutting in a mountain. We were coming south over the Hunter Valley and so on just so that he could auto-rotate; he had enough elevation to auto-rotate if he lost power in the engine. He was put into a small holding pattern very briefly at Mascot and landed. I got into my car and had to drive 10 minutes to home about 3 kilometers. I was busier in that 10 minutes than he was in the previous hour. I had to do more accident avoidance than he had to, yet people say his job is a difficult one. I am changing lanes, I am braking, I am stopping at lights, people are changing lanes on me and so on. Driving well is not easy.

I now go to the second report out of America, and I remember reading a report along these lines out of England 25 years ago. This was the US Department of Transportation Technology. The objective of this research was to determine the effects of raising and lowering posted speed limits on driver behaviour and accidents for non-limited access rural and urban highways. Speed and accident data were collected in 22 States at 100 sites before and after speed limits were altered.

The result of the study indicated that lowering posted speed limits by as much as 20 mph - 32 kph - or raising speed limits by as much as 24 kph had little effect on motorists' speed. The majority of motorists did not drive 8 kph above the posted speed limits when speed limits were raised, nor did they reduce their speed by 8 to 16 kph when speed limits were lowered. Data collected at the study sites indicated that the majority of speed limits are posted below the average speed of traffic. Lowering speed limits below the 50 th percentile does not reduce accidents but does significantly increase driver violations of speed limits.

CHAIR - And you made that point on radio in recent weeks.

Mr HAGON - This is interesting. Road safety is a very complex problem but it is treated simplistically.

Ms FORREST - That paper was 20 years ago?

Mr HAGON - No, no. I said I had seen a study like that 25 years ago in England.

Ms FORREST - When was that study done?

Mr HAGON - That is a report of 1992 so it is 17 years ago, yes.

You can quickly verify that sort of thing. Anzac Parade in Sydney was once 60 and then it was raised to 70 but the traffic flow along there barely altered.

The one I have instanced on air is relevant to Tasmania. I want to come to a point about how I think Tasmania could be really smart and really intelligent and make some really good gains for road safety in your State.

The instance I have talked about is the Sydney Harbour Bridge. If you go towards the Cahill Expressway if you are coming from North Sydney - there are two lanes there; one is up against a fairly high railing with a pedestrian walkway the other side of it and on the left and on the right side of it are bits of pylon and bridge. It is pretty enclosed and there are overhanging bits of steel for lights and various things. On the other side of that same bit of roadway - it is just two lanes divided and separated into two single lanes - is the left side of the bridge structure and a low concrete median strip. Traffic on that right side, less impeded and less crowded, always travels faster than the left side. So the simplest and most credible way, if we believe that American study, to get people to go more slowly is to have some overhanging trees or whatever and make them feel constricted. Pitt Street has, I think, a 60 kph limit. Can people do 60 kph?

Ms FORREST - I saw a taxi doing close to 60 kph yesterday, I must admit.

Mr HAGON - This is fine because - and I heard a bit of the previous presentation and some of your questions - you have to forget the aberrant behaviour in road safety. No matter what your rule, how you organise it, there will be the few percent who will go crazy.

CHAIR - I saw a learner rider on a motorcycle yesterday starting off at the traffic lights. He made an unholy noise and I looked around to see this young chap with an 'L' plate. I know what you're saying because the limits in so many main streets of cities around Australia, be they 60 kph or 50 kph, it would be very dangerous for most people at most times to go up to those limits.

Mr HAGON - I don't know your background and driving experience or thoughts about it. I didn't mention it officially in my submission but my experience in being mobile is I cycle, which to me is by far the most dangerous thing I do on the road; I ride motorbikes and I have raced them on odd occasions. I have ridden motorbikes down to Melbourne, Broken Hill and back to Brisbane and Sydney and around Tasmania. I gained a truck licence many years ago out of interest in semitrailers and the technology. I have done interstate truck trips - one to Adelaide a long time ago - and some delivery trips when I was working for Volvo in 1974-75. I have obviously driven cars and four-wheels drives on racetracks and roads - roads predominantly in Australia and in vastly different parts of

Australia - I was in Broome and across the Gibb River Road not long ago - Central Australia, Queensland, Europe and America.

The problem with road safety is that there is an official line and people such as you get the official line, mostly I think from interested parties. I don't want to be unfair to anybody you may invite to address you because I find it refreshing that I was invited. People who are a little bit left field, as I may be seen to be, are generally ignored. I know motoring people, equally experienced to me, who really think about it and really care - Peter McKay is one who comes to mind - and who feel we are belting our heads against a wall. Most of the motoring blokes either do not know or do not care. Wayne Webster, who was at the *Daily Telegraph* for many years, recently did a book on Peter Brock and he said, 'There's no point. Nobody listens. There's no win in it'.

Here is an example of how you folk don't necessarily get all points of view. When I was at the *Sunday Telegraph* - that was between 1977 and 1990 - I had a deputation of six highway patrol officers come to see me at the paper. They wanted to talk to somebody about getting something going, because they felt that what they were doing was bad and in one instance what they had been told to do under the label of road safety had caused an accident.

I listened to all these people who had come from between Cronulla and the Central Coast, so they really ran the length of the Sydney basin and thought you beauty! Here is a really good campaign, an interesting story for the paper. The editor, the late Red Harrison, said we would not touch road safety or criticise road safety, so we did not run a paragraph. Like the car companies they do not want to be seen to be speaking out of turn, to be speaking against something which is considered biblical. It is accepted that you do not talk against road safety. Every time I talk about road safety somebody will write or phone and say you only have to obey the rules and you do not get pinched. I have a clean licence; I do not get pinched either, because I do not want to be pinched not because I agree with the rules. I get overtaken by a lot of vehicles.

If you think that road safety, road traffic rules and enforcement are good in this country, envisage a collection of 500 ordinary Australian motorists of all ages from 18 to 75, male and female. Go to that group and offer a terrific deal of an organised one-week driving holiday in Europe, including Paris, Rome, rural England and London. Would they want to do that? I think that you would find that a lot of them would be intimidated by it because they feel that they would not handle it. I think I know from the sort of driving that I see on the road that they would not handle it well. Again, this is a general comment so you can shoot me down on a number of specifics, but I think generally it is probably fairly right. Australians broadly are adhering to the speed limits. The likelihood of being caught is slight for anybody sensible driving at what they think will be allowed by the system.

Mind you, I know of at least two people, both of whom are responsible, but one of whom works at a VACC in Victoria and is genuinely a very upright citizen, responsible, cares about cars, motoring, road safety, engineering all sorts of things and he has a traffic infringement for 103 kph in Victoria.

CHAIR - Three over the limit?

Mr HAGON - Yes. So if that is seen as being a contribution to road safety, fine, but I think that it is questionable. The gentleman here previously said a pilot of a jumbo jet has to obey the rules. I have sat in small planes and helicopters reasonably regularly and am often reading an altimeter as I hear them talking to air traffic control so I really wonder if they are held to a 3 per cent error in speed or height or direction as they approach Mascot. I rather doubt it. As I say, looking at altimeters when they say not above 1 500 feet I see them coming down to 1 500 feet, but on the road they might have been pinched 150 metres before the sign that said 70 kph or whatever.

Another point incidentally in these traffic surveys out of America and England was that you should not have a change of speed sign within 600 metres of a previous one. That would test them in New South Wales because I recently saw a cluster made up of an 80 kph, a 40 kph and a 60 kph within 100 metres.

Mr DEAN - They test them at home in Tasmania, as well.

Mr HAGON - There is a credibility problem with road safety and I think you need to get around that. What I call fear and fines intimidate me and I am an experienced motorist, whether good or bad that is for other people to judge. I feel intimidated by all the cameras, the warnings and things and I have quite unintentionally broken school 40 kilometre an hour limit areas. There is one near Sutherland, out of my area, and I have come out of an 80 kph zone over Captain Cook Bridge to a 70 kph zone and shortly after that there is a 40 kph zone when the hours apply for school and then there is a traffic light. I stop at the traffic light, I am looking at the traffic and when the light changes I take off but I forget that the 40 kph zone continues. The school is nowhere near there and unintentionally I know a lot of others who have gone past that.

I promised to try to tell you how I think Tasmania could -

CHAIR - Before you go on, what you are really saying is that for maximum observance the traffic rules must be seen to be reasonable.

Mr HAGON - Absolutely.

CHAIR - It is a very important point.

Mr HAGON - It is very important and I really feel that in New South Wales and Victoria the road traffic authorities and the police are trying to prove that they can make motorists obey. 'We will show you that we can force you to obey' although the English emphasise self-compliance. If we were honest about speeding this country where we have all sorts of mechanism to pick people going through red lights and speeding and everything else, why is there not some monitoring, computer controlled, that determines the eighty-fifth percentile and books only those above it? The eighty-fifth percentile is quite widely accepted as being about right.

Parramatta Road is very wide near Homebush in Sydney and on Sunday at 8 a.m. in summer there is brilliant light, four lanes each way, one car, if you are doing 75 kph should not be a problem, but if you are doing 75 kph there in peak hour it should be a problem. Let us adjust and we have a little bit of adjustment in the north of Sydney, when there is rain they have a different speed limit posted on the expressway but there

are bits of expressway that once were 100 kph zones, came down to 70 kph and now have gone back up to 90 kph. All sorts of people have been pinged there on the basis they probably did not adjust their speed

Mr DEAN - That adjustment applies on the Western Ring Road in Melbourne, as it applies on the Westgate Bridge, an adjustment from about 40 kph to I think the highest speed is 100 kph.

Mr HAGON - The Western Ring Road is pretty vigorous and pretty heavily policed. Contrary to my thing of people flying in preference to driving, for various reasons I have driven to Melbourne for the Grand Prix for the last couple of years and the most vigorous driving is around the Western Ring Road. The highway from Albury to Melbourne is nothing but heavily policed and with all sorts of average speed enforcements and so on. I think the system in Victoria is horrific. I really think it is dreadful. I do not have any figures to counter what they are saying but I really think that they need -

Ms FORREST - They have one of the lowest fatality rates in the country.

Mr HAGON - When you say 'fatality rates', is that per 100 000 drivers?

Ms FORREST - Yes.

Mr HAGON - All right, let us align it with roads. New South Wales has much more difficult road conditions with the Blue Mountains. Victoria has generally flat roads which are less interrupted with curves and rivers and harbours and all the rest of it.

CHAIR - Do you think people have fewer problems on the roads and fewer accidents if the driving conditions are difficult, like the Blue Mountains where you have winding, hilly roads and fewer accidents because people take extra care, whereas on expressways they speed up and have head-on collisions.

Mr HAGON - Yes, but you really don't get an enormous number of accidents on expressways.

CHAIR - We do on the Midland Highway in Tasmania. We have quite a few head-on collisions, and the theory -

Mr HARRISS - It's not a true expressway, though.

CHAIR - It is not an expressway, it's just two-lane most of the way. The theory in Victoria is that - and you say that's horrific - people need to learn that if they exceed the speed limit anywhere, they are likely to be booked because there are random checks to encourage the attitudes. That's what they were saying when we were in Victoria.

Mr HAGON - Let me come to some notes that I made which I call 'Beware the physicists who tell us that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction'. Let's suggest that the road safety researchers come up with a fact that you won't be killed in a car if you are wearing a seatbelt at greater than 50 or 55 kph, so we will make the speed limit of say 60 kph between Sydney and Melbourne. It seems an excellent idea, everybody does 60 kph. They can have head-ons, they do all sorts of things and we'll have no

fatalities, but the physicists will tell you there's an equal and opposite reaction, so two things will happen. First, you will have twice as many vehicles on the road because they will be taking twice as long to get anywhere. Second, people will become very weary and although they might not get killed, I suspect they will have a lot of accidents because they will go to sleep because they won't be concentrating and driving properly. Third, they will say, 'This is dreadful, it's driving me crazy, we'll take to lesser roads without the cameras and the enforcement'. There they will do 60, 80, 90 kilometres an hour on lesser roads, and you may increase the road toll. You may.

I heard mobile phones referred to, and I have also talked about this on air. A lot of rule makers - I have seen it in motor sport, I see it everywhere but it certainly applies with traffic - think this is a problem, so they'll make a rule to fix it. Just because you have made a rule it doesn't mean people will obey it. If we are truthful about not talking on mobile phones in cars, there would be 10 000 fatalities a year if it was nearly as dangerous as we are told it is, because an enormous number, hundreds of thousands of people make millions of mobile phone calls, sometimes just answering or whatever, while they're driving.

We had a perfectly good rule prior to being specific about mobile phones, you are meant to be in proper control of the vehicle at all times. That is the overriding rule, that's fine. Whether I am eating a hamburger, drinking a coffee, talking on a mobile phone or remonstrating with my kids, that rule should apply. It is illegal to talk on a mobile phone; I am in my car, the phone rings. I may ignore it, but a lot of people won't, and of those who won't, some don't seem to care and they talk boldly on their mobile. They may continue talking and they may say, 'Harry, I'm just in the car, I'll ring you back', but whichever, it is an unsatisfactory result.

Scenario two. You have to be in proper control of the vehicle. Phone rings. 'Harry, sorry, I'm driving at the moment, can I ring you back in about 10 minutes, I'll be home then'. He is looking around properly, he is still driving properly, he's not half under the dashboard, or whatever, and he puts the phone down.

School safety zones. Let me again be the physicist - there are equal and opposite reactions. I have no idea what the problem was with children outside schools except that a child or two or 10 or 15 may have been hit and or killed at some stage but it has caught a politician's attention and somebody has flicked their fingers and said 40 kph zones. I have never heard the problem quantified concerning what was going on. Was it aberrant behaviour, was it epidemic behaviour or whatever? I have no idea what it cost to paint the roads before and after every school and put up signs. I have no idea what the result has been in improving whatever the previous situation was but let me put a counter thought to you, and I mean this so seriously. The politicians are sitting back and saying '40 kph zones in schools; everything is under control', and the police are getting an enormous amount of non-compliance. So governments are fairly happy because they seem to be doing the right thing and they are getting a pile of revenue and they will now try harder to make all you dreadful people obey. Meantime back at the school, which is the only place we should be caring about, who gets fined or who does what outside in their vehicles does not matter. It is the safety of the children that matters. Back at the school they have said, 'There is a 40 zone outside there, children, so everything is all right'. 'Oh', think young children, who have very poor judgment of speed and distance and all sorts of things, 'the traffic is only doing 40'. They have been lulled into possibly a

more dangerous situation than if we said, 'It is 60 out there and you may be bowled over so hang on and we will come and get you across'.

Ms FORREST - I hear what you are saying but the evidence is that if a person, particularly an adult, is hit at 30 kph the research shows you would probably survive, but at 40 you would probably be seriously injured if not killed, so is a 40 zone a bit meaningless anyway if you use that argument?

Mr HAGON - I love that research; I really love it. Let's go around and hit everybody at 30. Could we go to preference one? Don't hit them. You have to get them to do the 30 or the 40, which I am saying here is not proved. There is at least 30 per cent non-compliance - inadvertent or intentionally. I suspect Mr Bevin's agency ran that commercial that was about somebody being T-boned at an intersection and if you are only doing 50 you will have a lesser accident. That's terrific. I would prefer it if somebody told me to have my foot over the brake as I approached the intersection and to lift off the throttle, not to be doing 50 or 60 because that is the speed limit. This is a whole attitudinal thing where we have to get smart.

I am sorry, Ruth, but this business that you will do less damage to them if you hit them answers your question about Victoria. Australia in the last numbers I saw has slipped to eleventh in international ratings of fatalities per 100 000 licence-holders. We were about third at one stage. We are behind countries with slightly more difficult environmental conditions, road surfaces, grip, visibility and traffic densities. We are behind Finland, Denmark, Sweden, Iceland, Germany with its high speed limits, and England. The other thing that is not counted and referred to at all in this national toll that newspapers run through the Christmas-New Year period of how many are killed is how many are injured. Dr Laurie Spark was the Holden person whom I was talking about earlier. He had done an enormous amount of research and he said to me five years ago that there was no account for people who banged their heads against B pillars and are vegetables. We are getting more of them. We are killing less for a myriad of reasons, of which speed limits and traffic enforcement would be one part of many reasons, probably a small part. However, we are probably having a similar proportion of accidents and, possibly, a greater number of people very seriously injured and perhaps life-impaired with their injury.

With the mobile phone rule, and I tried to clarify this recently, my understanding is that if you are stationary at the side of the road with the park brake on but the engine running, you are guilty of talking on your mobile phone. Well, tell me, out near Orange in New South Wales in these weather conditions is it safer to turn your engine off when you are talking on your mobile with your dog and your cat and your three young children, and the car air-conditioning no longer working, or is it safer to sit there with the engine running and keeping everybody cool. There are infringements now where you are stationary, yet it is regarded as a serious driving offence worth a lot of points, yet you are stationary. How can it be a driving offence? There may be good reasons for it but I think what people have to think about is credibility and establishing acceptance.

Mr DEAN - Just on the mobile phone matter, what was the point you were trying to make?

Mr HAGON - Our overriding concern in all instances should be for good control of the vehicle to avoid an accident. But complying with a rule, per se, doesn't make it good

driving. So if the rule and enforcement of it allows you to drive properly then, to me, that is superior to complying with a traffic regulation.

Mr DEAN - The point I was going to make there was how could you control that as against a person who is waving around and not concentrating properly. Sometimes you cannot determine concentration until a person has an accident.

Mr HAGON - That is the whole thing, isn't it? That gets back to the thing about holding a licence and all sorts of things. Some people will not obey the rules. But you will get closer to it, I suspect, if you gain some public acceptance and confidence.

For instance, on trains people poke around and say, 'Look at this train; it is bloody dirty, with graffiti, seats torn and everything'. If I were running the railways I would put a sign up to say, 'Hello, welcome, enjoy your trip. These are your trains. We cleaned them last night. If they are not clean or if they are defaced, this was not done by our staff. It must have been done by your fellow passengers. Please look after the trains'. I think it is time for some goodwill.

To go back to the fear and fines thing, if I walk into a park there signs stating 20 things I cannot do and how much I will be fined for each offence. Why not say, 'This is your park, please look after it. I hope you enjoy it.'? There will always aberrant people but let us try to get them on side. Instead of saying, 'Speed limit here', and 'Do not there' and so on, why not at the end of the year send somebody a letter and say, 'Congratulations; thanks for being a good motorist and having no accidents. We will give you three extra points to play with'. You do not have to do that, but get them on side and be nice to them.

Ms FORREST - I would rather give them some money off their registration than give them extra points because extra points would encourage them to perhaps think, 'Now I can speed, I have a few more points up my sleeve'.

Mr HAGON - Yes, but you are taking the general bureaucratic line, I think. The people who haven't lost any points probably are working generally along the lines of not wanting to lose points. There might have been some luck involved as well.

Ms FORREST - As a person in that category, I would appreciate a reduction in my registration fee.

Mr HAGON - How you do it is another matter. Twenty years ago I said we had to deal with reality. There's the idealism up there of making a rule and having 100 per cent compliance, which is fine, but you don't get 100 per cent compliance. When we deal with reality on things such as driver training, traffic infringements and all the business of driving safely on the road, have the driver training testing regimen pretty much as it is. That is what we can afford, that is what we have the facilities and people for. But with young drivers who want to get into all sorts of vehicles - and in various States they make lists of vehicles they can and cannot drive - again, don't worry about that. Just say, 'Hello, 18-year-old, you want to drive a Nissan Skyline GTR. Certainly. Go over there to the Nissan Skyline GTR training school. It will be \$3 500 and it's going to take 10 days. Then we will test you and the test will take four hours and cost \$600'. Let's get positive about it. Let us say, 'Yes, you can do that' - and you only have to check

registration against licence. Again, you get the aberrant and swinging things, as people write in and say, 'My grandmother was doing that speeding', but in general terms you will get a degree of compliance. I think then you could build up a requirement to suggest some pride in driving well, in having better training and so on.

If I could get to Tasmania, and go back to my harbour bridge thing and the two lanes. Tasmania is a pretty tight sort of a State, with generally more difficult roads, not as wide and as open and as straight for as far as on the mainland. In general terms, you probably have some degree of compliance, just self-compliance in the sense that people feel this speed is roughly safe. Again, with my physicists thing, if by being too strict and tough the public see it as being unfair, it is counterproductive. In America they did some stuff with small towns where they felt that road traffic speed limits and other infringements too harshly enforced affected things such as travel and town economics because people were dissuaded from making those sorts of trips. With all that Tasmania offers, if you want to promote it as being a lovely place to drive - difficult, but wonderfully enjoyable; great roads, not boring - you don't have to emphasise speed. Then have realistic stuff in terms of the speed limits and the traffic control generally.

I heard talk of campaigns in the previous chat - a blitz on a particular issue. I see the signs up that we're blitzing drink-driving, wearing seatbelts and so on. There is only one thing that is ever blitzed and that is speed. Somebody referred to a war on traffic. We have to get to reality. The reason that we have this many people killed and injured on the road, firstly, is the perception that it 'it's not going to happen to me' and, secondly, that 'the whole system is so useful and desired by me that I'm prepared to take the risk'. It is not like war or signing up for an army and going overseas to fight. That is for a particular mentality and type of person. This is for everybody. Everybody wants the freedom and the mobility to drive and to move around and all that motoring offers. If I say 'motoring' I mean bicycles or cars or motorbikes or whatever. Can I be revolutionary or continue being revolutionary and say motorcycles are not unsafe -

CHAIR - It is the riders.

Mr HAGON - it is the people who ride them. Think of it. You talked about head-ons on the Midland Highway. Are you likely to have a head-on on a motorbike? You shouldn't. It is only that wide. You have enormous performance to get by. You are up higher than a car and you have great visibility. You can look around and be completely unconstrained by B pillars or A pillars and things in the car. You have no visibility problems to see whether it is safe to overtake, so overtaking on a motorbike should be safer. Running up the back of cars should be less likely because, again, you are up high, you can see forward and so on and you should not get trapped. Curiously, motorbikes have tremendously good brakes and, again, if you do get things wrong you may even have the good alternative to be able to duck down the side lane or something, and pass, even if you really misjudged and were likely to hit them. If you fall over in a corner or something, sure you have got a problem.

I have driven quickly here and overseas. I came out of Adelaide once years ago in an Alfa Romeo and it was about February and it was on the Hay Plains. In the first five hours I averaged 100 miles an hour. I did 800 kilometres in the first five hours. I saw no traffic and I was doing it legally at that time. What governed my thinking was the car. I was watching the oil pressure and the water temperature. When I turned the

airconditioning on the water temperature went up and the oil pressure fell and if I turned it off it came back. So, in Europe self-compliance says we will do what suits fuel consumption when I need to be there, what I think is safe, and so on. If you said the speed limit on the Midland Highway was 130, do you think the average speed of the motorists, the traffic flow would greatly change? A few people would be able to overtake more safely.

I was spoken to years ago by some police coming back from Bathurst, outside Lithgow, because unbeknowns to me I had overtaken the Bathurst District Commander in his car, legally, because I knew where I was and I knew what I was doing. He was about 3 kilometres below my indicated 100 kph. I knew the little bit of road and I got outside him, put it on cruise control and took forever to go past him - stupidly but legally. Ultimately he got in touch with the police and a squadron of cars appeared. I thought, 'Gee, what is going on here?' They all wanted to talk to me. I said, 'What's going on? I haven't been speeding.' They said, 'No, no, it is not that.' They just wanted to talk to me. I did it badly but I did it legally. So, if you raised the speed limit on the Midland Highway there would still be the aberrant ones and there would still be some that might have head-ons and all the rest of it, but would the average traffic flow change greatly? Would overtaking be safer and would you reduce bunching of vehicles? With these strictly enforced limits on the open road I worry because I, like others, drive cruise control all the time and we are all in bunches and everybody is afraid to touch the throttle and get clear and drive in their own way according to the conditions and so on. Would that be improved?

CHAIR - If the limit on the Midland Highway were increased to 130, in the event of a crash do you not think the injuries would be more serious than if it had been 100?

Mr HAGON - At 100 or 130 there'd be no difference.

CHAIR - We have had a lot of evidence to the contrary.

Mr HAGON - Really?

CHAIR - A lot of evidence.

Ms FORREST - But also people are saying that the roads are not really built in a way that minimises the risk at this stage. We have too many roads with road surfaces that are not in good condition and that of sort of thing that makes the risk higher of coming to grief at that speed.

Mr HAGON - All of that has to be taken into account and I put it forward, not specifically for that road, but as a general proposal. Transfer it if you like to the Sydney to Melbourne road or something. I know - and again I mean this very seriously - that the greatest error I make on the road now, the closest I come to having accidents, is through inattention.

CHAIR - Yes, and it is a well-recognised fact that inattention is a very high cause of road crashes.

Mr HAGON - Let us go back to it and ask why. Years ago in New South Wales there was a prime facie 60 mph limit and there was an oblique sign which meant that if you exceeded this speed you accepted the onus of proving that the speed at which you were travelling at the time was not dangerous to the public. I know in a court that is untidy and difficult, but on the other hand every time I saw that sign I did not think, 'I can drive at 60 mph and I know everything will be all right', I thought, 'I am going to drive according to the road conditions which may be greater than 60 mph'. I genuinely used to look around and check the traffic, visibility, and all the rest of it because I needed to be ready to say to the policeman, 'No, there were no cars around'.

Mr DEAN - You are right, there are a lot of people who will overtake a vehicle on the Midland Highway in a 110 kph zone when the vehicle is doing 105 or just over 100 kph so it takes them a long time to pass if they stick to the 110 limit. That is highly dangerous and very bad practice so I do not disagree with your comment. I want to touch quickly on the issue of alcohol. Where do you think the road safety the limit should be, 0.05?

Mr HAGON - I see it as one of the most important things in the whole road safety scenario. In the days of Warwick Farm, the early 1960s, they did a test where they selected a group of drivers including Kevin Bartlett and other top racing drivers who spent a long period of time drinking orange juice, some spiked and some not. They had been told at the beginning of the day to do various moves, pull up at a crossing, reverse into a garage, a marked out area and so on. Above about 0.02 everybody's skill was going out the door, which is why I say that we should not allow the sale in this country of throw-away random breath testers. If you think you should test yourself you should not drive.

Ms FORREST - Who conducted that research?

Mr HAGON - That was done at Warwick Farm, the Australian Automobile Racing Company. It might have even been done by the RTA, I do not know.

Ms FORREST - Do you know if they wrote up the research? Has it been published?

Mr HAGON - They probably did but it was 40 years ago. Dr Michael Henderson - do you folk know of Michael Henderson?

CHAIR - No.

Mr HAGON - I know Michael Henderson well. He was the first head of the Traffic Accident Research Unit in New South Wales and he is a medico. He races historic sports cars and single-seaters. He is a yachty who sailed for Europe and was away for eight years, went to 43 countries and wrote three books - one on risk. He said to me years ago, 'Anybody above about 0.2 but perhaps 0.15 is practised at drinking. The ordinary person who has a big slug of grog prior to that will fall over. We read reports in papers of people being fined for returning a reading of 0.21 or whatever. In his opinion that is a person with a drinking problem and therefore you have a person with a road safety driving problem apart from their other behavioural things. Drink is an enormous problem and it just does not go with traffic.'

I would ask counter to that, why are we not allowed to have radar detectors that theoretically only advise us of black spots as that is where they have radar? If your radar detector goes off you would know you must be a black spot and had better be careful. The fact that you avoid a fine, so what? Don't you want people to comply?

CHAIR - That is right. We would like to go on for longer but unfortunately we cannot because we are running late. Mr Hagon, thank you very much for coming.

Mr HAGON - I am sorry to dominate so much.

CHAIR - We wanted you to do just that and we would have liked to have had more time with you, but we will be listening to the radio to get more of your views. Thank you very much. A number of your views have been quite challenging as you said they would be and we will take those all into account.

Mr HAGON - Thank you kindly. I emphasise the only thing I am pushing is a care for better things. You would not agree with everything but it comes out of some experience and certainly passion and caring. I am trying to win the public.

THE DISCUSSION CONCLUDED.