

THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL SELECT COMMITTEE ON ROAD SAFETY MET AT THE VICTORIAN PARLIAMENT COMMITTEE OFFICES, 55 ST ANDREWS PLACE, MELBOURNE ON THURSDAY 29 JANUARY 2009.

THE COMMITTEE MET WITH Mr RICHARD WADSWORTH, STATEWIDE RECREATION AND TOURISM COORDINATOR, DSE AND Mr ROGER PITT, PROJECT OFFICER, DEPARTMENT OF SUSTAINABILITY AND ENVIRONMENT.

CHAIR (Mr Wing) - Welcome, gentlemen. Thank you for giving your time to be with us. Would you like to give us an outline of your involvement in road safety, particularly any new initiatives?

Mr WADSWORTH - I am with the Department of Sustainability and Environment and my role is as statewide recreation and tourism coordinator. Roger Pitt is my project manager for our trail bike project. If it's helpful I will explain a bit of the genesis of that program. It was not driven primarily through safety issues but rather through conflict issues over competing uses of the forest. DSE directly manages State forests, so the non-park estate of Victoria's public land, and we also do the policy stuff for all public land. In early 2000 there had been a growing trend of increasing trail bike use on public land, probably a reflection also of increasing sales. Those competing uses were causing conflict in the bush so there were a lot of complaints from residents and issues with rural amenity. The 'tree-changers' had gone out to live in rural areas to enjoy the peace and quiet and change of lifestyle and they were finding that their quality of life was affected by trail bike riding and the noise and the conflict. We had conflict with other recreational users. Passive recreationalists who use the forest, go walking, ride their horse and those sorts of things were in conflict with trail bike riders who often don't stick to the formed road networks. They go off and create their own single track through the bush. We probably have a legacy that dates back decades of illegally created single track, which is a bike just pushing into the bush and creating a track and through repeated use that track gets a bit worn and others follow it, so you have a network of single track that is probably not larger than our legal network. From a safety point of view, you have riders riding in the bush on a track network that wasn't formed for that use. Under our laws it is illegal because you are off a formed road passable by four-wheel vehicles that is open to the public. They are out there and enjoying their passion, their sport and recreation, but there's all these associated conflicts and issues that come out of that use.

This project came about through the conflict that increasing use was causing; environmental issues and environmental degradation is a big one. Conflict with residents and other recreationalists was probably the key driving force. A lot of the issues were also not primarily around safety, but were around noise. In a number of hot spots around the State we had residents and other passive recreational users in conflict with trail bike riders.

From a road safety point of view, or from a safety point of view and from an injury and fatality point of view, it is a bit of an unknown about the true nature of injury stats to trail bike riders. I guess this is historically a problem with how the data is collected. If you're a rider operating essentially illegally by being on a single track network, you may not be covered by your work insurance, and those sorts of things. If you are riding

unregistered or unlicensed, you are not covered by TAC insurance. I don't feel we have a good handle on the true nature of the level of injury to riders, and that is something we are starting to address with VicRoads, and it's an issue of data collection and how that data gets recorded.

Essentially we feel that where there are injuries and fatalities, riders may misreport where they got injured because they don't want to admit to riding unlicensed or unregistered or illegally on single track. So there is certainly a level of misreporting, we believe, because they don't want that on the record. Often they will say they were injured on private property when they might have been injured in the bush. The way the stats get recorded will tend to be the nearest major intersection, so that kind of brings them into the non-park estate, and that gets recorded against maybe the sealed road network because their friends will bring them to the nearest intersection to meet the ambulance.

There is not good hard data on how big an issue it is, but our belief is it is a bigger issue than is currently understood but there's not hard data to back that up.

Ms FORREST - Is there any data at all collected at the Department of Emergency Medicine when they present?

Mr PITT - The analysis of injury data collected through 18 different data sources indicates that there is a combination of both gaps and overlaps in the data collected. When we look at injury statistics relating to motorcycle crashes collected by the police, ambulance service, both metropolitan or rural, and we have the SES involved in attending at accidents, when we put in private doctors in practice as well as the hospital admission system, we have a total of 18 different authorities who collect this data. What is very clear is that we don't have accurate data.

A report I have here from the Victorian Injury Surveillance Unit indicates that for the three-year period from 2002 to 2005 in Victoria there were 139 motorcycle fatalities. Of that, nine were recorded as being off-road, but we don't have any reason to believe that is an absolutely accurate figure. As Richard indicated, there is misreporting both ways as to where the accident occurs.

People are registered and licensed and are therefore covered by Transport Accident Commission insurance, but if they actually have an accident off the road network, perhaps even on private property, they attempt to report it as being a road traffic accident because they then can get income protection cover. So some accidents will be reported as being a road traffic accident when they may not have been.

There is also misreporting in the opposite direction when people who are unregistered or unlicensed have a crash on the road network, they will, for the reasons that Richard outlined, report it as having happened on private property to avoid prosecution. The information is very poor.

CHAIR - Are they covered by insurance then?

Mr PITT - Which ones?

CHAIR - If they are registered and insured on private property, are they covered by motor accident insurance?

Mr PITT - My understanding is that they are.

Ms FORREST - We did have some evidence that they were not but the court had ruled in their favour in a few cases.

CHAIR - We have a copy of that report but I have not had a chance to read it. They just gave it to us yesterday at Monash University. We are looking forward to reading all the data in it because this is a problem in Tasmania too.

Ms FORREST - The robustness of the data is a major issue here obviously for you and it seems to be in our State as well. You said you are making some moves to try to improve that. What are you doing to try to improve the data collection?

Mr WADSWORTH - I guess if you look at the key drivers for this project, the Victorian Government, more broadly, is doing other things, particularly with VicRoads and TAC, in terms of fatalities and injuries and that is part of their core business. Ours is public land management, dealing with some those conflict issues and land degradation issues and the like. So the reason we are interested in how these things are reported is that funds tend to flow to where the injuries and fatalities are seen to be. At the moment there is very little government funding to address those issues on the public land network - in the parks and the forests. That is a reflection of the data not being able to tell government that this is where you should spend some of your money because it is a reasonable problem. At the moment it is not seen to be, from a road safety point of view, a big enough issue to start to allocate a significant or reasonable amount of funding to it. So that is our interest in it because, in getting a more accurate picture, they will be able to better target their expenditure to where the problems lie. If it happens deep in the forest and it is not reported or it is misreported then agencies do not have the hard data to wave the red flag and get some money to attend to those problems. So the genesis of this project again was about conflict and land management issues but we are interested in the data because we think that has funding implications and will help us deal with some of those problems as we see them.

In terms of what we are doing about it, we have been talking to VicRoads about some research programs about how they capture that data. There has been some talk about doing some in-hospital surveys, confidentially, doing a broad sample of riders to find out, in the hospitals, where they were injured and what the nature of their injuries were.

Ms FORREST - De-identified data collection so that there is no risk of prosecution and things like that?

Mr WADSWORTH - Yes. That has not been done but we have been in discussion with VicRoads about trying to get that happening.

Mr PITT - VicRoads is commencing a research project which has as its focus a cost analysis of providing off-road riding facilities with the specific priority aim of reducing injury crash statistics. We are providing some input to that project. I would have to reinforce

the fact that the data is not robust about the accidents, about the extent of them and where they occur. No agency is satisfied that data is robust.

Mr WADSWORTH - For the area that we are looking at, trail bike riding on public land, there is very little research to tap into, very little existing research. It seems to be a reasonably neglected area of research for government. We have started some research projects on behaviours, attitudes and motivators to understand what they want to get out of their recreational pursuits, what motivates them, what their current behaviours are and what their attitudes are to the law because, essentially, we have segments of that recreational community who operate outside our existing suite of laws. So we have off-road riding on a single track, under-age riding, unlicensed, unregistered, but we still do not have good data on the level of that. It is mostly anecdotal but we are doing a lot more data collection in the bush and we are doing a lot more compliance work, so we are starting to get better statistics. That has been interesting because sometimes it debunks some of your thinking.

One of the things we have been concentrating on is noise emissions. We started this project thinking that a significant number of bikes were non-compliant and that is why noise was such an issue, because they had modified mufflers and the like, but we found an 81 per cent compliance rate so it is actually really good. So the problem there, although this is not a road safety issue, is not that bikes are illegally noisy but that they are legally noisy. It is just that the current legal limits and the way that people ride their bikes still result in significant noise that affects residents and other recreational users.

Ms FORREST - Was the threshold of tolerance of these people different in different areas or not?

Mr WADSWORTH - In terms of noise it is because we have a change in demographics in rural areas, so they may not be people who typically own bikes in their family. Traditionally people did; their kids rode bikes on the property and they would go out and ride in the forest. It is a changing demographic because with some people that is not their passion and that is not what they enjoy; they want peace and quiet. It affects businesses. Bed and breakfast operators on private land adjacent to public land have had to close their businesses because no-one wants to stay in their B&B because of all the trail bike noise on the weekends. We have had horse trail operators who have closed down their businesses because they cannot ride on the trails safely because they encounter bikes and the bikes scare the horses so it is no longer a safe operation and people do not have a good experience. They are some of those unintended economic consequences of bike riding that also have some safety-related issues.

Some of the other issues for us are under-age riding in the bush. We could talk a little bit about the sales stats but essentially the sales growth for what are loosely termed off-road bikes or trail bikes and mini-bikes and the like has been pretty steady and that is all feeding demand for places to ride. In the Victorian context, and this is true nationwide, areas that were set up by clubs, or leased land where members of the public could ride in a controlled environment - so they catered for under-age and motocross and those sorts of things - have historically been crowded out by the pushing out of the urban fringe. Suddenly they are surrounded by neighbours that do not like the noise and over years they lobby local councils. The councils severely restrict their hours in the first instance so a lot of these places might only operate one Sunday a month for something like half a

day. If that is your passion and your pursuit and suddenly you can only go riding one day a month, where else are you going to do it? It is going to drive you into rogue behaviour essentially, onto whatever available bit of public land or private land you can find. You have had the legally available venues, where it can be a controlled experience, closing down and being pushed further out. That feed that demand for public land as a bit of a haven to go riding in because it is an area of last resort, if you like.

Where parents have invested money for their child to buy a minibike or the like they are not going to walk away from that purchase. Having made it they are going to want to send their kid riding, so we get under-age riders in the bush often riding without their parents, and we will often find under-age riders with their parents. Parents in those situations are trying to do what they see as the responsible thing. They are teaching their son or daughter to ride safely so that when they come of age they have some skills to ride.

We frequently are requested to lower the legal age limit for riders to be licensed. In Victoria in recent years it increased. It is 18 years now, so you have to be 18 before you can even apply for your learner's permit. People around 17, 16 and 15 are getting to that age where they want to ride bikes and often will on private land and often will illegally on public land. We have closed down legal venues for them. Not just in Victoria but also nationwide it is very hard to find available land for those venues to operate.

Ms FORREST - I think a lot of them come to Tasmania.

Mr WADSWORTH - You get some of that because Tassie is seen to be a place where you can take your ATVs and whatnot and different rules apply. Each State is dealing with this in different ways. In my options paper I spent a bit of time talking to land managers to get a feel for how they were responding to it. It is a real matrix. The land managers seem to be trying different things and having varying degrees of success, but mostly not much success at all. It is creating a real headache for them because the choices you make as a government and as a land manager have great ramifications for the scale of the problem you deal with in the future.

I would say from my observations in Tassie that the Ride Around Tassie program to some extent has initially diminished problems but now it is Feds and local demand and now you have burgeoning expectations and people wanting greater access to more road network, which has been the experience in other States too. In West Australia where they set up some venues for off-road riding and weren't heavily regulated they had a lot of problems. There are great aerial photos of the area they set aside for people to ride around. They crisscross and you can see track network and then you see this network of tracks radiating out from it. So you start off with an area that you try to patrol, having provided a place where they can ride but, depending on the riding style and the type of riding they want to do, they can get sick of it and then seek to get a different experience out in the broader network. So understanding where the demand is coming from and the riding experience riders want is pretty important before you start making choices.

The research we are doing at the moment is trying to tap into some of that - what riding experience they want and is it a good fit for public land, should it be provided on private land, by private entrepreneurs? We make a lot of assumptions that are not evidenced based and we are trying to understand what riders want and to what extent government

can cater for that. It is a bit of a learning exercise and it's hopefully helping us make better decisions about where government should invest its effort and how it can accommodate these users.

CHAIR - Assuming a person had a licence and riding a motorcycle was registered, what is the difference in the insurance cover that person would have between riding in a public place lawfully and in a private property with authority?

Mr WADSWORTH - It is probably a question for TAC and VicRoads. I couldn't answer with authority on that one.

CHAIR - You were saying that sometimes people report that they were riding on private property when in fact they were on public property. I am not sure what the motivation would be for them to do that.

Mr PITT - To avoid prosecution for riding unlicensed and unregistered.

CHAIR - I see what you mean; they would do that if they were unlicensed?

Mr PITT - Yes.

CHAIR - Or unregistered.

Mr PITT - If I were 14 and I had a crash and broke my leg I would report that it had happened on private land.

CHAIR - I understand.

Ms FORREST - Do you have any idea how many of these riders use the appropriate safety equipment such as helmets and leathers and things like that? I know they are not on bitumen but they can be on fairly rocky tracks.

Mr PITT - Yes. We have engaged with in excess of 2 000 riders in the course of 2008 in our compliance operations. The overwhelming majority of these riders are equipped with good quality and appropriate equipment because we are out on the State forest where people make a specific journey to go riding.

The higher levels of inappropriate riding equipment are found on the urban-rural fringe where youngsters will ride from home unregistered - minibikes, pit bikes - and they will have perhaps saved up enough money to buy a motorcycle but they won't have good quality equipment. The ones we see, by and large, are well equipped with appropriate boots, protective clothing, body armour, gloves, helmets, goggles and really the overwhelming majority are well equipped.

Ms FORREST - The serious ones.

Mr PITT - Yes.

Mr WADSWORTH - We have been doing some in-depth interviews and some focus group discussions with various aged cohorts and amongst the younger riders, particularly the

ones that are at that entry level. They might be under-aged or they might be of age, but particularly when you are testing out a sport and you have limited cash you might make some compromises on safety gear. You might not buy something because you want to get a better bike rather than the more expensive protective gear and you might do without certain things. You get the mix of that entry level where you have inexperienced riders and less investment in gear when they first start out in the sport. Once they move on and have been riding for a few years and have a few spills they learn that it is a worthwhile investment. The investment in their gear is quite significant. I think Roger worked out it was in the order of \$15 000 to \$20 000 for bike, gear, repairs and all those sorts of things. It's not a cheap sport to continue in, but the people who do are really passionate about it. One of the interesting things we are finding in our research is that we better understand what motivates them, how passionate they are and how important a part of their lifestyle it is to be riding because of all they get out of it. We are trying to influence some of the negative behaviours in terms of conflict with residents and environmental degradation. The challenge is that you have people who are really passionate about doing what they're doing and they don't particularly want to change and you have conflict at the other end where we are trying to say, 'We want you to change your behaviour in certain areas so that some of that conflict can be brought down a notch or two'. They are very passionate about their recreation and that is one thing that has emerged out of the study.

Ms FORREST - Do you have any idea about the compliance with safety gear on private land, farms and places such as that?

Mr PITT - This is anecdotal, but I would say it is lower. Adults who take their unlicensed junior riding children to go riding tend to ensure that the children have appropriate equipment. The ones with the highest likelihood of riding without the appropriate equipment will be teenagers whose parents are not taking them riding. So there is that gap in the middle. Once you are 20-plus, the level of equipment seems to improve significantly. We observe people on private land while we are conducting other operations and we do frequently see youngsters riding without appropriate equipment. However, I have never seen children riding without a helmet. I have only seen one person riding without a helmet and he was about 20 years old, but he did have a baseball cap on.

Ms FORREST - I think the cohort there that seems less well prepared would have less disposable income.

Mr PITT - There is no question about that. The point was made to us just last night by a representative of a large motorcycle retailing chain that the single most significant impediment to having riders appropriately equipped was the cost of the equipment and good quality, mid-range equipment including boots, gloves, helmets, goggles, body armour and protective clothing is going to cost you a minimum of \$1 500-\$2 500 and that is not for the high-bling-factor equipment, that is good quality, useable equipment. Parents who are taking their children riding are sometimes spending that much to take 10-, 11- and 12-year-olds riding.

Mr HARRISS - Richard, a moment ago you made a comment that you are seeking to understand the passion with which these people pursue that recreation. One of the researchers at Monash yesterday indicated to us that his view was that motorcycle riding

is inherently a dangerous pursuit. We visited other issues such as horse riding, jet skiing and waterskiing. We need to understand, don't we, that people pursue all sorts of recreational endeavours for whatever reasons. Some of these riders, no doubt, go out into the bush for the scenic beauty and for being away from everybody else. It really will be important as part of your process, and I suspect ours as well, to somehow better understand all of that. We can't just wrap people in cottonwool, notwithstanding the validity of the comment from the researcher at Monash yesterday.

Mr WADSWORTH - Views in the community are highly polarised around trail bike riding. Trail bike riders feel put upon and ostracised and unfairly targeted. There is a polarisation of views. One thing we need to better understand is that if we are going to change behaviours we have to understand what motivates people and also what their attitudes are to prevailing laws, codes of practice and all those sorts of things. If you don't understand some of those basic things, you will spend money really poorly because you will spend it to little effect. At one end of the spectrum we have people wanting to ban that type of pursuit, they want government to come in heavy handed and lock them out of areas. That is just not feasible or sustainable. We have to work with these recreational users because they are significant recreational users. They get a hell of a lot out of their recreational pursuits. In some of the interviews we have done, and so on, one of the things that quite often comes up is how much they get out of it. Some individuals report that if I didn't do this then I might have got into some less savoury things as a teenager; this helped me hold it together and it was a great release. People talk about leaving their cares at home and it really helps them reset their compass. There are a lot of social benefits, I would say, from trail bike riding and a lot of personal benefit that they get from it. There is a broader lens to look through this as well. They don't do it to annoy people or to aggravate people or reduce other people's quality of life.

Mr HARRISS - Or to put their lives at risk.

Mr WADSWORTH - No. They do it for legitimate reasons that are important to them; we have to understand that if we're going to influence them. Even from a road safety point of view, maybe where you've got good stats and you're trying to reduce some of the negative consequences of that sport, you still have to understand what motivates them. The thrill and adrenalin that people get out of riding is very real and frequently comes up when we are interviewing them and doing focus groups. Government can try to provide a really sanitised experience and say we only want you to do X, but if you look at what drives and motivate them, that's not a good fit. So I think we have to pick the battles that we can win.

Ms FORREST - You run the risk of non-compliance there if you push someone. You can have this nice sort of modified version that won't give you a thrill that you're seeking. Everyone likes to feel good. Endorphins are great things, so if you do that, aren't you increasing the risk of their saying, 'Stuff you lot; we're going to go somewhere else where you can't see us'.

Mr WADSWORTH - You only have to look at what they're doing elsewhere to see what they have tried and failed. They have tried to put in permit systems, so riders don't bother getting permits. They tried to regulate the trail network they need to use, and riders create their own trail networks. So there is a fundamentally poor fit there with what government is trying to provide riders and what riders want. That doesn't mean that

government should provide everything that riders want, because that is not feasible and there are other compromises. As a land manager, you're trying to balance the needs of residents, the needs of other recreational users, the environmental impacts of some of these uses, and I guess the road trauma issues as well. That is a mix, but if you don't understand what motivate them, we are very unlikely to influence what they do.

Mr HARRISS - There is also an economic component in amongst all that as well. There's the commercial reality of sales and repairs and tyres and petrol and all those kinds of things, just like there is with any recreational pursuit which might not suit some in the community. People are stupid out in a boat, and drink, and then we have a bit rescue cost to pluck them out of the sea. As a community, we will complain about that because of their stupidity, but there's nothing inherently wrong with going out in a boat or whatever the recreational pursuit. You probably only have to look elsewhere at attempts to control/license people. Can you give us some examples of that?

Mr WADSWORTH - They have a permit to traverse system in New South Wales on some of their tracks. It doesn't work even though it is free. If you look at the way riders plan their rides, it is not that controlled. They will choose an area they want to go to, but they don't necessarily predetermine which roads they want to go on or which tracks or which single track they want to go on. They will go to an area with their friends, and they will see a nice bit of track and away they go. So it not the same as bush walking; I know where the track goes and I'm going to start there and finish there. Trail riding isn't like that; it's a little bit more explorative.

If government says these are the five tracks you can ride on so book ahead and make sure you have your permit or your registration or whatever, that is not really a good fit for how they enjoy their recreation and how they plan it. So in offering it up like that, the danger is - particularly if you allow entrance into that kind of legal-use bracket where they might be under age so you give them some kind of conditional licence or some kind of conditional registration for ATVs and whatnot that you would not normally let on a public road - whether they get what they want out of it. Will that satisfy them and will that grow the demand. If it grows demand how will you be able to manage that and is it manageable? So I guess with governments it is about where you draw that line and what uses you can accommodate with all the other values you are managing and to what extent you cater for it or not.

There is an element of drawing a line and saying this is what we will allow legally and this is what we will not. In Victoria one of the consequences, through road safety issues, is that they have pushed up the legal age at which you can get a licence. One compromise they did make, going back a while now, was rec-registration. They recognised that there were a number of riders out there who had modified bikes from which, because of trial bike riding, things tend to get knocked off - blinkers, mirrors and all that kind of stuff. People were not having fully ADR-compliant bikes for full registration. So they said that we want to bring these people in so they have some kind of insurance cover and they can still operate within the law, so let us offer them recreational registration. People can now legally register bikes that meet certain minimum standards in terms of brake lights and braking and headlamps and those sorts of things, but you could not ride them on an urban road network. That was a way of trying to bring some of those into the fold whilst still feeling like we could manage that. So they still had to be fully licensed. It was a form of registration but the bikes that we

were registering were seen to be sufficiently safe to operate in an environment that was deemed to be okay.

Mr PITT - There are about 130 000 registered motorcycles in Victoria at the present time. We estimate, and VicRoads does not have this data, that about 40 000 to 45 000 are used for trail bike riding and dirt bikes. Of that number, 12 800 have recreational registration, which does restrict their use to certain parts of the road network. They are able to use forest roads and the roads in State parks but they cannot use urban areas, any area with a speed limit of less than 100 kph, on freeways or arterial roads. It is really suitable for people who are going to go trail bike riding in the forest. VicRoads will be able to confirm the precise numbers but it is in the order of 12 800 out of approximately 30 000-40 000 trial bikes.

Ms FORREST - Some of those could be farm bikes used in the bush?

Mr PITT - The bikes that are used on farms can be registered under a different category - primary producer category.

Ms FORREST - Do they have lesser requirements?

Mr PITT - That is right, yes.

Mr WADSWORTH - One of the things that have emerged out of this project is the need for agencies not to work in isolation. Even though the Department of Sustainability and Environment has the lead on this, we have been working with other agencies to try to redress some of the problems that we have between agencies and also with industry. There have been some gaping holes in the information different agencies provide. There are problems with the information they give people on registration and noise emission requirements, conditional registration for farm bikes and all those things that allowed bikes to operate in a way that those agencies did not appreciate. You have some agencies like VicRoads and the EPA that tend to be more urban focused, and that is where their resources are geared up. Then you have the bush areas, so other agencies can manage that and we do not have to give that much attention. But the consequence of that has been real inconsistencies with the information that agencies give out and that has unintended consequences.

Riders have historically received incorrect information from agencies that has made them feel that certain things are okay that actually are not okay. Part of what we have been trying to do is work more closely with agencies. We have good cooperation with Vic Police now and we do joint compliance stuff. There are legislative gaps as well, which make regulating trail bike use 'problematic'. Our officers are empowered under certain acts and can do certain things but they cannot deal with unlicensed and unregistered riders, for example; that is a police matter. So, given that we are encountering riders that are unlicensed and unregistered, we have had to work hard to build good relations with police and they have been really good at coming to the table to get them onto joint operations, and that has been really effective because historically they have not had much of a presence in the bush so they are helping us pick up those issues. It has required agencies to work together.

EPA was not even aware that noise was a problem in rural areas and so we have them involved in the information that is given out. We have developed noise-testing regimes with the EPA.

Ms FORREST - Who are people complaining to? If the EPA were not aware of it being a problem, to whom are these residents complaining?

Mr WADSWORTH - To the police, land managers and to ministers.

Mr DEAN - What is the level of policing of this in the reserve areas and the areas where they are riding? Is that a problem, the actual level of people on the ground that are looking and checking, inspecting and controlling?

Mr PITT - There is a division of the traffic management unit of Victoria Police called the Special Solo Unit and there are seven staff, as I understand it, on that unit who conduct trail bike compliance operations so they are actually mounted on trail bikes and they are working consistently across the whole of the State of Victoria but their resources can also be diverted to other operational requirements, which could be search and rescue or running security on some outdoor events and things like that. They are the prime frontline for trail bike compliance but the next step back would be the traffic management units. They are not equipped with motorcycles to actually engage with riders where the riders are.

Mr DEAN - I am not quite sure what they are called here, but are national parks people engaged in those operations, are they actually out there at times policing and controlling the reserves in the forest areas?

Mr WADSWORTH - In the parks more so, and I think amongst the trail bike riding community there is greater acceptance that parks are kind of special places and you will not do the same things in parks that you will do in the other half of the public land network, the State forests. There are differences in the way they use different land estates to an extent but, in terms of the land manager presence on the ground, it is pretty sparse. It is better in parks because they have higher ranger numbers and they are out there more on weekends and so on. With the State forests part of our land estate it is of a lower order. You talk to riders who have ridden and never seen anyone out there and you talk to some riders now who have seen the police or us reasonably frequently but that is probably more in the last couple of years when we have scaled up our efforts.

The challenge with trail bike riding is they are fast, they are highly mobile and if you are in a four-wheel drive you have no chance and you do not want to pursue offenders whilst the police and the special solos can and will. We do not want to pursue offenders because you do not want to have all the attendant risks of pursuit and the danger of injury that might come with that. Almost it is an overreaction to what we want to achieve anyway.

Ms FORREST - These police you talk about, the special solos, are they identifiable as police? Do they have a marked bike?

Mr PITT - Yes.

Ms FORREST - A rider would know they have met the police?

Mr PITT - There is no question. When you come across a guy in a blue uniform and they have their police label on, riding an orange KTM and he rides like a real gun, they know they have met the police.

Ms FORREST - These are guys who really love trail bike riding and have gone into that section of the force.

Mr PITT - Within the trail bike rider community there is incredibly high respect for the capabilities of the special solo squad, they are out riding their bikes every day and they are some of the best riders and they do not try to get away from them.

Mr DEAN - The other point that I wanted to raise was your educational levels. What are you doing in that regard? The youth involved in this - and I had three sons who were involved in it, ardent trail bike riders - do it for the risk, the challenge and the thrill of it. They do not think that they are ever going to be injured or that there is ever going to be an accident. That is the way they see it. What are your levels of education, your publicity and all of that?

Mr WADSWORTH - With this project it has always been our intent that what we are trying to achieve is some longer-term behavioural change. It is more of a hearts and minds and an understanding thing. Those things that motivate them are very real and are at odds with some of the other values you are trying to manage for. The education side of things is really important. Working out how best to get information to riders, what form it should take and who they regard as credible sources of information is really important. We are doing some research at the moment to explore that. We are interviewing riders and retailers to get a better understanding of what information needs they have and who they trust as sources of information. One thing that is pretty clear is that one of their prime sources is their mates. Some will get it from bike shops, a lot get it from the Internet - the Internet is a real source of information sharing. The technology now is such that people will go out with GPS and share shape files and pass them on to their mates, so they can know the non-legal track network through sharing those files but, typically, also through going with mates who know that patch. If they don't know an area of bush but are keen to go there, they'll go with a friend who has been there and will tag along and get to know it. It is very much a hands-on sharing of information. On the Internet you can join up for a ride with people you don't know on trail bike web sites where someone says, 'I'm going to lead a tour out to here' and people jump on. These are no-cost things often and so they learn that way.

What we are trying to do is understand the sources of information they use and to tap into those, but it is hard for government to have a credible voice. One of the things we are also trying to work on is with industry and the information they give out, not just at the bike shop in terms of where they can ride et cetera but also the products they sell. One thing that feeds demand is the availability of certain things that we might regard as undesirable. Little pit bikes and monkey bikes et cetera you can't legally ride anywhere but they are freely sold without any information that you can't ride them on public roads or on public land. People will buy after-market mufflers that don't meet Australian design rule standards so they are excessively and illegally noisy, but they put it on

because it looks good. It is a way of modifying your bike and making it look special. There are all the things that industry does that feed into some of the problems.

Mr DEAN - That was an issue that was raised with us in Tasmania, that on the market now there are trail bikes that are poor quality. There is a cheap bike - I think it was a Chinese bike, from memory - and it was identified as a cause of some of the accidents that were occurring. Is that an issue?

Mr PITT - There is an absolute plethora of these. The sales data that we have from motorcycles issued by FCAI does not include these motorcycles that are sold outside of the established dealership networks. They tend to be sold by online sellers through eBay.

Ms FORREST - We heard that a container will come in full of them to be sold.

Mr PITT - That's correct. The typical selling price for one of these motorcycles, which has a 125 cc engine and is capable of easily achieving 80 kph to 90 kph, is about \$500-\$600. It makes them very accessible. My understanding, without being a professional engineer but just by observing, is that the quality of the brakes, tyres, suspension, frame construction, controls and every aspect are of poor quality. There are, however, bikes of a similar appearance which are engineered to much better standards but if you are 15 and doing a paper round or working at McDonald's you don't wait until you have \$2 500 to get your motorcycle, you buy it as soon as you have \$500. Figures that came from Australian Customs, which were relayed to us by a member in the motorcycle industry, indicated that whereas in a year approximately 100 000 motorcycles were imported to Australia through the regular distribution network, these motorcycles had sales of maybe 80 000, which are unreported.

Mr WADSWORTH - They are not required to meet Australian design rule standards so all the things such as meeting noise emission standards, engineering standards - we were talking to some riders last night who were talking about a mate who had one of these little mini bikes and the frame broke on him when he was riding it. They are not that well engineered, so there are certainly issues there. They are cheap and available and from a road trauma and land management point of view it is highly undesirable that those bikes are being sold in the way they are, and in the unregulated way they are. People aren't get good information to inform them that perhaps it is not a good choice.

Mr DEAN - What are you doing about that?

Mr WADSWORTH - We are trying to get a better understanding of where riders get their information from. We are working with the industry on how we can get better information out, so we are working on point-of-sale brochures. In the retail shops you can get a brochure that explains some of these things. With VicRoads we are going to be doing a brochure that goes out to all riders with registration renewals. They will get a brochure when they renew their registration that will tell them about some of these issues so that they are better informed. We are feeding into the Internet forums and the Internet through providing better information there.

Ms FORREST - Are you providing links on some of these web sites that you join a trail bike ride - links to information?

Mr WADSWORTH - We are having a presence that we have never had on those Internet sites. We are putting articles into popular bike magazines. We are attending expos and events to get the word out on some of these basic issues. There is a lack of information and people are reasonably poorly informed about some of these things. Government and industry need to get out there repeatedly and over the medium to longer term to get those messages out if you're going to change those purchasing behaviours.

Ms FORREST - So the false economy of buying a bike like that, is that one of the things you're saying? If you buy a cheap bike through these non-approved measures, you run the risk of it only lasting for your first bike ride basically.

Mr WADSWORTH - For parents too, if your son or daughter is interested in this at a young age - 14, 15 or whatever - and you don't know that they are going to stick at it and you know how expensive a good bike and all the protective gear, to some people it will seem like a reasonable purchase to buy that cheap bike. You know it is not going to last but maybe it is like piano lessons - they're not going to stick at that either, so give them the cheap bike. If the interest continues, they will step up a notch. It is kind of an entry-level bike for young kids.

Mr PITT - I have an additional concern and that is these bikes, which are the least suitable for use, are sold almost exclusively to the most vulnerable rider cohort.

Mr DEAN - With the cheaper import that doesn't meet the standards, is the Government looking at doing something about that, stopping it? If we see the sale of a product that comes into this State that doesn't meet the standards - toys, for instance - they can be stopped and can't come into this country unless they meet certain standards and qualities. Are you looking at that?

Mr WADSWORTH - It is the problem of being a State agency and these issues are regulated and standards are set nationally and internationally. The Australian design rule standards fall into line with international conventions. The Australian market is not a huge market necessarily so we can't ask for different standards for bikes that are radically different from what they want overseas. In terms of this market, which is outside Australian design rule regulations and the National Transport Commission scope, they are selling a bike that they don't advertise as being available for use on public road networks. They are saying, 'This bike has a legitimate outlet, and that is on private land. If you operate on private land, you don't need to meet all those Australian design rule standards and so on'. It does have a legitimate use but what is happening is that people are taking up those bikes and using them in areas that legally they can't be used in.

Ms FORREST - Are you saying they can be sold in Australia because they can be sold for a particular purpose? The problem is they are being used for other purposes.

Mr WADSWORTH - Yes - that they are not intended or constructed for.

Mr PITT - Within the Department of Justice in Victoria, Consumer Affairs Victoria is aware of this issue. It has been brought to their attention by the Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce and myself. They have investigated the sale of these products and find no grounds to intervene in the sale because they recognise that they are a legal product.

There is usually in the documentation a disclaimer advising people not to use it for certain kinds of use. When they did have a prosecution it was because the instruction manual failed to show sufficient detail for the safe operation of the equipment. That was all; it was because they did not have a proper operation manual. So it is quite difficult for consumer affairs and like bodies to bring any further regulatory weight to bear on this one.

Mr WADSWORTH - The broad category of off-road bikes now exceeds the sale of road bikes, an 82 per cent increase from 2003 to 2008. They are national figures. We estimate that around 30 per cent of bikes are ridden illegally in terms of being unlicensed or unregistered. What I did not add there is that the percentage of bikes that ride on single track, which is illegal in Victoria, is high. When you talk to riders that is the network that they love and that is an issue because that is unregulated and it has all sorts of attendant issues.

ATVs are about 15 per cent and, again, the issue is that they can't be legally ridden on public roads. Noise is the biggest problem. In Victoria there is high level of compliance but people are still annoyed by noise.

There is an extensive illegal track network. Legal venues are diminishing, restricted hours - all States are struggling with some of this stuff.

So with our stuff - and this is not necessarily road-safety related - we want to reduce impacts on residential areas, environmental impacts, and have better compliance with the law in terms of licence registration and noise emission standards. We want to give riders some stuff too. We want to give them better facilities, better information, research to inform how we go about things, and better inter-agency and also industry coordination in service delivery and the information we give out.

Effecting long-term behavioural change is hard and you have to sustain that effort. That is always a problem with government when they give you initiative funding - how you continue it on beyond the four years.

I guess riders have not been contacted by government. They are not a group we have engaged with actively so they are suspicious of government and they are worried about how government will react. In Victoria there have been areas of public land that have been closed to riders and the road network ripped up and rehabilitated because of resident-related issues, so they see that as a bit of a test case for what might happen elsewhere so they are concerned.

Ms FORREST - So they think the government is there to stop them doing what they want?

Mr WADSWORTH - Yes, I think so.

Ms FORREST - To take away their options rather than to work with them.

Mr WADSWORTH - Yes.

There are high levels of conflict in some areas. We have had isolated incidents where residents or other community members have taken the law into their own hands and have

strung wire across tracks at head level, driven stakes into the ground, those sorts of things. They are isolated but it is a measure of the level of conflict and in some cases outrage in some areas of the community.

Ms FORREST - Have people come to grief on any of those things?

Mr WADSWORTH - Not that we know of but we have had reports and we have had photos of them and we have visited areas where it has happened, so it is real.

Mr PITT - We have seen evidence of this and they are injury accidents. We have had bicycle riders caught by one that was set-up for motorcycles, and quite badly injured.

Mr WADSWORTH - So in our program there are some things that we see as negotiable and others - changes to the legislation, licensing regulations, permitting under-age riders, changes to land use legislation - have been put in the non-negotiables because of the short time frame of this project but I think they will become issues in the medium to longer term.

Ms FORREST - How long is the project?

Mr WADSWORTH - It is a four-year funded initiative.

CHAIR - Is registration in the non-negotiables?

Mr WADSWORTH - Yes.

CHAIR - Is that being proposed as a requirement for the use of trial bikes and riding on public land?

Mr WADSWORTH - We are saying the existing laws will not change over the life of this project because VicRoads, for their own reasons, upped the age to 18 years at which you can get a licence. They were driven by some of their research and their concerns about road trauma and when riders are sufficiently prepared to be able to ride. So, whilst there is pressure to lower that age, in the scope of this project that is not in the short term.

CHAIR - But is registration required on private land as well?

Mr WADSWORTH - No, not on private land but if you are on public land, yes. The only two classes of registration in Victoria are full registration and recreational registration which allows you to have a more modified bike.

Ms FORREST - And the primary produce registration?

Mr WADSWORTH - Primary producers will typically get a special class of registration that enables them to use public roads between their properties, so it is a very limited use.

Mr PITT - It particularly gives them Transport Accident Commission cover in case of an accident and admits their obligations as far as WorkCover is concerned, so it is really to satisfy occupational health and safety requirements of operating a machine on your private land.

Mr DEAN - Are you able to take out third-party insurance without registration?

Mr WADSWORTH - That has not come up. I would be surprised if it would.

Mr PITT - It would be more expensive than the registration.

Mr WADSWORTH - Because rec. registration only costs about \$60 at the moment. So that is quite cheap and a lot of people do rec. reg. because it is quite cheap.

Mr PITT - The situation is different in New South Wales where they are separate animals.

Mr WADSWORTH - The stage we are in at the moment is the research stage so this will be completed in March. We are doing focus group surveys with interviews, on-line surveys and stuff like that. The stuff we get out of that will be quite informative and it will, I think, change the focus of some of what we are doing.

We are building things like trail bike unloading areas, because one of the things we are trying to do is move them away from areas where they are causing conflict to areas where they can safely unload. But also it is where we can give them information. Also we have a couple of routes that we sign post so that if they are new to the area they can follow those routes, because often the problem is that riders new to the area will just ride up and down the boundary line between private property and the State forest and drive everyone crazy.

We are introducing some reduced noise zones. They are voluntary but the idea is that we are trying to say to riders, 'If you are in this area it is a smaller area and sensitive to noise because of residents or other uses, so you can ride through here but just lower your revs and ride respectfully'. That has been working in some of the areas where we have started to put it in. These are some of the signs we worked on with VicRoads. You enter an area; you see a signpost when you enter it and you see a signpost when you leave, so then you can resume your normal riding. That is about getting some voluntary behaviour change. Riders are more open to that kind of thing and the response to this has been reasonably good and positive.

Ms FORREST - So you have positive feedback from the residents or businesses?

Mr WADSWORTH - There have been towns where they quite like the riders coming there. They pump up the local economy but there are some noise conflicts in certain areas and we signpost those. We have riders who understand the need to do that, and particularly the local riders will educate the ones that come in. You get some behaviour change out of that, which has been useful. Because we are trying to get some behaviour change out of riders we have to work with them; we have also to be seen to give something back to them. They are a recreational user we have traditionally ignored. What we are trying to do here is give them some facilities that are useful to them. So this is one of the unloading areas and a shelter that they use in wet weather. They will change out of their gear and do pre-ride planning and all that kind of stuff.

You can see the demographic we have. It is a mixture of age groups but this kind of group is quite common. We will give them information, the map, the legal road network, the sensitive areas that we want them to moderate their behaviour in.

Ms FORREST - Are there many women out there?

Mr PITT - Fewer than 5 per cent.

Mr WADSWORTH - We have fairly robust, long-lasting facilities. This is an example of the trail-riding routes. This does not stop them from using all the rest of the road network. This is just a couple of routes that we promote for them if they are new to the area and they can explore it. It uses the legal of road network and it is a good introduction, but we do know that riders do not necessarily just stick to this.

Mr PITT - The length of these riding routes varies between 40 and 80 kilometres for your riding loop, so it is not just a very short one.

Ms FORREST - Do the riders know that it is not just a little Mickey Mouse trip around the block?

Mr PITT - Yes. The information you saw the riders looking at that tells you the length of the route also gives some information on the kind of riding experience that you will have if you ride on it.

Mr HARRISS - Roger, you just used the term 'riding loop'; does that suggest one-way traffic?

Mr WADSWORTH - No, we have been really conscious not to make it one way. We have talked to riders and put the proposition to them in focus groups about whether they would like directional flow tracks, one way. They initially say, 'Yes, that would be a really good idea', but then others will say, 'Hang on, if you create a one-way track it almost creates the perception that it is safer to go faster'. What they will say is that often you will have a slow rider or a rider that has stopped for some reason or a rider that has dropped something and has to go back or is about out of fuel so he takes the shortest way back and some riders say that will actually increase the safety issues. It is interesting that you get that, so I think whilst some report that that would be a good thing to do, others says that there might be some issues with it.

In terms of education, there is stuff on the web in the trail bike web forums. That has been really useful where we see a whole bunch of commentary on an issue and at least we can interject some factual information, and that has been quite useful.

Ms FORREST - Do you identify who you are when you participate in the sites?

Mr PITT - I am EnviroRider so I make it very clear in all the postings and actually give my name and the fact that I am DSE trail bike project manager. The riders actually come to us with a lot of questions. They make comments, provide feedback and it is without question the most valuable fast communication tool that we have and it enables us to have a very targeted communication channel.

Mr WADSWORTH - It is hard for government, though, because it is not strictly regulated. You can put out a little brochure and you can think about it and get it all signed off and checked off, but the web is a really immediate forum so you have to be sufficiently well informed and prepared to engage at that level. I think if we are not prepared to engage at that level we are going to lose this education information.

Ms FORREST - Is there a risk, though, that you could fall foul of the government position on something by blogging?

Mr PITT - We are quite conservative and only put information into the public domain which we have already had cleared and approved, so we do not actually fly kites in the breeze.

Ms FORREST - Not even to get a reaction?

Mr PITT - We are not seeking a reaction.

Mr WADSWORTH - There is plenty of writer commentary that is out there to get a reaction from us.

Mr PITT - As an example, in a two-week period for some of the threads that we are communicating with riders we will get 7 000 or 8 000 views on that information, whereas if we have a look at the number of people coming to our own DSE web site it is only a fraction of that, so we have actually found it more convenient to actually use the communication sources that the riders are currently using than try to force them to use ours.

Ms FORREST - Do you start threads or you just participate?

Mr PITT - On occasions we will start, yes.

Mr WADSWORTH - A lot of these are non-traditional forms of government communication. We are not historically freed up to engage in that way so it is a bit of a challenge for us.

We have been going to key rally events where we can talk with thousands of riders. We had a stand at the expo. We had a joint stand with the Victorian Motorcycle Advisory Committee at Jeff's Shed earlier in the year. We are developing point-of-sale operation, as we said earlier - the registration mail-out. We have done an educational DVD which is really focused around rider skills and safe riding but with some subtle messages about care for the environment and keeping your noise down and those sorts of things. That has gone out to MX TV on the Foxtel network and that reaches a broad audience as well, so some of that has been quite useful.

We have some on-line mapping stuff where you can pick an area of public land, zoom in and get maps of the legal road network. That is our most up-to-date data so we are not dealing any more with the old technology of hard copy maps. Into that we will interject our stuff like the reduced noise zones. There are overlays so people can see where they are when they are pulling up maps for the ride networks. We are trying to clarify through things like point of sale what the law is in terms of what bikes can legally be used on public roads et cetera.

This one here is called the Stockman's Rally. We have purchased bikes and we have a number of DSE and VP trained officers who are accredited to ride trail bikes so we are a presence out there doing the face-to-face stuff with riders on trial bikes - partly education and partly compliance.

We have attended, in the last 12 months, five major car rallies. We get big numbers at those events, 500-800 people, and we do route checking and promote the noise testing and the noise compliance issues there.

Ms FORREST - Do you actually have the opportunity for people to have their bikes tested?

Mr WADSWORTH - Yes. We worked on this with the EPA in terms of the testing regime. We put noise reports into them for non-compliant bikes and then they handle any prosecutions. The core thing here, in the case of noise, is the message to riders that noise is an issue and it is in their interest to be legally compliant - you won't get hassled or pinged. We do these at events and also when we are doing compliance patrols.

Of 800 bikes tested, 81 per cent had compliance. The problem is the after market mufflers; they are the ones that tend to fail. They do not meet Australian design rules standards in terms of current noise emission requirements. Also with some of them you can buy a bike with a compliant muffler and it will just have cap on the end that you knock-off and your bike is instantly noisier. The whole issue of noise and people's understanding of it and the impacts of it is something that we are trying to educate people about. We are also saying to industry that it is not in your long-term interests and your sales interests to keep selling non-compliant mufflers because it will create tension in the community and that may lead to access problems.

Illegal tracks: I could bring lots of photos about damaged areas but there is a lot of it. I mentioned compliance patrols with police, Parks Victoria, and we work with the EPA and have done a lot of work with VicRoads in terms of licensing, registration and we are developing our educational collateral.

Compliance operations: probably in the last year we did about 60 days of operations jointly between DSE and Victoria Police and Parks Victoria - more than 1400 bikes.

Ms FORREST - Do you do that on different weekends, during the week?

Mr WADSWORTH - Mostly weekends.

Mr PITT - And public holidays.

Mr WADSWORTH - Traditionally we have not been there so it is going out there when riders are out there. You can see that we observe a certain number of bikes but we only engage a certain number because some see us and go the other way. The common offences are off-road riding, unlicensed and unregistered, and varying levels of compliance across the board. Again, we are trying to change riders' behaviours. We do not necessarily want to go heavy handed in the first instance so we will use official warnings where that is appropriate because then they are on record and if they repeat the offence we proceed to prosecution.

We have 15 accredited riders, with more in training, and seven bikes and that has been great for face-to-face stuff with riders. They actually really appreciate that we are out there on bikes dealing with them at their level and we are not anti-bike. So from an education and engagement point of view that has been fantastic.

CHAIR - So the emphasis seems to be on regulation and noise, matters like that. Are injuries not a major problem?

Mr WADSWORTH - It is a bit of an unknown and as we said earlier there is not good data on it.

CHAIR - In Tasmania some members of the medical profession are really concerned about this because of periodic spates of injuries. On one weekend I think at Launceston General Hospital about 17 young people were brought in for treatment.

Ms FORREST - And that is only the hospital; that is not GPs.

CHAIR - Yes; that is the accident and emergency.

Mr WADSWORTH - What kind of bikes were they riding and where?

CHAIR - I do not know.

Ms FORREST - They only off-road, though, I think you said. Not on the roads, off them.

CHAIR - This is all off-road, and the same doctor sent an e-mail two or three days ago saying that last weekend there were quite a number of injuries. I don't know how many, but they are concerned with off-road.

Mr WADSWORTH - I will show you some images because they will show you some of the riding styles riders are after. You can see they will create their own track networks through the forest. This taps in to what they are after, the kind of thrill and adrenalin factor and the technical challenge of riding that you won't get on a formed road for four-wheel drive vehicles. You have people riding through streams and up stream banks.

You can see how their recreation gets promoted. One of the issues in Victoria is with the drought, there is that headwater in the north-west. The issues are not just illegal use, but the damage to the environment. In some of these areas when you get rain you get massive sedimentation and there are issues with town water quality. Some dry river banks, like the Woomera River at Horsham, become a conduit for underage riders to jump out of the back yard into the river. They ride up and down the river bank with their mates and it is dry, and all that sort of stuff. It is great fun, but there are many safety issues, such as those you are talking about.

Mr PITT - On this one we had a focus group with responsible riders in the age group of 35 to 50. They were asked for their response to this, and they said that it looked like an ideal location for taking junior riders. There wasn't any environmental concern whatsoever, they felt it was a very safe place to take kids because there are not too many trees.

Mr WADSWORTH - Some of the backlash from these issues for farmers concern Landcare groups that put in a tremendous amount of time revegetating and rehabilitating, and that can be undone by trail bike riders who may not appreciate the damage they're doing. Again, depending on the type of forest, it can be quite easy or quite difficult to create a trail. We often see them when they come off the single track on to the road network. We caught that one because he crashed his bike, so we got to chat to him.

Ms FORREST - You probably distracted him.

Mr WADSWORTH - Probably. You can see the kind of terrain and the challenge they are getting out of this. Whilst we will have some issues with it because of the environmental impacts and other issues, and the safety issues -

CHAIR - Amphibious vehicles.

Mr WADSWORTH - Yes. Some of the things riders wouldn't appreciate is sedimentation in streams can put silt over eggs and affect fish breeding. There is always stuff they don't know, and part of what we are trying to do is package up that information in a way that may influence some of that behaviour so they have an understanding. You can see the challenge and the fun they have in this. In terms of where you get big numbers of riders you start to get a fair bit of fragmentation and erosion.

Ms FORREST - The risk of slipping in the wet and then slamming into a tree is pretty real, isn't it?

Mr WADSWORTH - Their preference for riding isn't in the hot, dry months, it's in the cooler, wetter months. A bit of mud, a bit of dirt is considered all good.

Mr PITT - Riders are very accepting of the risk which they personally generate.

Mr DEAN - That's the attraction.

Mr WADSWORTH - It's part of what motivates them. You can see the impacts on the landscape, but from a rider's perspective they are having a really good ride with their mates. It is a very social activity and it's a great challenge. There's an awareness of the risk, and that's why they ride in groups and they are quite cognisant of that, but it's a risk they are prepared to take in pursuing their recreation.

Ms FORREST - Spot the women.

Mr WADSWORTH - Yes. This may be a typical demographic for one of the larger enduro events.

CHAIR - They are all well matured, or just about all of those are.

Mr PITT - The age cohort of 30 to 39 is the peak one.

CHAIR - I was thinking it would be teenagers.

Mr PITT - No, not at all. They can't afford it.

Mr WADSWORTH - If you think of this age group, they are experienced riders, they like to do their own thing and do not particularly like to be told what to do, so you need to think about how to influence a group like that. They are probably not the most vulnerable group in terms of road trauma and injuries, but in terms of the numbers of users they are one of the more significant groups and the question is, how do you influence the behaviours and actions of a group like that, quite mature people and quite experienced.

Ms FORREST - Some of them are probably very well educated as well. You have done the focus groups. Do you seek their input and their ideas about it?

Mr WADSWORTH - The key part of the focus groups is asking them what they want. We are trying to better understand them at this stage, and what motivates them, and then trying to work out where we have common ground and what things we can work collaboratively on. I have some photos of focus groups that we did to get community, resident and local council and rider input into what we are doing in just one of the trail visitor areas. These are photos of another event, what is called the high country ride, and I think a local resident who is expressing concern about environmental impacts -

Ms FORREST - She lost her bike.

Laughter.

Mr WADSWORTH - I do not think she would be on one. You can see the increasing fragmentation of the forest in some areas and the impacts it has. This shows a suspicion of government as there is a sign urging people to make a submission because 'they are about to close all your tracks'. So there is concern from the rider's perspective that the Government is going to take away something they highly value. There are some testing programs we are doing with the EPA and I think that is about it. I just wanted to give you a snapshot of some of the images.

CHAIR - Thank you, that is very good. You do not have a print-out of some of those statistics for the area?

Mr WADSWORTH - If you send us an e-mail we can provide them. That is no drama.

CHAIR - Thank you, that would be good.

Mr WADSWORTH - Are there any other particular issues you would want to approach or have we covered all of them?

CHAIR - You said you are working with VicRoads. What is the general thinking and what provisional plans are emerging as a result of the work being done?

Mr PITT - I am not able to speak for what work falls within VicRoads' responsibilities. What we see as the synergy between ourselves and VicRoads is if we have a broad approach to better managing trail bike riding activity, by promoting responsible riding through eliminating unregistered riders, unlicensed riders or directing them to appropriate place, getting people to be noise compliant and to be accepting of the need

for some form of regulation across the board. We are going to do several things. Not only are we addressing those discrete issues, but we are making riders more aware of the fact that when they do go to ride in the forest there are responsibilities for them to match up to, that there are standards, and that there will be regulatory authorities - ourselves and the police - who will be in the forest to ensure that they are met. We will work to reduce the level of non-compliant riding because it seems - and this is anecdotal - that there is a disproportionate representation of non-compliant riders who are presenting in crash statistics.

Mr WADSWORTH - The opportunity with VicRoads really is better collaboration and better understanding so that government presents a consistent position and puts out consistent information. Where we identify there are gaps and problems we will work collaboratively on them. One thing that I do think is missing and that we are having conversations with VicRoads on is the data that informs what government does. That is the missing piece of the puzzle and I think that is missing nation-wide. We do not have good empirical data on the true nature of road trauma and injuries because it is hard to get and there are deficiencies in the way we currently collect that information.

Ms FORREST - Who should be tasked with that and who should be the collector of the data?

Mr WADSWORTH - It is in government's interests to do it, and I think probably VicRoads would be the lead agency. They respond to the knowns they have at the moment, so I guess it is about us shining a light on this as a problem and putting some research effort into it to getting better data. Then based on that data, which may or may not support our anecdotal evidence, it may lead to some changes in priorities for government in where it spends its money on road safety.

Ms FORREST - I think VicRoads and the police generally would have a great deal of difficulty getting accurate data because they're not informed about a lot of these crashes. The kids or people who end up at the GP with injuries are not recorded anywhere. It seems that some who even go through the Department of Emergency Medicine are not recorded in a meaningful and consistent way. Is it really the Department of Health that should be engaged here at least to make a serious attempt confidentially to see the de-identified data collection in the process, collect this data and have a link with the GP? I am not sure how it works in Victoria with the GPs. Are they funded and managed federally?

Mr WADSWORTH - I don't know.

Ms FORREST - GPs are different; they don't operate within the State health system in Tasmania. You would have to have some agreement for them to collect that sort of data. It relies on self-reporting.

Mr PITT - It does, because people will attend for medical treatment with a broken collarbone and get treatment for that, but the cause of the injury may not be recorded and captured.

Mr WADSWORTH - It shouldn't matter who in government does it, but I think the issue is that it is a neglected area that government needs better information on to make better-informed decisions.

Ms FORREST - We probably need a multi-agency to look at it.

Mr WADSWORTH - Yes. We will be pursuing this with VicRoads and it may be that it ends up being led by another department. I don't think that is the issue; I think the issue is that it's an area we have insufficient information on and we need to better understand it because there may be some serious issues in terms of injury and fatalities.

Mr DEAN - Some form of compulsory reporting, perhaps.

Mr WADSWORTH - I am sure there are plenty of precedents for how you collect this sort of information.

Ms FORREST - You need to task someone with it; you need to make it a requirement. There have been times in the past in Tasmania when they have collected data in the Department of Emergency Medicine, looking at things such as child abuse - when a child presents with a broken arm one week and then something else the next week. There was a time when that data was not collected. These children presented, were treated and then went home and there was no collection. There are ways of doing it to address a particular problem.

Mr WADSWORTH - Yes, it is hidden. The true nature of it, I think, is a little bit obscured at the moment. Did that come out in your conversation with VicRoads and the TAC in terms of that being an area?

Ms FORREST - Only briefly. We didn't delve into their data collection as much with them.

Mr PITT - I would conclude that TAC would have reasonable statistics for all the people to whom it is paying compensation, but the grey area is those people who are not receiving compensation and who were treated and received their treatment outside the TAC system.

Ms FORREST - You talked about people being reluctant to be accurate in their description of where the incident occurred. Again, that is the same thing with a child abuse situation where people are trying to hide what has happened. There must be a way of doing it.

Mr PITT - When a person is attending for medical treatment, the medical practitioner may delve and find that they fell off a motorcycle, but the general practitioner has no interest in where it happened.

Ms FORREST - That's why you need to expand it. There needs to be some sort of structure that gives a consistent data collection approach, if they are identified as having an injury resulting from an off-road event, that they then record data including the location and report it back to a central agency.

Mr PITT - Have you engaged in conversations with the Monash University Accident Research Centre?

Ms FORREST - We met with them yesterday but we didn't really go into the data collection side of it so much.

Mr PITT - With Dr Erin Cassell?

Ms FORREST - No.

Mr PITT - She was the lead in conducting a very good survey of available data, and it was research that they conducted on behalf of VicRoads. That may illuminate some of the issues that we have spoken of.

CHAIR - Any questions or any other matters? It has been a very comprehensive coverage and thank you very much indeed. Are there any points you would like to make before we wind up?

Mr WADSWORTH - I know Victoria is not alone in grappling with some these problems and I have been over to Tassie last year to talk to the Parks people about the issues they have in their recreational working group that they are forming. I know they are dealing with some very similar issues although there are some subtle differences in the nature of the problems you have. I think each State has its own slightly different mix of problems based on their mix of land tenure, their existing legislation and levels of access, because it is quite different in different States. Also the land type, too; Tassie particularly with its beaches. In Victoria you can't drive a vehicle on beaches so we don't have all those problems that some other States have with beach driving and damage to primary dunes and all those sorts of things. So some of your problems are unique but there are also -

Ms FORREST - Aboriginal middens are an issue for us, probably more so than you, in our coastal areas.

Mr WADSWORTH - Yes.

CHAIR - Did you speak with Scott Gadd, do you remember?

Mr WADSWORTH - I spoke with a number of individuals there. Anni McCuaig was my primary contact in going over there but I can't recall all the names of everyone I spoke with.

CHAIR - Scott is the departmental head. He gave evidence to this committee.

Ms FORREST - He told us about all the Victorians coming over.

CHAIR - Did he?

Ms FORREST - Their mud-runners and things like that.

Laughter.

Mr WADSWORTH - Yes, so it is a shared problem and I think some of the issues are national issues too. Some of the problems with the types of vehicles and the types of

uses and the types of information you try to get are problems that almost need to be dealt with on a national level. As you can see, in Tassie you can inherit problems from other States as well; borders aren't an impediment to problems.

CHAIR - Are you aware of any measures taken in other States or Territories about the problem of injuries in off-road use of motorcycles and trail bikes?

Mr WADSWORTH - Certainly in WA it was a more pressing issue. Most of my conversations with other States have been more about the conflict and clashes between residents and other recreationalists about trail bikes and environmental damage. In WA where they had set up some free access areas, that experiment wasn't really working for them. They had I think something like six areas and they were starting to close them down because of the injuries and fatalities they were having, and they were having quite a number of admissions to hospitals. There was an issue about how to appropriately manage and regulate it and who bore the cost with a particular issue as well. Some of these areas had been set up for local councils to manage and they were inheriting all of these costs associated with managing those areas and the debts and fatalities and they were wanting to close them down. So that is an interesting model to look at in that you can see the experiment they tried, but to some extent we are backing away from it because they were closing those areas because it was not seen to be a model that was, I guess, solving their problems.

I know that they have recently been reviewing their trail bike management and have come out with a trail bike strategy and that of itself is presenting challenges because some of the push is for parents to be able to take underage kids on supervised rides and those sorts of things, so again, that throws up a whole bunch of road safety and road trauma issues. It is that perennial problem of what behaviours you legitimise and what behaviours you determine to be unacceptable and draw the line at, and how you effectively regulate it is the main problem. You can draw any line in the sand you like but you have to be able to have some effective implementation of those strategies. But WA particularly had some road trauma issues that they had reported to me and I captured that in that report to some extent.

Mr PITT - I have an observation which would backtrack a little but specifically has to do with one detail regarding crash data and injuries. The data that is available clearly shows that relative to the exposure, if we contrast road riding to what is known as off-road riding or dirt bike riding, dirt bike riding results in a very small number of fatalities but has a relatively high number of low-level injuries, whereas with road bike riding for the same exposure in terms of rider time, length of ride duration, frequency of riding et cetera, a higher proportion of those crashes result in serious injury and fatalities. A number of riders who go trail bike riding say, 'I used to ride a road bike but I don't think it's safe any more', and they choose to ride a trail bike because of their perception that it is safer. They make the point that they are travelling at a lower speed and if they fall off at 30 kph or 40 kph they can pick themselves up, dust themselves off and on they go. So the riders themselves are aware of the safety implications and the data supports the fact that trail bike riding has fewer fatalities and is skewed towards lower-level injuries such as broken ankles, severe bruising, cracked ribs and that kind of thing.

CHAIR - That's interesting.

Mr WADSWORTH - That's the nature of the riding experience. They will talk about a tight track with tight turns and whatever and it can be a thrill riding that at 30 kph because it is a challenge getting around those corners at that speed, but it's not a sufficiently high speed to lead to fatalities. The riding style is a little different to what we get on the open road network.

Mr PITT - The key thing there is that the riders are voluntarily offering the information that they have chosen to transition from being a road bike rider to a trail bike rider because of the safety implications. They feel that riding in a road situation there are too many factors beyond their own control which may cause a crash to occur, whereas when trail bike riding they feel more of the risk is under their own control and they can accept that level of risk which they personally choose.

CHAIR - That will be an interesting aspect for us to pursue with medical witnesses in Tasmania about the number of injuries.

Ms FORREST - I think one of the issues, as Don has highlighted, is that they tend to happen in spates - over long weekends, Easter et cetera - and the Department of Emergency Medicine is overrun with trail bike injuries, but for the rest of the month they won't see any potentially.

Mr PITT - Yes. We have informally had a look at this and anecdotally it is because long weekends, holidays weekends and periods such as this tend to bring out the very occasional rider. The regular hard-core rider will often choose not to ride at these times because there are a lot of inexperienced riders about. It is people who are going out camping and decide to take bikes along as well rather than people who are going specifically for a trail bike riding trip. So the long weekends do bring out the less-experienced and occasional riders.

Ms FORREST - So you're probably going to get an unrealistic look at it if you focus on those times when you have those greater numbers presenting to emergency departments or whatever, because they are the people you're talking about, the ones who perhaps don't have the skills to manage their bike as well as those people who are out there all the time.

Mr WADSWORTH - If you're going to do a bit of research it is not only good to know how they were injured, where they were and what kind of riding they were doing, but also how frequent a rider they are.

Ms FORREST - Yes, and how well equipped they were. The hard-core riders have all the gear but sometimes the ones just going camping - there's only so much you can take when you are camping; you're limited by how big your trailer is.

Mr WADSWORTH - The gear that you have to transport for trail bike riding is significant; the gear bag is huge. It is a significant amount of gear you are taking and if you were going primarily for other reasons you might compromise on a few things.

Ms FORREST - Was there any comment made by the guys who made the choice from on-road riding to off-road riding that they took the same level of care with their protective gear on the road as they did off-road?

Mr PITT - It is my perception that they had a similar level of care.

Ms FORREST - So it wasn't the protective gear they were using, it was the more the speed and uncontrollable factors on the road as opposed to in the bush?

Mr PITT - It is concern about the behaviour of other motor vehicle drivers. They weren't concerned about their ability to control their motorcycle on the road, the road surface or the speed at which they were travelling, they had a singular interest just in the behaviour of other drivers.

CHAIR - Richard and Roger, thank you very much. That has been very interesting and helpful and we appreciate your time.

THE DISCUSSIONS CONCLUDED.