

30th November, 2012

Mr Tom Wise
Clerk of Committees
Legislative Council
Parliament House
HOBART TAS 7000
per email tom.wise@parliament.tas.gov.au

Dear Mr Wise

**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL SELECT COMMITTEE
RURAL ROAD SPEED LIMITS**

As a Tasmanian resident and a frequent user of rural roads for commuting, business and pleasure, I wish to offer to the Committee the following evidence, comments and opinions which I believe are entirely relevant to its Terms of Reference.

The recommendations upon which the Government bases its proposal, to reduce rural road speed limits, are based on unsound reasoning. They propose that, by a 10% reduction in rural road speed limits, Tasmania would enjoy a corresponding 10% reduction in road trauma.

- 1 Studies around Australia and the rest of the world show that speed by itself is *not* the principal cause of road trauma. Rather, study findings consistently show that speed in combination with poor driver training, inexperience, fatigue and drivers under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol represent the deadly cocktail.
- 2 Perhaps THE most comprehensive recent study of the causes of road trauma was conducted in Italy, relating to the incidence of road trauma on the Italian autostrada. That study concluded that the principal cause of trauma was fatigue, linked to adherence to existing maximum speeds allowed on the autostrada. The Italian Government LIFTED allowable speed limits to permit quicker point-to-point travel times and reduced driver fatigue, with an immediate drop in road trauma.
- 3 The Northern Territory recently applied open road speed limits for the first time. The numbers of road accidents including deaths and serious trauma rose in the first year of their application.
- 4 Modern motor-cars are markedly more competent than their forebears, with powerful brakes, a range of safety equipment, and latterly traction control. They are designed to operate safely well beyond any limit of 90km/h.
- 5 The Tasmanian Government's own research (reference the recent media coverage of documents obtained by Rene Hidding MP under Freedom of Information legislation) indicates that the primary cause of road trauma in this state is driver fatigue, not speed in isolation from that or other factors.
- 6 The recommendations on which the Government's proposed reduction of rural road speed limits are irresponsible, for applying a simple arithmetic calculation to the likely reduction in the numbers of road deaths and serious injuries which may result from a lowering of rural speed limits. To predict an annual reduction of four deaths fails to take into account the increased travel times, fatigue, traffic bunching and driver frustration which would most certainly result from application of the proposed limits. There is a strong possibility that the number of deaths and trauma incidents would rise, due to longer travel times and driver fatigue.

- 7 Similarly the recommendations' dismissal of extra travel times as a matter of a few minutes is nothing more than a simplistic arithmetic calculation rather than an attempt to properly quantify the outcomes from implementation of the proposal.
- 8 There is no attempt to quantify the commercial disadvantage of lowered rural road speed limits on travel and delivery times between major centres like Launceston, and those outlying towns and villages who depend on speedy and timely arrivals.
- 9 The question of driver fatigue from increased travel times as they apply to drivers of trucks and commercial delivery vehicles is not addressed, while nationwide evidence recently points toward serious trauma where such drivers exceed allowable travel times between rest periods.

I have observed in rural areas that many drivers lack basic driving skills, are intimidated by other traffic and even bends in the road, and frequently travel at highway speeds well below the allowable maximum. Their behaviour produces tail-backs and frustrated drivers unable to safely overtake on Tasmania's predominantly narrow rural roads. This problem adds yet another element to the causative factors involved in road trauma in Tasmania, but rather than ordering incompetent drivers off the roads, maximum road speeds should make allowance for the fact that point-to-point travel times presently are not accurately reflected by distances involved. Slow-moving timber trucks are yet another cause of driver frustration and fatigue, but which remain unavoidable.

This Government and its predecessors have invested heavily in Targa Tasmania, a now world-famous motoring event which lifts Tasmania's profile and attracts drivers who enjoy this island's spectacular scenery and its uncrowded and scenic road system. While I have no statistics to offer you, I understand that the Government's Special Events secretariat can supply detailed figures on Targa-related visitation. I know with certainty that the Targa and its reputation attract motor clubs to Tasmania in large numbers, returning the Government's investment in supporting the event, and in many cases serving as the catalyst to spend money in Tasmania and ultimately to relocate.

That Tasmania should "lead Australia" in applying the nation's lowest rural road speed limits - as are proposed - invites ridicule rather than approval, and I observe that already this State suffers from some unfair characterisations as being slow and backward, which for commercial reasons it can ill afford. If for political reasons the Legislative Council wishes to be seen to be acting decisively on road trauma, before endorsing lowered rural speed limits please consider recommending the implementation of measures such as rigorous driver training and re-training, or reducing driver alcohol limits to zero, since the practice of nominated drivers seems to be gradually taking hold, and pubs and clubs still survive.

My comments apply to speed limits on sealed rural roads, since from my experience the issues of poor driver training, inexperience, fatigue and intoxication multiply the likelihood of trauma on unsealed roads. That the recommended changes (as last reported) do not apply to the Midland and Bass Highways renders absurd the recommendations' argument that speed of itself is primarily responsible for Tasmania's road trauma, since those roads carry the highest traffic loadings, and must statistically be more prone to road trauma than more lightly used rural roads.

May I urge The Committee and the Legislative Council to seriously question whether the many risks inherent in this half-baked proposal to reduce rural speed limits merits consideration.

Yours sincerely
BRUCE M LINDSAY