

**Department of Transport and Main Roads**  
**Decision Brief**  
**MBN14611**

**To:** Minister for Transport and Multicultural Affairs

**Date:** 30 March 2011

<b>SUBJECT:</b> To seek approval for the release of the Centre for Accident Research and Road Safety - Queensland, Bicycle Helmet Research Report	
<b>REQUESTED BY:</b> Internally generated	<b>Due date</b> 1 April 2011 Members of the public have written to the department requesting copies of the report

Approved \ Not Approved  
 Minister .....  
 Date ...../...../.....

**Recommendations**

- That you approve the release of the Centre for Accident Research and Road Safety – Queensland, Bicycle Helmet Research Report (**Attachment 1**), commissioned by the Department of Transport and Main Roads in October 2010.

**Background**

- In 1991, as a result of a nationally agreed policy framework, legislation was introduced in Queensland that requires bicycle riders to wear an approved, securely fitted and fastened bicycle helmet when cycling. This law was introduced to reduce head injuries among cyclists in the event of a crash. A rider may be exempt from wearing a helmet if they carry a doctor’s certificate confirming that they cannot wear a helmet for a stated medical reason.
- This legislation has been enacted in all Australian states and territories, making the wearing of helmets compulsory. The legislation is outlined in the *Australian Road Rules*, Part 15, Section 256 Bicycle Helmets. All state and territory road rules conform to the national road rules, except for the Northern Territory where a variation allows adult bike riders travelling on separate bicycle paths and footpaths to travel without wearing a helmet.
- Safety benefits of bicycle helmets are well documented. Studies indicate that cyclists who wear helmets experience fewer head injuries and decreased severity of injury when involved in a crash. A recent study found that wearing helmets reduces the risk of head and brain injuries in cyclists of all ages by 63% to 88%. Helmets can also reduce injuries to the upper and mid-facial areas by 65%. These safety benefits are experienced by all cyclists as riding on off-road paths poses a similar risk as on-road cycling.

<b>Action Officer:</b> Jon Douglas Director (Safer Roads)	<b>Endorsed by:</b> Mike Stapleton Executive Director (Road Safety)	<b>Endorsed by:</b> Bruce Ollason General Manager (Road Safety and System Management)	<b>Endorsed by:</b> Mark Cridland Deputy Director-General (Policy and Planning)
Tel: 3253 4996 Date: 16/03/2011	Tel: 3253 4017 Date: 17/03/2011	Tel: 4529 7000 Date: 21/03/2011	Tel: 3306 7222 Date:

- Recent research on bicycle helmets has drawn media attention. In particular, a peer reviewed paper titled 'The effects of bicycle helmet legislation on cycling-related injury: The ratio of head to arm injuries over time' by Dr A Voukelatos and Dr Chris Rissel was released in August 2010 (**Attachment 2**). This research questioned the merit, safety and value of wearing bicycle helmets.
- In December 2010 the above mentioned peer reviewed paper was shown to contain errors by Dr Tim Churches, a medical epidemiologist based in Sydney. Both Dr Voukelatos and Dr Rissel publically acknowledged the findings were flawed (**Attachment 3**).
- In response to the increase in media attention, ministerial correspondence regarding helmet legislation and concerns about how public bicycle hire schemes will function in the context of compulsory helmet wearing laws, the department determined that there was a need for an independent body to conduct research on this topic.
- The Safer Roads Unit of Road Safety and System Management Division commissioned Centre for Accident Research and Road Safety – Queensland to undertake a thorough investigation of national and international evidence on helmet wearing. This investigation was led by Professor Narelle Haworth, Professor in Injury Prevention and Rehabilitation supported by several prominent researchers.
- The Centre for Accident Research and Road Safety – Queensland report included the following:
  - a national and international literature review
  - analysis of crash and hospital data
  - analysis of attitudinal surveys
  - examination of evidence to support a segmented approach to mandatory helmet legislation
  - analysis of the public health argument for helmet use.
- The final report was provided to the department in November 2010 (**Attachment 1**).
- There are no current plans to review the legislation. The department continues to monitor national and international research on bicycle helmets. This research will inform departmental policies and legislation.

### Issues

- The report commissioned by the department is not government policy and in no way does it represent any Queensland Government position on the helmet safety issue.
- The department has received a request from Mr Paul French (MC52841) from the Cycle User Group and Part Refuse Sch.4 Part 4 s.6 Personal information requesting copies of the report. Part Refuse Sch.4 Part 4 s.6 Personal information has also sent copies to Ms Robyn Davies, Program Manager (Cycle and Pedestrian Facilities), to the following individuals and organisations:
  - Professor Narelle Haworth, Centre for Accident Research and Road Safety
  - Councillor Margaret De Wit, Brisbane City Councillor for the Ward of Pullenvale
  - The Right the Honourable Campbell Newman, Lord Mayor of Brisbane
  - The Honourable Rachel Nolan MP, former Transport Minister
  - Bicycle Queensland
  - JCDecaux (contracted operator of the CityCycle Scheme).

- Discussions have been held between Safer Roads Unit officers and Professor Narelle Haworth, regarding the release of the report. Professor Narelle Haworth is supportive of the report's release and the following approach has been determined:
  - The Centre for Accident Research and Road Safety – Queensland (CARRS-Q) will make the report available on their website. A link from Transport and Main Roads website will be made available.
  - The report will clearly be marked as being an independent report that is not government policy.
  - The report will be released by the Centre for Accident Research and Road Safety – Queensland (CARRS-Q) once approval is received from the Minister for Transport and Multicultural Affairs.
  - Mr Paul French and Part Refuse Sch.4 Part 4 s.6 Personal information will be provided a copy of the report at the same time as it is released for Accident Research and Road Safety – Queensland.
- The report makes the following conclusions and recommendations:
  - Current bicycle helmet wearing rates are halving the number of head injuries experienced by Queensland cyclists. This is consistent with published evidence that mandatory bicycle helmet wearing legislation has prevented injuries and deaths from head injuries.
  - It is reasonably clear that the legislation discouraged people from cycling twenty years ago when it was first introduced. Having been in place for that length of time in Queensland and throughout most of Australia, there is little evidence that it continues to discourage cycling. There is little evidence that there is a large body of people who would take up cycling if the legislation was changed. Section 3.7 of the report examines the effects of bicycle helmet legislation on cycling participation, main points from this discussion are:
    - Limited work has been conducted in Australia specifically to evaluate the effect of helmet legislation on cycling participation.
    - Cycling participation rates have been examined by state and local governments in recent years. Census data from South East Queensland suggests that the number of journeys to work by bicycle fell after the introduction of helmet legislation (over 10,000 trips per day to just under 9,000 trips today), although the most recent available data suggests the absolute numbers now exceeds pre-legislation trip numbers.
    - Research studies, bicycle counts, sales data and anecdotal evidence suggest that cycling is increasing in popularity. Bicycle sales figures collected by the bicycle retail industry indicate the bicycle sales have outpaced motor vehicle sales in Australia since 2000. Figures indicate that 1.66 times more adult than children's bicycles are sold nation-wide.
  - Any move from universal helmet wearing legislation to a segmented approach would have a direct effect on those who no longer are required to wear a helmet and an indirect effect in reducing helmet wearing rates among those who are still required to wear a helmet.

- Cycling does have significant health benefits and therefore should be encouraged in ways that reduce the risk of the most serious injuries. Head injuries not only have the potential for death but they are among the most disabling of non-fatal injuries. Infrastructure and speed management approaches to improving the safety of cycling should be undertaken as part of a Safe Systems approach, but protection of the individual by simple and cost-effective methods such as bicycle helmets should also be part of an overall package of measures.
- A more detailed summary of the research findings including statistics on safety benefits of bicycle helmets are included in **Attachment 4**.
- The approach to the release of the report has been determined to provide the best outcome as it is most likely that it will stimulate public interest. The Centre for Accident Research and Road Safety – Queensland are best placed to respond to any questions as the content experts of the report.
- Questions and Answers regarding the report are being prepared and will be forwarded to your office once finalised.

#### **Consultation with Stakeholders**

- Nil consultation has been undertaken by the department.

#### **Financial Implications**

- N/A

#### **Employment impacts**

- N/A

**Political Representatives**

**Local Government**

N/A

**State Government**

N/A

**Federal Government**

N/A

Minister's comments:

Released under IP - DTMR