

Deputy Andrew Green MBE
Housing Minister of Jersey

Dear Minister

CYCLE HELMET LEGISLATION

Thank you for your letter dated 15 April 2014, regarding mandatory bicycle helmet legislation. I am very sorry to hear of the recent hospitalisation of your son, and his ongoing health problems due to a cycling accident some years ago.

Improving road safety on our roads is an important Government priority, and to that end, we have developed *Victoria's Road Safety Action Plan 2013-16*. The Plan outlines a suite of activities we are currently undertaking to make roads safer for all road users, including cyclists, while still enforcing the bicycle helmet wearing legislation already in place.

The mandatory helmet wearing requirement for bike riders is an important road safety initiative aimed at reducing the severity of crash outcomes. The rule is based on strong research evidence, and has been nationally adopted by all jurisdictions in Australia. The Victorian Government has a responsibility to take action to minimise the cost to the community of road deaths and injuries, and the compulsory use of bicycle helmets has contributed significantly to meeting this responsibility.

Since the introduction of mandatory helmet wearing, there have been numerous studies into many facets of bicycle helmets, including vigorous international debate on the effectiveness and desirability of helmet wearing.

A 2010 study commissioned by the Queensland Department of Transport and Main Roads found the following: *"A review of the most scientifically rigorous research concluded that bicycle helmets that meet national standards protect against head, brain, and facial injuries. Helmet wearing was associated with a 69 per cent reduction in the likelihood of head or brain injury and a 74 per cent reduction in the likelihood of severe brain injury. The benefit was the same whether a motor vehicle was involved in the crash or not. Helmet wearing reduced the likelihood of injury to the upper and mid-face by 65 per cent"* (Haworth, N., Schramm, A., King, M., Steinhardt, D. (2010) *Bicycle Helmet Research, CARRS-Q*).

A 2011 study titled '*The impact of compulsory cycle helmet legislation on cyclist head injuries in New South Wales, Australia,*' investigated the effect of compulsory helmet legislation on head injuries for bike riders. A review of 36 months of hospital data from the time that helmet legislation was introduced in 1990, found that head injury rates of cyclists decreased significantly, more than limb injury rates, while this was not the case for pedestrians. The study concluded that the evidence showing the positive outcomes in reducing cyclist head injuries justified the introduction of compulsory helmet legislation (Walter, S.R., et al., *Accident Analysis and Prevention*, 2011).

The Government therefore believes that regulations in Victoria that have made it compulsory for cyclists to wear helmets, have been successful in reducing the amount of head injury incurred by those who cycle. For more information about the efficacy of bicycle helmets and recent research which supports this, please visit: www.vicroads.vic.gov.au/bicyclehelmets.

Despite this evidence, a number of individuals and groups continue to lobby for a removal of Victoria's mandatory requirement. However, there is no compelling evidence to indicate that mandatory helmet wearing has had a significant impact on cycling activity. Nevertheless, the Government is conscious of the need for policy settings that balance road safety against the environmental and public health benefits of cycling. Victoria's regulations allow for limited exemptions from helmet wearing, based on religious beliefs or medical conditions. The evidence available from examining trends in cycling activity is mixed.

A Monash University Accident Research Centre report titled '*Bicycle Use and Helmet Wearing Rates in Melbourne 1987 to 1992: the Influence of the Helmet Wearing Law*' indicated that there was an initial reduction in the number of people cycling in Victoria when the bicycle helmet legislation was introduced. Two years after the law was introduced, the number of bicyclists was approaching original levels in adults and children, but was still greatly reduced in teenagers.

Research has identified an average increase of 28 per cent of cycling trips to work in Australia between 2001 and 2006. However, in the longer term, between 1986 and 2010, there has been a general decline in cycling activity per head of population, probably reflecting many social trends, apart from helmet regulation over this period.

On the other hand, commuter cycling has increased annually by 10 per cent on key routes between 2006 and 2010, though women comprise of only one third of the cycle commuting population in Australia, which by international standards is very low.

The Government's approach is to take steps to regulate for safety, whilst also investing in cycling infrastructure and other measures such as speed limit reductions, to encourage cycling that is safe and perceived as safe and accessible.

Should you wish to discuss this matter further, Mr James Holgate, VicRoads' Director - Vehicle and Road Use Policy *would be pleased to assist.*

I trust that the above information will be of use to you when considering instigating similar compulsory helmet legislation in Jersey.

Thank you for taking the time to write regarding this matter, and for your ongoing interest in cycle safety.

Yours sincerely

Hon Terry Mulder MP
Minister for Roads