Minister for Police; Tourism;
Road Safety; Women's Interests

Our Ref: 45-08455

Deputy Andrew Green MBE
Minister for Housing

Dear Deputy Green

BICYCLE HELMET LEGISLATION IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Thank you for your letter seeking information on mandatory bicycle helmet legislation in Western Australia.

Firstly, I am sincerely sorry to hear of your son's brain trauma and ongoing difficulties as a result. I hope this information will help you in the successful introduction of compulsory helmet wearing in Jersey.

In 1990 the *Australian Road Rules* were amended to specify that 'the rider of a bicycle must wear an approved bicycle helmet securely fitted and fastened on the rider's head, unless the rider is exempt from wearing a bicycle helmet under another law of this jurisdiction.' The law also requires helmet use by certain bicycle passengers. In Western Australia the helmet wearing legislation was introduced in January 1992, but was only made effective from July 1992. A six-month phasing-in period was applied, during which infringement notices issued for not wearing a bicycle helmet were cancelled if the recipient provided proof of purchase of a helmet within 14 days.

There is a body of valid independent research that demonstrates bicycle helmets are an effective tool in the reduction of head injuries. A good recent overview was produced by the Queensland Centre for Accident Research and Road Safety (CARRS-Q) in November 2010. This report reviewed the most scientifically rigorous research in this area and concluded that bicycle helmets which meet national standards protect against head, brain, and facial injuries. Specifically, helmet wearing was associated with a 69 per cent reduction in the likelihood of head or brain injury, a 74 per cent reduction in the likelihood of severe brain injury and a 65 per cent reduction in the likelihood of injury to the upper and mid-face.

I have attached a reference to this review and to some other research which may interest you in an appendix. I believe you will find substantial evidence to support the introduction of compulsory helmet legislation.

In response to your inquiry about the effect of compulsory helmet use on cycling rates, I am aware of concerns expressed over the years that the compulsory wearing of bicycle helmets in Western Australia reduces the overall levels of cycling and thus impacts on general levels of health in the community. In particular, there has been some concern from cycling groups that the compulsory helmet legislation may be a factor in the difficulties Perth has faced in establishing shared bicycle schemes like those found in European cities.

While it may be true that the helmet laws may have initially had an impact on cycling numbers when they were first introduced, local surveys conducted by the Department of Transport suggest that compulsory helmet wearing has had little impact on recent cycling patterns. Main Roads Western Australia has been monitoring cycling numbers on selected routes in Perth, and has registered a steady growth in the numbers of bicyclists, with overall growth rates for cycling of 18 per cent between 2009 and 2011.

Furthermore, in regular surveys of households by the Department of Transport, people are asked, among other things, how much cycling they have done in the previous six months. Those who indicate they have not cycled at all are asked to nominate both the key and other reasons why they have not considered cycling. Since 2001 the proportion of people who say that the legal requirement to wear helmets is a barrier to them cycling has halved from around four per cent as a nominated reason for not cycling, to two per cent in 2008. In the most recent survey a "lack of time" and "no bicycle" were the most commonly mentioned reasons for why respondents had not cycled in the previous six months, suggesting that compulsory helmet use is not defined as a factor preventing riding.

On this basis, the Government of Western Australia considers mandatory bicycle helmet legislation to be an important element in its strategies to improve cycling safety. The laws have been in effect in this State for over 20 years and the Government has no plans to amend or repeal them, despite occasional campaigns favouring helmet-free cycling by some bicycling groups.

I trust this information assists in your efforts to improve cycling safety and trauma outcomes for the people of Jersey.

Yours sincerely

LIZA HARVEY MLA
MINISTER FOR POLICE; TOURISM;
ROAD SAFETY; WOMEN'S INTERESTS

Att: Appendix One – Relevant Research

2 MAY 2014

Appendix One – Relevant Research

Scott R. Walter, Jake Olivier, Tim Churches and Raphael Grzebieta, 'The Impact of Compulsory Cycle Helmet Legislation on Cyclist Head Injuries in New South Wales, Australia', *Accident Analysis and Prevention*, 43 (2011): 2064-2071.

This study aimed to assess the effect of compulsory cycle helmet legislation on cyclist head injuries, given the ongoing debate in Australia as to the efficacy of this measure. The data showed decreasing trends in injury rates prior to the passing of legislation, possibly explained as background effects of other transport safety measures. Head injury rates decreased significantly more than limb injuries in cyclists, and this was attributed to compulsory helmet legislation.

Delia Hendrie, Matthew Legge, Diana Rosman and Carol Kirov, *An Economic Evaluation of the Mandatory Bicycle Helmet Legislation in Western Australia*, Australian Health Economists Society Conference, Gold Coast, Queensland, July 2000.

This paper includes a description of different research projects examining the effectiveness of helmet legislation in reducing injury rates in Western Australia. It suggests that meaningful projections of the economic benefits are very difficult to calculate.

D.C. Thompson, F. Rivara and R. Thompson, *Helmets for Preventing Head and Facial Injuries in Bicyclists (Review)*, The Cochrane Collaboration, 2009.

The study found no randomised controlled trials, but did find five well-conducted case-control studies. Helmets provide a 63 to 88% reduction in the risk of head, brain and severe brain injury for all ages of bicyclists. Helmets provide equal levels of protection for crashes involving motor vehicles (69%) and crashes from all other causes (68%). Injuries to the upper and mid facial areas are reduced 65%.

Bicycle Helmet Research, Centre for Accident Research and Road Safety – Queensland (CARRS-Q), November 2010.

This is 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% reduction in the likelihood of head or brain injury and a 74% 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%.