

Inquiry into e-mobility safety and use in Queensland

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My name is Ian Douglas.

I am a 71 year old retiree - a motorist - a pedestrian - and a (conventional cyclist). I am a member of "Bicycle Queensland" but hold no office.

I cycle with associates - all seniors - up to three mornings per week, most frequently on inner city Brisbane bike paths, mostly between the Toowong Cemetery and North Shore Hamilton but also on the Moreton Bay Cycle Way and on routes to Bardonia or Arana Hills or between Altandi and Murrarie. These trips each approximate 40 kilometres per trip (return).

I also spend time at the Gold Coast as a pedestrian so am aware of some of the issues in that area.

I would like to address several of these inquiries terms of reference and my comments are below. I am more than happy to expand on any of them.

To summarise my case:

I am not opposed to e-devices but I am opposed to such devices that can be "weaponised".

If a Vespa motorino was found riding along a public bikeway or walkway I would hope that the situation would be immediately addressed and the operator detained. But at least such a vehicle would likely be registered and the owner likely known.

E-bikes, e-scooters and e-skate boards that breach even current legislation should not be tolerated. In light of the varying ages of illegal operators and owners, and the difficulties associated with fines and prosecution, a more effective approach should be considered viz. Confiscation and, in the worst cases, destruction of the illegal device.

On Sunday last, a aged friend visiting Sydney was struck by a e-scooter. He suffered facial injuries and a broken hand. Such events will only become more common.

Failure to address these issues adequately will affect the well-being of other users of public by-ways, many of whom are already frightened to make use of them because of the risks posed by speeding and illegal devices.

The issues before this Inquiry are a minefield for Government and prevarication will likely only result in the issues getting out of any hope of control.

1. Benefits of e-mobility (including both Personal Mobility Devices (PMDs), such as e-scooters and e-skateboards, as well as e-bikes) for Queensland;

The benefits of e-mobility devices are clear. They form another mode of transport for commuters or for pleasure. They are relatively cheap to run and many see them as adding to their "green-credentials". I am an advocate of public transport

and rely heavily of buses and trains. These devices have a place for those unable to have adequate access to public transport.

Councils have embraced them as a means of transport and I acknowledge that they have some benefits for tourism.

I have been cycling and walking for many years and my activities preceded the advent of these devices. At first, these devices were of nuisance value to me but they were few and primarily not in private ownership.

There has been an exponential increase in the numbers and types of devices and an exponential decrease in the care with which they are used, such that these are often no longer a “nuisance” but a threat - a threat to health and to the lifestyles of the users of bikeways, walkways and roads.

2. Safety issues associated with e-mobility use, including increasing crashes, injuries, fatalities, and community concerns;

I am sure that the Inquiry has access to statistics on crashes, injuries and fatalities.

I can only speak from direct personal experience from my associates and myself. Only one fatality has occurred with which we were directly associated. That involved a privately owned scooter rider failing to take a bend near the milk factory at South Brisbane and collision with a lamp post.

I have personally stopped to aid several e-scooter riders who have had falls and minor injuries.

I have also come across several accidents involving conventional cyclists over the past eight or so years, so there is no monopoly on risk.

However the key impacts on safety are threefold.

1. Not wearing helmets - this is reasonably common in Brisbane but it is the presence of a helmet that is the rarity on the Gold Coast (including conventional cyclists).

2. Inexperience - many users of hired e-mobility devices clearly look “awkward” on these machines. They wobble and jump off because they believe they are about to fall. They also commonly “double-up” especially with young children.

3. Speed and overconfidence - The hire scooters are limited in speed, especially where congestion levels are high. Privately-owned devices, although I understand are meant to be speed-governed, are regularly used at reckless speeds. This provides a threat to the operator but to anyone who they come near. As a cyclist I know my approximate speed and I have a GPS device that mostly provides that information. Too many device users will exceed permissible speeds passing by me at perhaps twice my maximum speed.

To this must be added the nature of the device. Within the past twelve months e-bikes have appeared with large frames and wide tyres. These bikes have pedals but clearly these do not need to be used to urge the bike forward. I do not know the weights but they are the size of small Harley-Davidsons and, when ridden at the speeds I see them ridden, these are lethal weapons.

On my most recent two visits to the Gold Coast (Palm Beach) it seems that teenagers have created a sport of intimidating walkers on Council paths, trying to arrange a “near-miss” and laughing at the response with their friends.

4. Suitability of current regulatory frameworks for PMDs and ebikes, informed by approaches in Australia and internationally;

I have read some of the relevant legislation but do not pretend to be an expert.

I am not asking for a ban on all of these devices, but I am asking that the legislation applicable to illegal devices be strengthened.

I am aware that illegal devices could be used on private property. I am also aware that these are being increasingly purchased with no intention of use on private property.

In terms of penalties for inappropriate use, I believe that monetary fines are inadequate.

I do not see that licensing of the rider or registration of the device will be an effective solution to this very clear problem.

I believe that the only effective deterrent and means of removing the risks lies in confiscation of the illegal vehicle or confiscation of an illegally operated vehicle.

Confiscation can take various forms.

In the case of a device ridden recklessly, or at excess speed, the confiscation could be temporary. In the latter case, however, the device must have been modified to enable speeding so longer-term confiscation and compulsory installation of a speed governor is suggested.

For those increasing numbers of e-bikes that clearly breach the law when in public spaces, then confiscation and destruction is warranted if found being used in a public space.

There is also a need for some form of protection akin to third party insurance for motor vehicles. As premiums could not be collected from registrations, this will need to be fully funded by the State.

I am concerned that Local Government receives income from hirers. As far as I can see, they provide no service in respect to the monies charged but this (small) return may influence the Councils’ attitude to these devices and thus has serious governance implications.

5. Effectiveness of current enforcement approaches and powers to address dangerous riding behaviours and the use of illegal devices;

I am not personally aware of any enforcement at all.

On one occasion, I passed by an officer operating a radar gun on the Bicentennial Bikeway and I have observed bicycle riding officers speaking with helmet-less riders. I have cycled on over 600 occasions and a total of 23 000 kilometres in recent years but this is the only hint of enforcement that I have observed.

I understand that enforcement in this arena may not be popular with those obligated to enforce or with Government.

With the escalation these issues, I contend that failure to act represents an even greater risk to Government.

While confiscation may not go down well with the perpetrators and the Courts will need to be supportive, delaying the inevitable may be extremely damaging to the reputation of Government in its broadest sense.

I am tempted to believe that it may be already too late to act but I am certain that if these very serious threats are not addressed now, then the situation will spiral out of control.