

MRA.

DRAFT.
MAY 19, 2001

May 13, 2001.

The Minister for Transport.
Peter Batchelor MLA
L 26 Nauru House
80 Collins Street,
Melbourne 3000.

Dear Minister,

Attached please find a copy of an extraordinary set of emails from a Monash University researcher, Associate Professor Raphael Grzebieta from Civil Engineering. In these emails the Professor clearly displays a strong antagonism towards motorcycling. This type of antagonism was first documented in the May 1993 Report of the Parliamentary Inquiry into Motorcycle Safety by the Victorian Road Safety Committee (Ch. 7. P. 119.). If his rash statements about riders were aimed at women, Vietnamese, Protestants or other minority group they would be condemned.

A key point in the Motorcycle Riders' Association (MRA) submission to the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) seminar on Preventing Motorcyclists' Injuries (Dec. 8, 2000. Copy from Dr Chris Atkin 9419 9686) was that this antagonism towards motorcyclists made it very difficult to develop good bike safety strategies. This bias had to be recognised and addressed. Many in the Road Safety Industry (RSI) are in denial and have lately blamed most bike crashes on irresponsible riding - speed. Professor Grzebieta was honest enough to confirm that he felt "motorcycle safety was an oxymoron".

CONFIDENTIAL.

The emails were prompted by the response to Professor Grzebieta on ABC Radio, 3LO, on Friday, May 4, 2001. In that interview he said that wire rope barriers (WRBs) were a safety problem for motorcyclists. He said that the posts were the major part of that road safety problem.

Until very recently the promotion of this product, WRBs, has included the claim that no one has ever died at a WRB site. That was not true. A rider was killed at the WRB site on the Frankston Freeway on March 4 about 9.20pm. Professor Grzebieta defended the WRB saying the rider, a 34 year old male, was doing 150 kph when he hit. Questions we would like the Coroner to ask are. *How was the speed of the motorcycle measured? How high was the WRB? Was the WRB installed according to manufacturer's specifications and VicRoads own road safety guidelines?*

(There are probably others)

VicRoads' Deborah Hanlon told the Mannigham Leader (May 2), and others, that they "had carried out a thorough safety investigation ... there is no evidence to suggest they (WRBs) do present a risk to motorcycle groups ... We wouldn't introduce something if we thought it was dangerous." But Professor Grzebieta confirmed the danger to riders most publicly. A recent NSW study indicated exposed posts in a barrier system were what hurt riders. WRB has more exposed posts than any system. You say you broke Labor's promise to the motorcycle community for the good of the majority, car drivers. Labor's message to the millions of Australians who ride motorcycles is. "You are expendable." Road authorities have a duty of care to all road users. Motorcyclists are legitimate road users.

With fuel, parking and other car costs rising, traffic congestion getting worse and environmental concerns increasing, many people are turning to bicycles, commuter cycle and scooters for economy and convenience. Many mature people are returning to riding for the simple pleasure of touring. These people do not fit Professor Grzebieta's "boy racer" profile.

Professor Grzebieta also said, on radio, that the report on car/WRB crash tests at Laverton last year did exist. *Would you please forward a copy of that report?* The report on motorcycles & barriers given to you to present to the media on May 5 (The Age on May 3) is of little value. It is speculation on car data with the words "in the light of the current lack of information" appearing more than once. The MRA Research Officer, Michael Czajka, has done a preliminary critique (attached). It is an interesting coincidence that this report appeared on the day of the WRB Protest on May 5. The report was dated April 2001 and the publicity about the dangers and costs of WRBs began with the 3AW Rumour File in early April, then 60 Minutes on April 22.

Why wasn't the Motorcycle Riders' Association (MRA) or the Victorian Motorcycle Advisory Council (VMAC) invited to the Laverton car/WRB tests last year?

At the Road Safety Reference Group (RSRG) meeting on May 9, I showed the members photos of a WRB crash site on the Eastern Freeway, near the Bourke Road exit. This site was left unrepaired for some 78 hours. During the period between 2am Saturday, May 5 and the following Tuesday at around 8am, some 25 metres of loose wire hung beside the freeway and an estimated 2 to 300,000 vehicles drove by, most at speeds near to 100 kph. Some at the RSRG commented that the WRB had not behaved the way it should. No one explained why the crash site WRB took 3 days to fix. *How long is a reasonable time to expect the road authority to take to get the WRB back into proper working order?*

On May 5, Roger Hammond emailed you. *"I would like to know if they have conducted any tests using a compromised barrier (WRB) i.e. one that has been previously hit by a vehicle?"* I too would like to know of any such testing. The damaged Eastern Freeway WRB site I saw on May 5 looked very dangerous indeed.

In the 20 years plus that I have done volunteer work for road safety I have not heard of a Monash University Accident Research Centre (MUARC) representative appearing this way on a show like 60 Minutes. 60 Minutes was strongly promoting the product using sensation and emotion. It must have been about the time MUARC was doing the car/WRB tests at Laverton that MUARC Head, Professor Tingval, recorded the 60 Minutes segment. He returned home to Sweden before the item went to air. The behaviour of these highly qualified, and paid, scientists does not add to the credibility of MUARC as an independent organisation that is unbiased against riders.

Professor Grzebieta wrote that Peter Mount (MRA SA) was to represent Victorian riders at a national road safety conference next November. To the best of my knowledge Mr Mount has little contact with the major organisations in Victoria and NSW. He does not represent MRA Australia (03 9352 5544) or the NSW Motorcycle Council (02 9833 7794) at a Federal level. *Please send me details of this conference.*

Sincerely,

Damien Codognotto OAM

cc interested parties.

Damien Codognotto

From: "Raphael Grzebieta" <Raphael.Grzebieta@eng.monash.edu.au>
To: "Peter Kennedy" <snafu@alphalink.com.au>
Sent: Monday, May 07, 2001 11:39 PM
Subject: Re: Wire Rope barriers

Dear Mr Kennedy,

You've got it wrong. The laws of physics are against you. That is all I am pointing out. I am very intent on helping motorcyclists contrary to your opinion of me. I will continue to do so despite your insulting comments. I just don't like individuals amongst them fabricating stories and hindering good road safety initiatives. So far you have presented me with nil facts and data and you accuse me of bias. Did you even bother to read the reports I pointed you towards. Motorcyclists pass me speeding on the freeway on a regular basis. They zip between cars in a dangerous manner and I talk to other motorcyclist about how they love to ride 150 km/hr to 180 km/hr on country roads. I have come close to hitting a couple of zipping motorcyclists myself. I'm not blind or stupid. Face it. Motorcyclists love the rush. Why else would they ride such a machine.

When Peter Mount tried to stop the ATSB introducing a law at the National Road Safety Strategy Panel that required number plates be attached to the front of bikes, his association lost all credibility in my mind, as well as in the minds of the majority of the 40 odd road safety experts at that Canberra meeting. The excuse was that attaching a number plate was unsafe in a crash. That it would be a hazard. What a load of rubbish. It is obvious that motorcyclists do not want to be caught by speed cameras. Stories about speeding are legendary amongst young motor cyclists.

I know more about motorcyclists than you give me credit for. I know riders come off their bikes on a regular basis. I regularly speak to the motorcyclists in our department particularly when they have an accident. I know that my fathers best friend was killed coming off a motorcycle. Another close friend of mine's daughter lost her leg at the knee riding on a motor cycle. She has lived like this for 15 years now. I used to ride a motorcycle in Poland when I lived there for a short time and found in the end it was much too dangerous to move around this way. The survey Marrelle Haworth completed was heart wrenching when I saw the police files. What a waste of young human life.

It is funny how the motorcycle lobby pushes their cause without any facts. The statements Cognetto was making on the radio were fabrications and place at jeopardy all the good work so far by Vicroads in protecting people on our freeways.

5/20/01

When you have some tangible and credible facts I'll listen. Until then motorcyclists have a lot of ground to make up. Cognito did a lot of damage to your cause. Don't bother me with out some facts.

Raphael Grzebieta

✉

Peter Kennedy wrote:

>
 > Dear Mr. Grzebieta
 > I had forwarded a response to you before I received your attached reply. I
 > am sorry that you are biased towards motorcyclists and it is evident in your
 > dialogue.
 >
 > Your comments show you have a very limited understanding of motorcyclists.
 > I have highlighted your comments for you to appraise and I would advise you
 > sit back and have a look at what you have written.

> Regards, Peter Kennedy.

> <mailto:snafu@alphalink.com.au>

> -----Original Message-----

> From: Raphael Grzebieta [<mailto:Raphael.Grzebieta@eng.monash.edu.au>]

> Sent: Monday, May 07, 2001 7:52 PM

> To: Peter Kennedy

> Subject: Re: Wire Rope barriers

> Dear Mr Kennedy,

> You should obtain a transcript of the interview from the media if you
 > are so concerned. Statements are often taken out of context by the
 > press. However I did say that the term "motorcycle safety" is in itself
 > an oxymoron. It is a well accepted that motorcycle drivers are at a much
 > higher risk of death and serious injury in a crash than vehicle drivers
 > and that if motorcycle riders are really concerned about their safety
 > they should travel by car.

> However having made the decision to accept the substantial increased
 > risk by riding a motorcycle, motorcyclists should realise that an impact
 > into a wire rope barrier is a very rare event. The two events that have
 > occurred to date that I am aware of are one in the Northern Territory
 > and one in Frankston. In the Northern Territory crash the outcome was
 > very favourable for the motorcyclist. The motorcyclist praised that the
 > system saved his life by stopping him going over a precipice with little
 > injury to his body. In the Frankston crash the driver died as a result

— A.D. OF E NEAR
 BROKEN HILL, N.S.W.

5/20/01

HOW WAS THIS SPEED MEASURED?

- > of excessive speed (150 km/hr). It would not have mattered if the
- > barrier was made from wire rope or concrete. The rider went over the top
- > of the barrier when the barrier did what it is supposed to do, i.e.
- > redirect the motorcycle. Cars have seat belts and airbags designed to
- > cushion the deceleration of drivers and contain inside the vehicle when
- > it is being redirected. A motorcyclist will come off a bike that is
- > restrained or redirected in any manner unless you tether them to the
- > bike. Hence they are much more dangerous in a crash. I wouldn't ride one
- > and I have steered my young sons well away from them.

HOW TALL WAS THIS
WIRE? WAS IT
INSTALLED ACCORDING
TO VICROADS SAFETY
GUIDELINE "ROAD DESIGN
NOTE 3-18" OR ANY OTHER
SAFETY GUIDELINES?

- > The ideal situation is that no barriers or obstructions, i.e. trees,
- > poles, barriers, or cars, should be around when a motorcyclist comes off
- > their motorcycle or loses control. However, as you pointed out to me, we
- > need to consider the real world. Hazardous obstacles are a part of the
- > driving environment and hence motorcyclists need to maintain a safe
- > speed to ensure they do not lose control at all times and when they do
- > come off it should be at a low speed. I suppose it is a bit like
- > parachuting. All is OK until the one time when the parachute does not
- > open and nor does the spare. Motorcycle riding is similar. All is OK
- > until you come off your bike or the bike hits an obstacle. The outcomes
- > depend then on the speed you were traveling at the moment of impact.
- > Anything above 40 km/hr will result probably in a fatality if your bike
- > comes to a sudden stop and your body continues on. In a car you can
- > afford to make a mistake and survive at a higher speed (around 60
- > km/hr). The chances of survival in a motorcycle crash are at least an
- > order of magnitude less.

THE MAIN CAUSE OF CASUALTY,
MOTORCYCLE CRASHES (AND
PEDESTRIAN & BICYCLISTS'
INJURIES) IS CAR DRIVER
ERROR.

- > Both speeding and alcohol are significant factors in motorcycle crashes
- > (see attached summary of report from ATSB site). Loss of control is
- > usually associated with inadequate appreciation of a hazardous situation
- > and speed then becomes the dominating factor in loss of control. The
- > report states excessive speed was associated with 27% of cases listed.
- > Appropriate speed for a dangerous situation needs to also be considered
- > and when control is lost. You may be driving at or below the speed limit
- > but this does not always mean it is safe. Hence the term "not safe at
- > any speed" is quite appropriate for a motorcycle. Think of it this way.
- > If a motorcycle was invented yesterday and approval was sought from Road
- > Authorities for it to be used on our roads, I guarantee it would not get
- > through the approval process today.

HOW WAS THIS DATA
COLLECTED? HOW
WAS SPEED MEASURED?
AIS POLICE ESTIMATES?

> There are two reports you can refer to on the web at the ATSB site:

> <http://www.atsb.gov.au/road/research/>

> I strongly recommend reading them.

- > There is also a Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry report into motorcycle
- > accidents that like wise found wire-rope barrier crashes is a non-issue
- > in motorcycle fatalities. You can get a copy by contacting the Victorian
- > Parliamentary Road Safety committee. I strongly recommend you read that

THIS WAS A REVIEW DONE
BY STAFF SECONDED FROM
VICROADS. VICROADS
WAS INSTALLING WIRE-ROPE
AT THE TIME. THE REVIEW
HAS BEEN WIDELY
DISCREDITED. 5/14/01

- > report as well.
- >
- > The barriers that are really quite dangerous are in fact guardrail and I
- > can guarantee you the at speeds in excess of 60 km/hr concrete barriers
- > will also be very dangerous and would probably result in a fatality. The
- > fact is barrier impacts rarely happen. Why pick on wire rope barriers.
- > Why aren't the motorcyclists picketing guardrail. Wire rope barriers are
- > no more dangerous than any other commercial barrier. What sort of
- > barrier would you like to hit at 60 km/hr? I am sure your response is
- > "none". Of course if we are protecting a hazard with a barrier for a car
- > and the motorcyclists contend that hitting the barrier is dangerous,
- > then surely it must be obvious that without the barrier both car
- > occupants and motorcyclists are exposed to the same hazard. So why not
- > at least protect the majority of the people in cars. The motorcyclists
- > would get hurt hitting the hazard anyway. At least there is a chance for
- > the motorcyclists with the barrier installed as the Northern Territory
- > case illustrates.

- >
- > What irritates me is that some motorcyclists haven't a clue about good
- > crashworthiness design and yet protest about good and bad barriers when
- > it is a non-issue in the total picture. Banning wire-rope barriers would
- > result in a direct rise in car fatalities. The benefits of wire rope
- > barriers far outweigh the problems with them. However, I should quickly
- > emphasise in the same breath that despite the very low numbers of
- > barrier crashes, we are currently working on a "motorcycle friendly"
- > barrier (if we can design such a beast) at this moment. This is in line
- > with the "Vision Zero" philosophy. We want a cheap and effective system
- > that works for both motorcyclists and cars. We are modelling the
- > structure and will be testing them hopefully soon. But the extra expense
- > of installing the systems will be questioned as there are only a few
- > crashes into such barriers per year in the whole of Australia. The
- > motorcycle lobby would do better on focussing on speed (particularly in
- > hazardous locations), alcohol and inappropriate positioning or failure
- > to respond when maneuvering through traffic (bad driving habits that
- > usually result in car strikes and loss of control).

- >
- > On numerous occasions I have offered to your representative Peter Moun
- > of the Australian Motorcyclists Riders Association to present a case at
- > the national road safety conference. It never happens. If motorcyclists
- > are so intent on safety as they claimed they were at the Eastern Freeway
- > protest, then they should start coming to the conferences and put their
- > case forward on how to reduce motorcycle fatalities and injuries. We
- > would be very glad to see them there. Help us reduce the fatalities but
- > don't do it on the basis of emotional rubbish. Back it up with facts and
- > positive solutions because it will get howled down if it is based on
- > emotion as the Eastern Freeway protest obviously was. I don't hear too
- > many road safety experts howling my comments down calling for
- > motorcyclists to reduce speeding - only from motor cyclists who know
- > little about road safety and crashworthiness. The challenge is for your
- > road user group to take up my offer and come to the road safety

WITH NO INPUT FROM
GENERALLY ACCEPTED
RIDER REPRESENT-
ATIVES.

WHERE DID THE CASH
FOR THIS COME FROM?

WHAT ABOUT CAR
DRIVER AWARENESS
& EDUCATION?

PM IS FROM THE
AUST. MYC COUNCIL
(AMC). HE DOES NOT
REPRESENT RIDERS
OR MAJOR ORGANIS-
ATIONS IN VICTORIA
OR N.S.W.

THE DETAILS OF
SUCH CONFERENCE'S
ETC. BARELY GET TO
THE MRA AUST.