

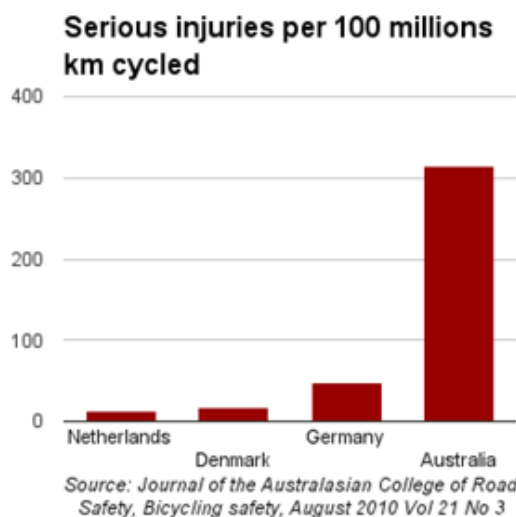
**From:**  
**To:** [Select Committee on Personal Choice and Community Safety](#)  
**Subject:** Inquiry on Personal Choice and Community Safety  
**Date:** Friday, 5 October 2018 12:39:15 PM  
**Attachments:** [x42qrwcw.png](#)

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Select Committee on Personal Choice and Community Safety - Legislative Council,

In the early part of the nineteen nineties Australian states were introducing Mandatory Helmet Law (MHL) for riding a bicycle. The idea was to minimise head trauma, but it changed the way Australians use bicycles compared to much more bicycle friendly countries overseas. Utility bicyclists, riders who use a bicycle rather than a car for shopping or going to work and other such activities on a daily basis, have all but disappeared. Countries which embrace bicycle transport provide safe environments rather than forcing cyclists to wear helmets and have achieved much higher bicycle participation rates. It relieves the burden on road infrastructure, air pollution and green house gas emissions, improves public health and provides a much safer cycling environment than mandatory helmet laws ever can do.

Since it's introduction, MHL has had a devastating effect on bicycle use and participation rates plummeted. We are facing problems with obesity, already starting with children as a result of inactivity and we are high on the list of stroke, heart disease, diabetes, obesity related cancers and inactivity related psychological problems. Looking at the whole picture of bicycle safety and public health, bigger bicycle participation far outweighs the chance of head trauma, particularly when the infrastructure for cyclists is improved and therefore made safer. Statistics show that mandatory helmet law has not achieved it's goal, Australia sticks out like a sore thumb when it comes to bicycle injuries and MHL should be reassessed.



*Australia's cycling safety record is 22 TIMES worst than best practice*

Restriction of personal choice for the individuals own good is in this case very much misplaced, it also ties up valuable police time to uphold the law. In occupational health and safety the first option is always to create a safe environment by removing possible hazards, personal protection is the last resort. To put it in context, the countries with low injury rates in the graph above, are providing safe bicycle ways away from traffic. In the Netherlands, the safest country to cycle, less than 1% of riders wear helmets. The riders who choose to wear helmets are predominantly sports riders who ride racing road bikes or mountain bikes travelling at greater speeds and are taking on greater risks.

In Australia the participation rate of sports riders is greater than the rate of utility riders, which is opposite to participation rates of the countries with the low injury rates. This can be explained because MHL did not affect sports riders choice, but it decimated utility riders. The countries in the graph showing the low injury rates also have much higher bicycle participation per capita than Australia. One of the shining examples is Copenhagen where "The Bicycle Account 2016" states that since 2014 the number of kilometers cycled on an average weekday has increased from 1.34 to 1.4 million which equates to 41% of all trips to work or education. Cars are outnumbered by bicycles in the inner city in this survey, but the aim is to increase the commuter traffic from 41% to 50% by 2025 and the proven way to achieve this is to provide safe infrastructure. The staggering safety record shows that it takes 122 trips around the world, or 4.9 million cycled kilometers between each serious casualty.

Big investments were necessary into infrastructure to achieve the above figures, but looking at the benefits the pay back outways the investments on a big scale. If the bicycles were taken off the tracks, the necessary increase in infrastructure for the extra cars would cost much more. There are also huge savings in public health from exercise and less pollution and cities become much more liveable and less dangerous for pedestrians. Additionally there are big financial savings for individuals who choose to replace the car with the bicycle, leaving them with extra spending power on other things than petrol. Considerable revenue from cycling tourism is gained as well for these bicycle friendly countries.

The above example is world best practice and has only been achieved over the span of many years. It's worth considering the effort because Australian cities are growing at a very fast rate and we have to make a choice now, how we want our cities to look in twenty or fifty years. It also has to be an inclusive process where bicycles get a comprehensive and safe network and planning processes should be done by listening to bicycle groups to cater appropriately for their needs. Increasing the number of cyclists in Australia will be a problem whilst we insist on Mandatory Helmet Law, because there are only so many people who want to take up cycling as a sport. We have to make bicycling attractive to people who want to use the bicycle as a mode of convenient and safe transport, this means to be able to do errands and short to medium trips in every day attire without fuss. Unfortunately the introduction of MHL has never been assessed objectively and for one reason or another authorities have been insisting on this law by increasing fines for not wearing a helmet, making bicycling more unattractive.

Thank you for your time to read my submission,

Markus Egli