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Thank you for this opportunity and please find below my submission regarding the Legislative Council's "Inquiry on Personal Choice and Community Safety". My particular focus is on:

"(2) outdoor recreation such as cycling. . . , including any impact on the wellbeing, enjoyment . . . of users. . ."

As a commuting cyclist, i.e. someone who chooses to travel to work in their work clothes and does not cycle as a sport, I would like to see the elderly, women, children and young people feel able to bicycle easily. This requires government commitment to building proper infrastructure where people feel safe. Aligned to this is the compulsory wearing of helmets. At the moment, WA's MHL 222 of the WA Road Traffic Code appears to impact on the wellbeing and enjoyment of cycling which should be simple, free and easy.

MHL can reduce the wellbeing and enjoyment of cycling, particularly for those people who might want to cycle slowly to the beach, for example, without any hindrance.

MHL can arguably reduce the possibility of income given it is harder to implement bike share with the added component of helmets. This could be bad for tourism.

MHL can also give a false sense of "safety" in that helmets can be incorrectly worn (too far back, too far forward, neck ties too loose) and car drivers tend to drive closer to riders wearing helmets than those without:

"The researchers think that cyclists in helmets are perceived as experienced cyclists who merit less passing clearance. Dr Walker, a traffic psychologist from Bath University's Department of Psychology, and author of a book on vulnerable road users, is quoted: 'This study shows that when drivers overtake a cyclist, the margin for error they leave is affected by the cyclist's appearance.'"

People see all cyclists wearing a helmet and think this implies that cycling is dangerous (it has been shown that the risks of cycling without a helmet outweigh not cycling at all).

It is always important to differentiate between the varied types of cyclists. It would make sense to let people choose whether they want to wear a helmet (freedom of choice) for the sort of cycling they do. For fast, sports racing/mountain bike riding it would make sense to wear a helmet. For slow, tranquil pottering around on a sit-up-and-beg bicycle, it would seem unnecessary.

"The bicycle has literally been pushed to the margins and the environment sends a powerful message that such use of the road is unusual, different, and is not valued. The transport norm is reinforced in other ways. For example, cycling promotion campaigns with safety-oriented messages such as "[Share the road](#)" have, perhaps unwittingly, strengthened the social framing of cycling as an activity that is inherently dangerous.

. . . I think the public debate in Australia in the 1980s around the helmet law also contributed to a heightened perception of cycling as an especially dangerous activity."

(Alan Davis, Crikey, "How Dangerous is Cycling?", March 27, 2017)

Australia is one of fewer than 5 countries worldwide where helmets are compulsory. If one looks at countries where cycling is a normal part of shared, sustainable transport, where people cycle in

normal clothes, where mothers, children and the elderly feel safe enough to cycle it will be noted that the choice of wearing a helmet is left to the individual. I would argue that making helmet wearing compulsory gives lie to the fact that cycling is something “dangerous”. Given the rates of obesity among our general population, and alarmingly among children, the risks of cycling without a helmet are fewer than not cycling at all:

“Australia now challenges America in having the greatest proportion of obese citizens. About one in five children in Western Australia is considered obese and it’s predicted that 75% of Australia’s adult population will in some way be overweight by 2020. About 60% of all Australians are classified as overweight or obese.”

(Chris Gillham website, “Obesity in Australia versus bicycle helmet laws”)

If we are to overcome health issues due to lack of exercise, heart attacks, increase in type 2 diabetes, childhood obesity we need to encourage people to exercise. Most local car journeys are less than 5 ks. If people were able to cycle short distances and walking and cycling were normalised, we would see a positive outcome for our mental and physical health and wellbeing.

The wellbeing of people who are active is widely acknowledged. They become fitter, more focused at work and less of a burden on the public health system. Obesity can be challenged. Giving people the choice whether they wear a helmet or not enables people to take ownership of their own life and not leave it in the hands of government.

Bicycle helmets can discourage cycling. An [Australian study](#) on mandatory helmet laws concluded that laws that required cyclists to wear head protection actually decreased the number of cyclists on the road. The implication of this study? The fewer cyclists on the road, the less likely drivers will be accustomed to sharing road space with cyclists, ultimately increasing the hazards faced by cyclists and further dissuading people from hopping on their bikes. When your average cyclist looks like they’re dressed for battle, this discourages those “keen but fearful” riders. Women (more frequently cited) don’t want to wear a helmet because of “helmet hair”. Indeed, apparently 27% of women won’t cycle for this reason. This isn’t something to dismiss as vanity. It goes hand in hand with enabling people to cycle safely to work, in their work clothes without needing to change (or do their hair) on arrival. This happens successfully in many countries overseas where cycling is considered a normal part of everyday life and the individual chooses a means of transport that helps them get to work easily (improved mental and physical wellbeing) and leaves the decision up to them (individual’s own good) whether they wear a helmet/wear lycra or not.

Over half of all head injuries occur in motor vehicles and more people were hospitalized after walking down the street than riding on a bicycle. Consider another statistic: According to [a 2006 French study](#) [‘Incidence and risk factors of severe traumatic brain injury resulting from road accidents: A population-based study’ [Etienne Javouhey](#), [Anne-Céline Guérin](#), [Mireille Chiron](#)] pedestrians are 1.4 times more likely to receive a traumatic brain injury than unhelmeted cyclists. We can also approach it from the perspective of injuries per million hours from a [1996 Australian study](#) [DL Robinson/ ‘head injuries and bicycle helmet laws’] looking at head injury risk before the beginning of any helmet laws:

Risk of head injury per million hours travelled

Cyclist - 0.41

Pedestrian - 0.80

Motor vehicle occupant - 0.46

Motorcyclist - 7.66

In each of these three examples we see that cyclists are not the group at highest risk for serious head injury. [cited Howie Chong / alma mater Yale / McGill Universities: howiechong.com / 'why it makes sense to bike without a helmet']

I ride a bike slowly, I don't smoke, I don't drink to excess. It should be up to the individual, not government, to decide whether adults choose to wear a helmet or not. Helmets, of course, have their place in cycling. If government were really keen to support the wellbeing of cyclists they would put genuine thought into separated cycle ways / intelligent infrastructure that enabled people to cycle safely. It should be up to me, as an adult individual who makes many other choices that are more life threatening, to make my own choice.