



DRIVER EDUCATION
28 October 2009

Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders) (17:25): This bill strengthens South Australia's graduated vehicle licensing scheme for inexperienced drivers, and it will hopefully help to save some lives.

I have been reassured that vehicle restrictions will not affect young people who are driving trucks in our regional areas. With the first good harvest expected for many years, every driver will be needed, and I would not like to see any problems caused by the new act. Can the minister also confirm that there will be no problems that will inadvertently affect current truck drivers in their employment?

Driver safety education programs in all South Australian secondary schools are also needed to highlight the dangers of speed, the effect of alcohol and other drugs on drivers' capability, and any other relevant topics relating to driver and passenger safety. I have been pleased to note that many of the secondary schools on Eyre Peninsula have already undertaken driver training in an effort to reduce accidents.

This positive and proactive position to reduce fatalities amongst drivers under 25 must be taken seriously, particularly in our regional areas, where accidents are many and transport options are so few. I commend the sponsorship of Iluka Resources, which funded a presentation by the Department for Transport, Energy and Infrastructure, the Far West Road Safety Group, the District Council of Ceduna, SA Police and Kalari Pty Ltd to educate children about road trains. Iluka's community relations officer, Karen Cosgrove, said:

...integrating road train safety into general road safety education programs by raising awareness and promoting the safety aspects associated with road trains travelling along the Eyre highway and through Ceduna is important for the safety of school children.

Schoolchildren had an opportunity to see a road train up close and learn first-hand from the driver how to be safe pedestrians around heavy vehicles. They were also able to take a drive in the Kalari driver simulator and discuss safety with different community representatives. Young adults aged 17 to 24 years of age make up only 11 per cent of the total population but account for 28 per cent of all road fatalities and 27 per cent of serious injuries.

Apart from the suffering of victims and their loved ones, the financial cost of fatalities and injuries to the South Australian community is more than \$900 million per year. It would seem, therefore, that the cost of driver education in schools would be more than offset by a reduction in accidents that result in death and injury, many of which happen in regional areas where there are no taxis or bus services.

Even quite experienced drivers can be traumatised by unexpected happenings on the road. A person who has never experienced a tyre blowing out when driving can have virtually no appreciation of the sudden and severe pull that is put on the steering wheel, and which, because of its swiftness, cannot be corrected in time to avoid going onto the wrong side of the road or off the road and, possibly, into an obstacle such as a tree.

In an article in the RAA magazine SA Motor, the Minister for Road Safety said that many drivers involved in fatalities have a previous serious driving conviction. He said:

To make significant inroads into SA's casualty and fatality rate we're going to have to address that group, which is

why we are now classifying them as 'criminal drivers'.

These are the ones who most need driver education, but it needs to be proactively undertaken before they incur driving convictions and not as a reaction afterwards, when lives may have already been lost.

However, mandatory sentencing can be unjust. It allows no recognition of circumstances or the effect of the sentencing. For example, for a country person to lose their licence, particularly a farmer, or those who do not live in a town, it has a much harsher effect because there is no alternative transport as there is for people who live in the city where public transport is available. Conditional exemptions are required to ensure fairness in some circumstances, and I am pleased to see that they are included in this bill.

An example of where the implications of mandatory sentencing have a severe impact has recently come to my attention. A country driver from a remote area, when visiting other areas of the state, regularly drove an elderly frail friend as a passenger. Unfortunately, the driver was involved in an accident and her dear friend was killed. The driver is a strong community advocate and volunteer. At the court hearing the magistrate referred to the driver's personal character and, given the circumstances, awarded the minimum mandatory sentence and declined to set a fine or court costs.

The driver has to live with the loss of a friend, but the long-term ramifications of dealing with a loss of licence while living in a remote area without transport choices and the knowledge that driving with an at-risk passenger could create further risk has had an enormous, long-term effect. This driver highlighted the implications for carers who regularly drive an elderly, frail, sick or at-risk person. Any minor accident could put these passengers more at risk of death or serious injury than other able-bodied passengers due to their being more physically vulnerable. In turn, this has grave consequences for the driver. Because they could incur a mandatory sentence if an accident occurred, it makes them review their carer-driver role for self-preservation. The negative effect of this will be that frail, aged or at-risk people will not be able to enjoy mobility by having a driver take them places they want or need to go.

The number of unlicensed drivers picked up for traffic violations is considerable, and no amount of so-called punishment will change that—even if the offender is gaoled for a considerable time. Upon release from gaol the offender is likely to begin driving again immediately, with or without licence. Unlicensed drivers do not carry a notice on their forehead or have an unusual shade of hair so they can be identified from a distance.

Unlicensed drivers and unregistered vehicles need some other method by which they can be recognised. Today's science can provide answers. For instance, it has been suggested interstate that unregistered vehicles have a reflective mark that can be picked up from a distance, thus identifying the vehicle as being unregistered. A person who has committed a number of serious driving offences could be microchipped. Again, the microchip could be picked up at a distance.

Larger penalties, such as heavier fines, gaol sentences, confiscation and possible crushing of vehicles, and cancellation of a driver's licence do not of themselves change the behaviour of the core people who ignore the law. More innovation and lateral thinking is required. A number of propositions—

Mrs Geraghty interjecting:

Mrs PENFOLD: I would rather save the lives!

A number of propositions that could positively reduce the number of people in this category have been suggested. Despite opposition, a privately owned and operated track where drivers can let off steam (as discussed with me recently by the mayor of the City of Port Adelaide Enfield) sounds like a great idea. It is an option which would provide drivers with an opportunity to gain practical experience in how to react and deal with unexpected situations. I strongly support this circuit for Port Adelaide, so that risk driving can be undertaken in a controlled environment and professional training is provided, rescue services are quickly available if something goes wrong, and the lives of other road users are not endangered.

People who have driven only on sealed roads have no understanding of the effect of hitting a slippery patch on a dirt road—and dirt roads will be with us for decades. Some experience of them can only help drivers to drive more safely.

Another aspect of driver training is education in the mechanics and care of a vehicle. The Lower Eyre Peninsula Road Safety Committee has undertaken such training at schools, including Port Lincoln High School, Cummins Area

School, Tumby Bay Area School and St Josephs School, taking along a lemon to teach students what to look for in order to ensure a vehicle they are buying is roadworthy and safe.

The year 10 and 11 students were asked to say what was wrong with the car and a police officer attended to point out deficiencies. Often young drivers acquiring their first car buy cheap vehicles because that is all they can afford. It is practical common sense for them to be able to look for traps which could mean the vehicle could become unroadworthy—if it is not already so.

Finally, I would like to see the promotion across the state of the successful Bag a Swag project, which is aimed at young people and which is supported by police on Eyre Peninsula. The slogan for the project is 'Crash at a party, not on the road,' with the aim being that young people take a sleeping bag with them rather than drive home immediately with a blood alcohol reading possibly over the limit. These bags could be hired out by entertainment venues for last minute cheap accommodation when driving home is not an option and alternative transport is not available.

While stronger laws and penalties are a component of our justice system—and hopefully a deterrent—they are only one aspect of ensuring people are safer on our roads. I ask the minister to investigate what else can be done to lower the number of deaths and injuries on our roads.