Speech By
Alex Douglas
MEMBER FOR GAVEN

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Motorcycle Safety, Children

Dr DOUGLAS (Gaven—Ind) (3.55 pm): I rise to highlight the need for children to wear helmets and protective clothing when riding motorcycles in light of a study of the impact of motorcycle trauma on Queensland children. Ten children—all boys—ranging in age from six to 15 lost their lives riding motorcycles between 2007 and 2009 and more than 600 children were admitted to public hospital for periods exceeding 24 hours with injuries from motorcycle accidents throughout the state. An additional nine fatalities in minors aged 16 to 17 were identified but not included in the study. The study did not include quad bikes, which have featured in recent media. I agree with the study that motorcycle riding is a dangerous pastime for children and, despite its popularity and the associated risk of off-road motorcycling on private property, the activity is unregulated. Child and off-road riders are not protected by law or government policy, yet governments recognise the vulnerability of adult motorcyclists on roads. For example, adult road riders must attend rider training courses, maintain a safe motorcycle and wear an approved helmet. But there are no regulations protecting children or non-licensed riders on private property.

The study found that the most common injuries that children suffered from motorcycle accidents were fractures, open wounds and abrasions or contusions. Of the fatalities, 90 per cent received a head or neck injury, 30 per cent had not worn any head protection, and 20 per cent used inadequately secured or adult sized helmets. Sixty per cent of the fatalities involved a second vehicle and half occurred during recreational riding. The Coroner cited young age, inexperience, decision-making ability, excessive speed or substance misuse in 70 per cent of cases. Of the remaining three children, all who received head or spinal injuries, none was wearing a helmet. The majority of incidents happened in outer regional or remote areas and 60 per cent were in areas with low to very low income, education and skills. Six fatalities were on-road and four happened off-road, although children under 16 years are not legally allowed to ride on public roads. As the report states, motorcycles used by children have a shorter wheel base and lower weight; rapid acceleration and turning may contribute to falls or loss of control; and often children do not have the physical, cognitive or hazard evaluation skills to ride safely. It is not known if off-road riding is riskier than on-road riding, but off-road users often face hazardous terrain and environmental challenges. This is the first population study of paediatric motorcycle trauma in Australia and I want to acknowledge the authors, and I table the report.

In light of this report's findings, I urge the government to introduce regulations of safety equipment for child motorcyclists. They should be compelled to use properly fitted and fastened clothing, helmets, boots and a back protector, which offers them protection. As well, the study calls for children to undertake appropriate training and ride a well-maintained bike suited to their skills and physical abilities. I will certainly push for these implementations to ensure the safety of all child off-road riders. Our children are our future and they deserve the full protection of responsible and informed legislation. Let us stop this terrible loss of life. Our children are the most precious commodities and we need to do something about this.

(Time expired)