

Enhancing South Australia's Graduated Licensing Scheme through road safety partnerships and a strong evidence-base

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Abstract

New rules to protect P-platers were introduced in South Australia on 28 July 2014. The changes are the most significant made to the Graduated Licensing Scheme in this State, applying both peer-passenger and night-time driving restrictions to P1 drivers and extending the time on a provisional licence from two to three years.

The reforms represent almost three years of work, including a major public consultation process, the drafting of legislation and passage of the Bill through Parliament. An inter-agency project group was responsible for successfully implementing the changes.

While reforms of this nature are never easy, the consultation process at each milestone was critical to success. It concentrated on the fact that the proposed reforms reflect international best practice, are evidence-based and that individual components were already in place in other parts of the country.

In addition, an extensive crash analysis was undertaken to work out the casualty savings if the laws had been in place during the previous five years, presenting a compelling case to Parliamentary members and the community. Much work was done to ensure these initiatives had the backing of major stakeholders, many of whom were strong advocates for the new laws throughout the process.

This partnership approach, together with sound evidence and a commitment to bringing the community along with us has meant a relatively smooth and successful implementation of these reforms. Most importantly, this achievement will have real and long lasting benefits for young South Australian drivers, their parents and the wider community.

Introduction

Despite significant reductions in South Australia's road toll over the past decade, young drivers have continued to be over-represented in road deaths and serious injuries, much more so than older drivers. In South Australia, young people aged 16 to 24 make up 12% of our population; however, they account for 22% of road deaths and 24% of serious injuries (South Australian Road Crash Database, 2009-2013).

Similar to other jurisdictions both interstate and overseas, South Australia manages the risks to young drivers through a graduated licensing scheme (GLS). The GLS allows novice drivers to gradually acquire safe driving experience with supervisory influences and restrictions progressively lifted as drivers progress through the stages of holding a learner's permit, following by a provisional (P1 and P2) licence and finally graduate to a full (unrestricted) licence.

South Australia has been working diligently to improve the safety outcomes for young drivers in this State over the past 10 years. Following the introduction of minimum supervised driving hours requirements for learner drivers, provisional P1 and P2 stages and the Hazard Perception Test in 2005; mobile phone restrictions for learner and P1 drivers in 2009; the GLS in South Australia was last amended in 2010. Of most significance was the increase in the minimum time required on a learner's permit from six to 12 months for drivers aged under 25 years as well as an increase in the minimum supervised driving time for learner's permit holders from 50 hours (including 10 at night) to 75 hours (including 15 at night).

While South Australia's GLS had been significantly improved over the years, the launch of *South Australia's Road Safety Strategy 2020 – Towards Zero Together* (Government of South Australia, 2011) placed a high priority and renewed focus on considering further measures to reduce the number of road deaths and serious casualties for young South Australians.

At the time, South Australia had the second worst fatality rate per population for 16-19 year olds of all Australian states and territories. Those jurisdictions that were ahead of South Australia such as Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia had already enhanced their graduated licensing schemes to reflect a number of 'best practice' findings.

International research evidence and comparisons with schemes in other Australian jurisdictions indicated that peer passenger restrictions, night driving restrictions, increasing the time on a provisional licence and raising the minimum age for a provisional licence all warranted further consideration.

Discussion

Consultation Process

On 14 October 2011, the South Australian Government released *South Australia's Graduated Licensing Scheme - Initiatives to Protect Young Drivers Discussion Paper* (Government of South Australia, 2011). The initiatives proposed in the Discussion Paper included:

1. A passenger restriction for all P1 drivers allowing no more than one passenger under 21 for the duration of P1 (with exemptions for immediate family members or for employment, or if a Qualified Supervising Driver (QSD) is present).
2. A restriction on driving between midnight and 5am for all P1 drivers for the duration of P1 (with exemptions for work-related driving or if a QSD is present).
3. Raising the minimum age for a provisional licence from 17 to 18 years.
4. Extending the total minimum provisional licence period from two to three years.
5. Removing regression to a previous licence stage following a disqualification period.

The Discussion Paper presented the community with factual information showing the need to further protect young drivers, particularly in rural areas of the State. Supporting evidence that the initiatives being proposed were in line with international best practice, were proven to work and that individual components were already in place in other parts of the country was also provided. It indicated that for some of the proposals exemptions would be considered for employment and possibly for other purposes, although the detail of the proposed exemption scheme had not yet been determined.

Importantly, the Discussion Paper also included the expected reductions in young driver fatalities and serious injuries for each initiative based on modelling done by the Centre for Automotive Safety Research (CASR). The estimated crash reduction for each initiative was a

powerful tool to promote open discussion with the community over the value of adopting such measures in South Australia and was very appealing to the media.

The consultation process ran for an eight week period until 8 December 2011. The proposed initiatives generated significant interest and public debate, and 1079 responses were received from people of all ages across the state. In addition to members of the public, responses were submitted from a variety of road safety stakeholders including those representing motorists, the health sector and youth interests, Members of Parliament, local government and community road safety groups.

A detailed report on the public consultation outcomes (Government of South Australia, 2012), including the views expressed by key stakeholders, was released in August 2012. It showed the level of support or non-support for each initiative, and also where responses were not clearly either supportive or non-supportive (see Table 1).

Table 1: Level of support by respondents for each GLS initiative

Initiative	Supportive	Non-supportive	Not clearly supportive or non-supportive
Passenger restriction	38%	45%	16%
Night-time driving restriction	39%	40%	21%
Raising the minimum licensing age from 17 to 18 years	20%	67%	13%
Extending provisional licence from 2 to 3 years	35%	36%	29%
Removing regression	42%	33%	23%

Analysis was undertaken according to the age, gender, licence type, location and parental status of the respondents. Not surprisingly given young people were most likely to be affected by the changes, there was not support by people aged under 25 for the proposed night driving and passenger restrictions, whereas they received general support from older age groups. The proposal to raise the provisional licensing age to 18 received the least support, despite evidence that it would bring the greatest trauma reductions for South Australia. Due to the strong community feedback, the South Australian Government decided not to proceed with this initiative.

Many respondents cited concern about the possible impact of raising the licensing age to 18 on young workers and students, particularly those living in rural and regional areas who have limited access to public transport. There was also a belief that the proposal would delay the crash statistics to a higher age bracket, despite the information being provided that the first year crash rate of new P1 drivers aged 18 would not be expected to be as high as that for 16 or 17 year olds.

Some respondents were concerned that the proposed initiatives would “punish the majority for the mistakes of a few,” indicating a belief that the young driver crash rate could be attributed to risk taking by a small number of drivers. Responses on the proposed passenger restriction included concern about the possible impact on car-pooling and designated driver programs where one person in a group of friends agrees to not drink alcohol. Another common concern was the possible effect on regional people who rely on others when travelling to work, school, sport or other social functions. Similar concerns were expressed about the proposed night driving restriction, and some respondents requested more detail about the exemption scheme.

There were also respondents, including parents and young people, who supported the proposed restrictions on the basis that they would reduce the peer pressure on young people to drive late at night or with passengers and assist parents to enforce a curfew or reduce worry about them driving unsafely if encouraged to do so by others. Many respondents who supported the restrictions tended to simply indicate their support, although some said they agreed the changes were likely to reduce the youth road toll.

The proposed initiatives were supported by the Royal Automobile Association (RAA), the Motor Accident Commission, CASR, South Australia Police (SAPOL), emergency services and the health sector. Throughout the process of developing the GLS changes, these key stakeholders had an important role advocating for the proposals. All worked cooperatively to ensure that consistent messages were imparted to the community, helping to achieve increased awareness, understanding and support for the proposals.

After work had begun on drafting the new legislation, the Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure (DPTI) offered briefings to organisations that had either expressed concern or requested further information during the initial consultation phase. They were provided with a detailed briefing on the proposed changes, including how the proposed exemption model would work and what it would mean for their members, as well as for young drivers. These briefings, along with those that followed with Members of Parliament, were particularly important in gaining support for the Bill. The majority of organisations who received a briefing and were presented with the evidence supported the changes going forward, and assisted with disseminating information about the new laws after they were passed by Parliament. The Youth Affairs Council of South Australia did not support the GLS initiatives on the basis that they would impact on young people's mobility.

Evidence-Based Approach

There was strong evidence to support the introduction of passenger and night driving restrictions for young P1 drivers, and it was important to convey this to people in a way that could be easily understood. A variety of visual aids were used to explain the information, ranging from a simple flyer through to detailed graphs and tables.

While the visual aids were refined over time, the key facts presented were the same in the Discussion Paper right through to the final communication strategy leading up to implementation, almost three years later. The data sets shown below, which were updated as time progressed, were key to getting the GLS initiatives through Parliament and implemented in South Australia.

Age and Population Representation

People aged 16 to 24 years are over-represented in serious casualties in South Australia. For the years 2009-2013 they made up 12% of the population, but accounted for 22% of all fatalities and 24% of all serious injuries as shown in Figure 1 (South Australian Road Crash Database, 2009-2013).

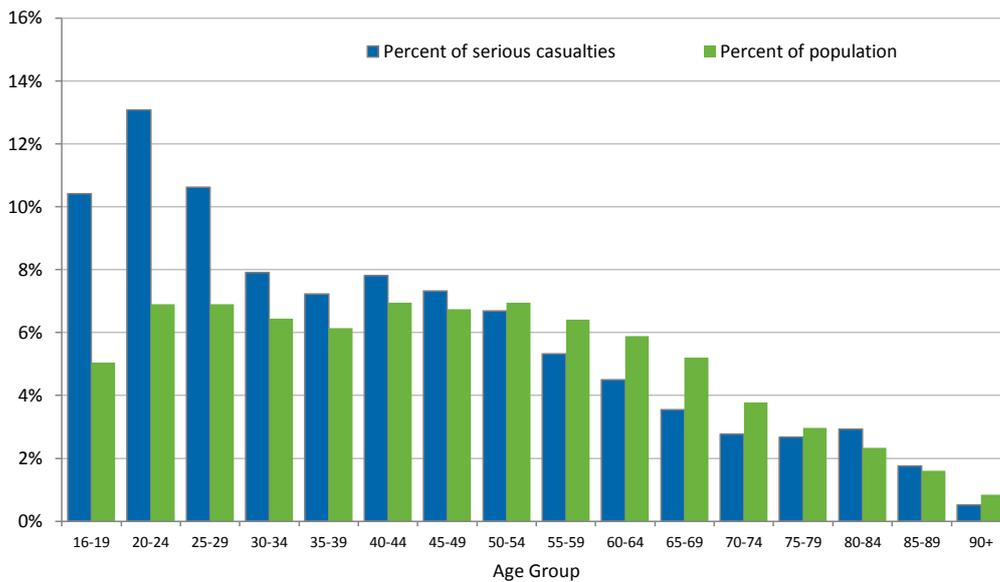


Figure 1: Fatal and Serious Casualties by age and population distribution, South Australia, 2009 - 2013

Need to protect P-Platers

Young drivers are more likely to crash in the first twelve months of holding a provisional licence, when the driver is least experienced and driving unsupervised. Figure 2 shows that upon gaining a provisional licence and beginning to drive unsupervised, the percentage of young drivers involved in crashes rises eleven times (Austroads, 2008).

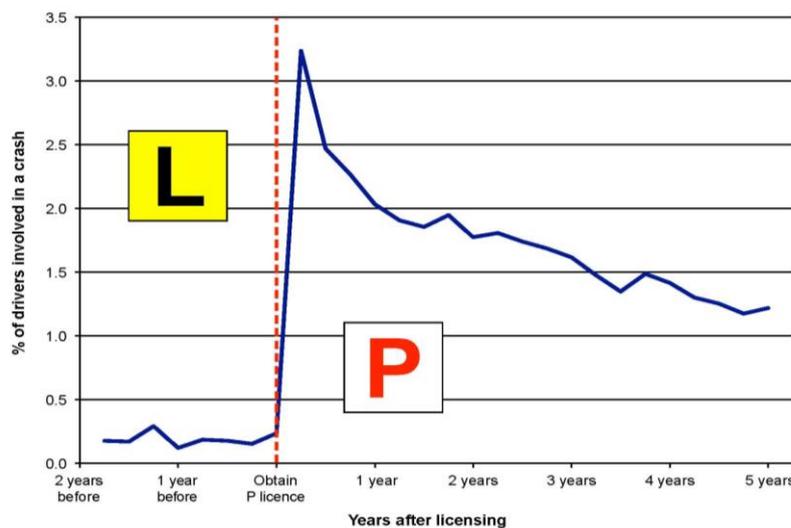


Figure 2: Percentage of drivers involved in a crash five years after licensing

Interstate Comparison

Until recently, South Australia has had the second worst fatality rate per population for 16-19 year olds of all Australian states and territories. While 2009-2013 figures show South Australia has moved up to be ahead of the Northern Territory and Tasmania, the Government’s goal is for South Australia to have the lowest fatality rate per population for 16-19 year olds in the country. The information in Table 2 clearly demonstrated that there was more that could be done in South Australia to improve the safety of young drivers (Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics, 2013).

Table 2: 16 – 19 year old fatalities per 100,000 population by jurisdiction

State	Fatalities 2008-12 Avg	Fatality Rate	State	Fatalities 2009-13 Avg	Fatality Rate
ACT	1	5.0	ACT	1	4.1
Vic	28	9.7	Vic	25	8.7
NSW	36	9.8	NSW	35	9.4
Qld	31	12.6	Qld	29	11.6
WA	18	14.4	WA	15	12.0
Tas	4	14.0	SA	11	12.8
SA	14	16.0	Tas	4	14.8
NT	4	32.1	NT	2	18.4
Aust	136	11.6	Aust	122	10.3

Regional Vs Metropolitan Drivers/Riders

The information that young rural drivers were two and half times as likely to die or be injured in a crash than their peers in metropolitan Adelaide is seen in Figure 3 (South Australian Road Crash Database, 2009-2013). This was confronting information for many rural stakeholders who had not realised that young rural drivers were at much greater risk of dying or being seriously injured in a crash. It also showed that young rural drivers could receive a disproportionate safety benefit from the proposed initiatives, which was crucial in gaining support when they were also less likely to have access to public transport options than young people in the city.

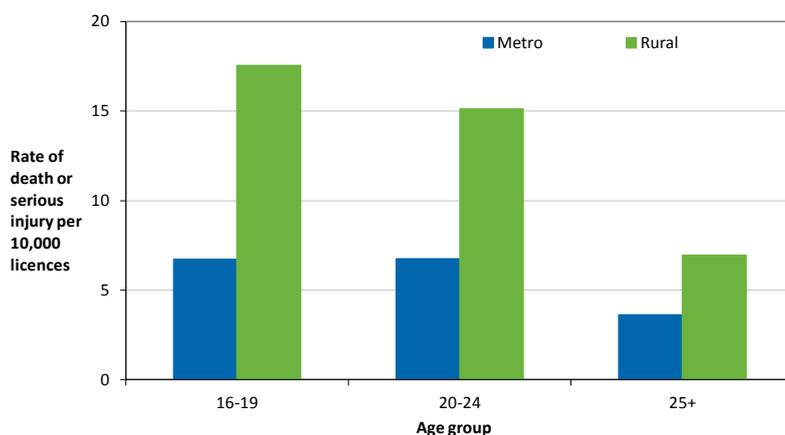


Figure 3: Rate of death or serious injury per 100,000 licences held for drivers/riders by residence, South Australia, 2009-2013

Night Driving Restriction

Figure 4 shows the over-representation of young drivers in fatal crashes between 10pm and 5am as a percentage of total crashes in South Australia between 2009 and 2013. Of the 16-19 year old drivers/riders involved in a fatal crash, 30% crashed between the hours of 10pm and 5am. This compared to 12% for drivers/riders involved in fatal crashes aged 25 years or over (South Australian Road Crash Database, 2009-2013).

Figure 5 also shows that P1 licence holders involved in fatal and serious injury crashes are more prevalent at night than holders of a full licence.

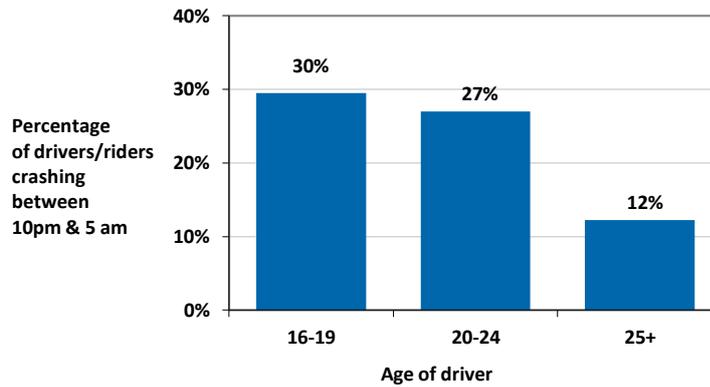


Figure 4: Drivers/riders involved in fatal crashes between 10 pm and 5 am as a percent of total crashes, South Australia, 2009-2013

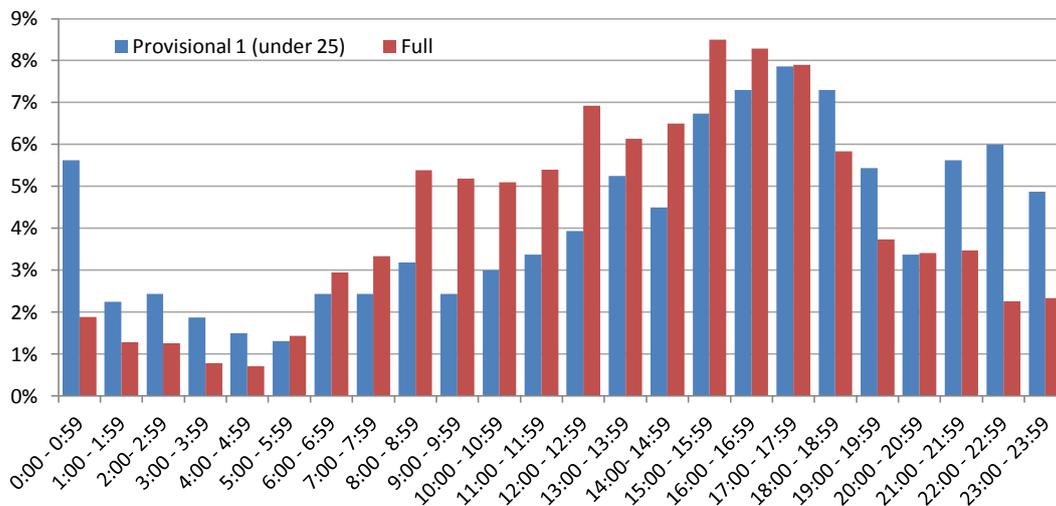


Figure 5: P1 and Full licence holders involved in fatal and serious injury crashes by time of day, South Australia, 2009 – 2013

Passenger Restriction

Figure 6 shows the over-representation of young drivers in fatal crashes involving two or more passengers as a percentage of total crashes in South Australia between 2009 and 2013. In this case, 25% of 16 – 19 year old drivers involved in fatal crashes are carrying two or more passengers. This compared to 12% of drivers involved in fatal crashes over the age of 25 carrying two or more passengers (South Australian Road Crash Database, 2009-2013).

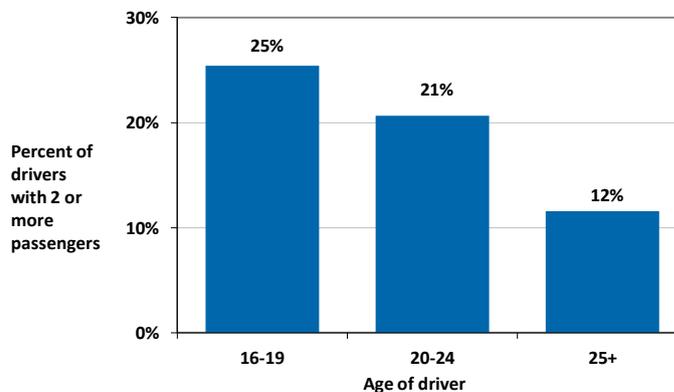


Figure 6: Drivers involved in fatal crashes with 2 or more passengers as a percent of total drivers, South Australia, 2009-2013

Crash Analysis

DPTI undertook an extensive crash analysis to provide further evidence that the proposed changes could save lives and prevent serious injuries (Noack et al, 2013). The analysis examined individual crashes of all P1 licence holders aged 16-24 that were involved in casualty crashes between 2008 and 2012. All casualty crashes that fell into one of the proposed restrictions were considered, the ages of injured passengers were determined where possible, as was the time of the crash. The casualties that resulted from these crashes were then calculated. From this analysis it was found that the overall total number of fatalities and injuries that had the potential to be prevented if these restrictions were in place in 2008 was:

- 22 fatalities (an average of 4 per year)
- 240 serious injuries (an average of 48 per year)
- 1397 minor injuries (an average of 279 per year)

The Department’s analysis, along with existing key statistics provided during the consultation process, was used to provide the community with a real understanding of the lives that could potentially be affected as a way to communicate the safety benefits of the proposals. Presenting the statistics in an interesting and easy to read format that has an impact on young people, their parents, the business sector and parliamentarians has been crucial to obtaining support for the GLS changes (see Figure 7). It was also another opportunity to present a united front between key road safety stakeholders in support of the proposals.

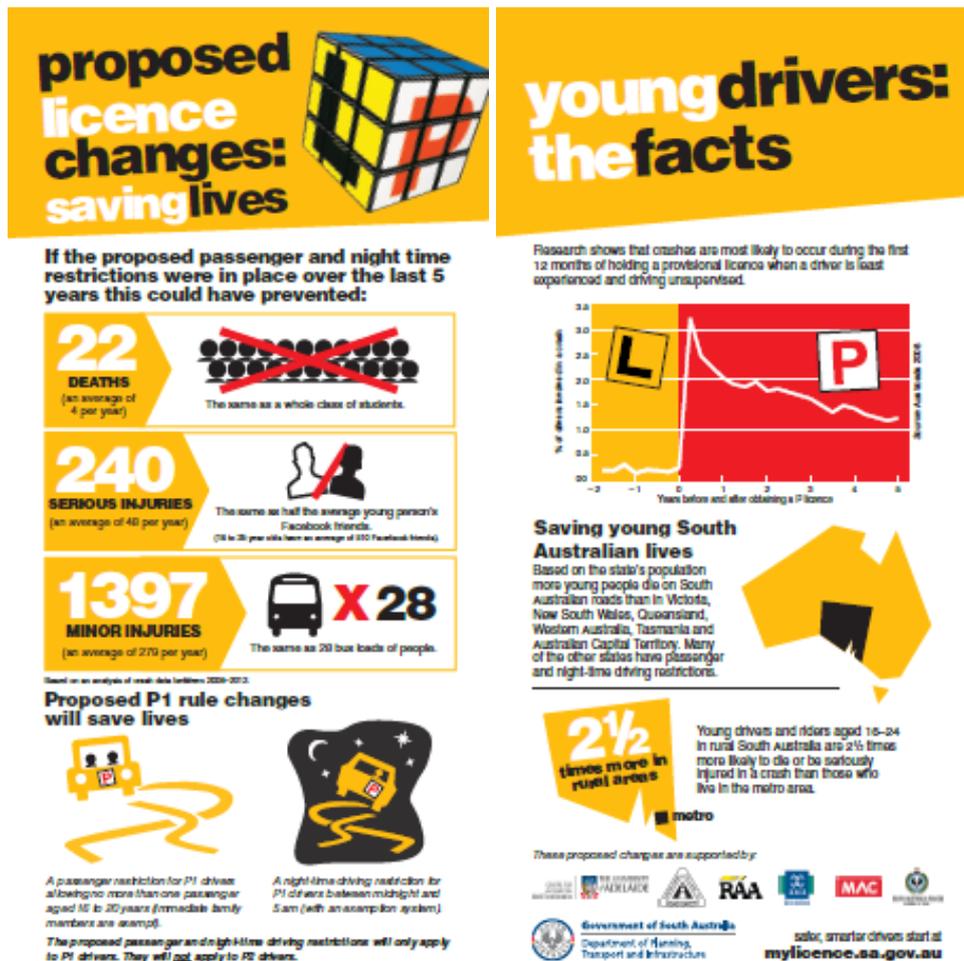


Figure 7: An example of one of the many GLS Brochures

Exemption Scheme

The exemption scheme was a key factor in gaining support for the changes. The final scheme allows young drivers to drive between midnight and 5am to participate in employment, education and training, as well as sporting, artistic, charitable, religious, scientific and volunteer commitments, addressing significant community concern that young drivers should not be seriously disadvantaged by the new laws, particularly in rural areas where there are limited public transport options. Drivers are able to carry more than one peer passenger if they are driving for employment purposes or driving on duty as an emergency services worker.

Driving to participate in a sporting activity was included after feedback was received from the community that young people may need to drive to attend swimming or rowing training prior to 5am. The activity must be provided by an organisation, association or club, and driving during the restricted hours to watch a sporting event is not allowed.

Following amendments to the Bill while it was in Parliament, the exemption grounds for the night driving restriction were expanded to include driving to participate in artistic, charitable, religious and scientific activities provided by an organisation, association or club.

Considerable thought was given to selecting an exemption model, particularly as large numbers of people would potentially be seeking an exemption. DPTI worked closely with SAPOL to develop a workable proposal. The model that was chosen was based on the approach taken in Western Australia, where an automatic exemption from the night driving restriction is available for employment or education/training purposes. The model places the onus on the driver to satisfy police at the roadside that they are driving under one of the exemption grounds. It caters to the needs of young people who may frequently change the circumstances of their employment, and often at short notice. It was decided that a formal application process where each application must be individually assessed against the relevant criteria may result in delays for drivers who urgently needed an exemption.

It is recommended that drivers carry evidence that they meet the exemption criteria while driving, for example a letter from their employer, education or training institution; or sports club or association. To assist drivers, a voluntary P1 Driver Exemption Form was developed in conjunction with SAPOL and made available on www.mylicence.com.au. The form contains the recommended information for young drivers to complete.

Implementation and Communication Strategy

Citing the evidence behind the restrictions strongly assisted with getting the message through about the safety benefits for young drivers. It was also very important that key messages were developed and communicated throughout the process, and this helped to dispel some of the myths that exist about young drivers, for instance that the crash statistics are the result of extreme behaviour by only a few drivers. It was also important to let people know that the initiatives were already in place in other jurisdictions and that they were shown to work.

The following are examples of the key messages that were used:

- Despite steady falls in South Australia's road toll over the past decade, young drivers continue to be over-represented in road trauma statistics compared to older age groups.
- Crashes are most likely to occur during the first 12 months of holding a provisional licence when the driver is least experienced and driving unsupervised.

- Young drivers in rural South Australia are two and a half times more likely to die or be injured in a crash than their peers in metropolitan Adelaide.
- South Australia has the second worst fatality rate for this age group of all Australian states and territories – almost double that of Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland.
- The initiatives reflect international best practice, are evidence-based and are already in place in other parts of the country.
- The initiatives are not about making life tougher for young drivers. They're about protecting them and will result in fewer deaths and injuries among young drivers, their passengers and other road users in South Australia.

Upon passage of the Bill, a significant communications campaign was prepared to accompany the new laws. This was the final stage in the commitment to bringing to the community along with us to achieve a relatively smooth and successful implementation of the reforms, and it was important to convey both the detail of the changes and the reasons behind the new restrictions.

A state-wide advertising campaign involved press, radio, digital and bus shelter advertising. In addition, a letter and an information brochure were sent to all Learner's Permit and P1 drivers across the State (approximately 100,000). Some 500 letters were also sent to employer and volunteer groups, education/training institutions and relevant clubs and associations to advise them of the detail of the changes, how the exemption model would work and what it would mean for them. These organisations were encouraged to assist young drivers by recognising that the restrictions exist to reduce the risk of a serious injury or fatality and if asked, to provide a letter or sign a form as evidence of their need to travel. A specific page on the mylicence website was also dedicated to the new laws. More information is available at <http://mylicence.sa.gov.au/gls/home>.

The GLS changes were successfully implemented by an inter-agency project group including representatives from DPTI, Service SA, SAPOL and the Courts Administration Authority. This group was established following passage of the Bill through Parliament, and it required a six month period to ensure that the changes were successfully implemented.

The GLS changes introduced on 28 July 2014 include:

Passenger restriction

P1 licence holders aged under 25 must not carry more than one passenger aged between 16 and 20 (excluding immediate family members) unless they have a qualified supervising driver sitting beside them or they meet one of the exemption criteria below:

- driving in the course of employment; or
- a police or emergency services officer on duty.

Night driving restriction

P1 licence holders aged under 25 must not drive between midnight and 5am, unless they have a qualified supervising driver sitting beside them or they meet one of the exemption criteria below:

- driving between home and work or driving in the course of employment;

- driving between home and education/training or driving in the course of education/training with a school, university, TAFE, apprenticeship or other formal training provider;
- driving between home and formal volunteer work or driving in the course of performing formal volunteer work;
- driving between home and an activity to participate in sports, artistic, charitable, religious or scientific activities; or
- a police or emergency services officer on duty.

Learner motorcyclists under the age of 25 without a P2 or full licence for a car are also subject to the night driving restriction.

Extending the total minimum provisional licence period from two to three years

The total length of time a new driver must hold a provisional licence was extended from two years to three. This means one year on a P1 licence and two years on a P2 licence. This in turn would extend the duration of conditions such as the zero blood alcohol limit, speed and high power car restrictions and a lower demerit allowance. Extending these conditions will help to keep our young drivers out of high-risk situations without impinging on their mobility.

Removing regression to a previous licence stage following a disqualification period

Regression to a previous licence stage has been removed. This will mean that disqualified L and P drivers will return to the licence stage they were at when they committed the offence resulting in the disqualification.

The Hazard Perception Test (HPT) being a requirement from L to P1, rather than P1 to P2

The Hazard Perception Test has become a requirement to progress from L to P1 rather than P1 to P2.

Throughout this process, the GLS initiatives have generated significant community interest and public debate. However, once the new laws had passed Parliament and the community were advised that they were coming into effect in July 2014 the comments received from the public generally moved from “these initiatives are unfair/not workable” to “how will these new laws affect me personally” with many parents and young drivers enquiring about their own situation and how the exemption criteria might apply. Once the laws had come into effect, the enquiries subsided significantly supporting the notion that the community was now aware of the new laws and had come to accept them. The evaluation of the communications campaign also showed a high level of community awareness about the new laws.

Interim Results

In South Australia, while young people are over-represented in fatalities and serious injuries, crash data shows that in the last five years the number of young lives lost has decreased. In the 11 month period until 1 July 2015 there have been five P1 drivers/riders under 25 years of age involved in fatal crashes compared to an average of 11 per year for the years 2009-2013.

In the nine month period until 1 May 2015, preliminary figures show that 42 P1 drivers/riders aged under 25 were involved in serious injury crashes and 402 in minor injury crashes. On average (for the years 2009-2013) 96 P1 drivers/riders aged under 25 were involved in serious injury crashes and 869 in minor injury crashes per year. An independent formal evaluation on the GLS changes will be undertaken once sufficient crash data is available.

Conclusion

Improving young driver safety has been an emerging priority for South Australia over the last decade. While continuing to push for more significant reforms over the longer term, our strategy has been to accept smaller safety improvements thereby enhancing the GLS in this State incrementally over time. This has required constant review and evaluation of the evidence so as to be able to persuade the Government and the community of the changes needed to further protect young South Australians.

The new rules for young Provisional (P1) licence holders represent almost three years of work including a major public consultation process, the drafting of legislation and passage of the Bill through Parliament at the end of 2013, followed by a six month implementation period which included a significant public communication campaign. In around five years' time when there is sufficient crash data, an independent formal evaluation on the GLS changes will be undertaken.

These latest reforms are the most significant changes made to the GLS in South Australia, and this package means that we now have one of the best GLS in the country. The new laws have now been in place for 11 months and with no significant issues reported in that time, there is a level of confidence that the laws have been accepted by the community and are working well.

This result would not have been achieved without the combined effort of road safety stakeholders who worked together to develop and implement changes that will be of lasting benefit to young people in South Australia. Crucial support was also gained by providing the evidence for change in a variety of ways, so that the community and key stakeholders understood the road safety risks facing younger drivers, the reasons for the changes, and the evidence that the restrictions could save lives.

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