



The Royal Australasian
College of Physicians



4 September 2015

The Hon Adam Giles MLA
Chief Minister
The Hon Peter Chandler MLA
Minister for Transport
GPO Box 3146
Darwin NT 0801

Via Email: Chief.Minister@nt.gov.au
Minister.Chandler@nt.gov.au

Dear Chief Minister Giles and Minister Chandler,

End open speed limits in the Northern Territory once and for all

On behalf of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians, the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons and the Australasian College for Emergency Medicine, we write to condemn the Northern Territory government's planned expansion of the open speed limit zone on the Stuart Highway, and to call for an end to open speed limits in the Northern Territory once, and for all.

The open speed limits trial, introduced in February 2014 on a 200km stretch of the Stuart Highway north of Alice Springs, was a backwards step for road safety in the Northern Territory. Since this time we have consistently outlined the risks the trial poses to all road users in the Territory, and called upon your government to abolish open speed limits, particularly in the absence of any publicly available review.

In 2014, the number of fatalities on Northern Territory roads was three times higher than the Australian national average.ⁱ The risks posed by open speed limits on Territory roads are compounded by poor road conditions and the long distances from emergency services and medical care.

Open speed limits create significant dangers for motorists and pedestrians. Research shows that a 5% increase in speed leads to a 15% increase in serious injury crashes and a 22% increase in fatal crashes.ⁱⁱ Internationally, there has been a global trend away from open speed limits, based on consistent evidence linking speed to car crashes, deaths and injuries.ⁱⁱⁱ

Open speed limit zones jeopardise the health and safety of all road users in the Northern Territory and undermine the Northern Territory government's commitment to the *National Road Safety Strategy 2011-2020*. We are deeply concerned that the continuation and proposed expansion of open speed limit zones will see increased speed-related motor vehicle accidents and fatalities on Northern Territory roads. Our Colleges urgently call on the Northern

Territory government to prioritise the safety of all Territory road users by halting any planned expansion of open speed limit zones in the Northern Territory and abolishing the existing open speed limit zone on the Stuart Highway.

Yours sincerely

Dr Stephen Gourley
Chair, NT Faculty
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Dr Anthony Cross
President
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Dr Christine Connors
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Laureate Professor Nicholas Talley
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Dr John Treacy
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Professor David Watters OBE
President
Royal Australasian College of Surgeons

ⁱ Table 5.4: Annual fatalities per 100,000 population by jurisdiction 1985-2014, Road Trauma Australia 2014 Statistical Summary, p51.

ⁱⁱ National Road Safety Strategy 2011-2020, p59.

ⁱⁱⁱ Cameron, MH (2003), 'Potential benefits and costs of speed changes on rural roads', Report No. CR 216. Australian Transport Safety Bureau, Canberra; Carlsson, G (1997), 'Cost-effectiveness of information campaigns and enforcement and the costs and benefits of speed changes'. Proceedings of European Seminar, *Cost-Effectiveness of Road Safety Work and Measures*, Luxembourg; Crawford, R (2002), 'Suitability of rural dual carriageway roads for higher speed limits'. Internal report, Department of Transport and Regional Services, Canberra; Kallberg, V-P, and Toivanen, S (1998), 'Framework for assessing the impacts of speed in road transport'. Deliverable 8, MASTER project, European Commission; Nilsson, G (1984), 'Speeds, accident rates and personal injury consequences for different road types'. Rapport 277, Swedish National Road and Transport Research Institute (VTI), Sweden; Peeters, PM, van Asseldonk, Y, van Binsbergen, AJ, Schoemaker, TJH, van Goeverden, CD, Vermijs, RGMM, Rietveld, P, and Rienstra, SA (1996), 'Time to tame our speed? A study of the socioeconomic cost and benefits of speed reduction of passenger cars'. Report to Research Unit for Integrated Transport Studies, Den Haag, The Netherlands; Rietveld, P, van Binsbergen, A, Schoemaker, T, and Peeters, P (1996), 'Optimum speed limits for various types of roads: a social cost-benefit analysis for the Netherlands'. Tinbergen Institute, Free University Amsterdam, The Netherlands; Toivanen, S, and Kallberg, V-P (1998), 'Framework for assessing the impacts of speed'.