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The Hon. David Borger MP
Minister for Roads & Transport
The Legislative Assembly
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

22nd September 2010

Dear Minister Borger,

Thank you for your correspondence to me which was attached to a 'copy of your correspondence to the Hon. George Souris MP'.

I note your statement in paragraph 4 ('copy of your correspondence to the Hon. George Souris MP') that *'a recent study by the University of New South Wales in 2009, investigated the effectiveness of a bicycle helmet to reduce angular head acceleration and subsequent brain injury in crashes,'* but I was somewhat dismayed that you did not expand the details further, leaving me at a loss to discover a) what the study was entitled, and b) what the actual findings of the study were. Consequently, I have attempted to discover these details for myself.

Despite numerous phone calls made to your ministerial office, followed by numerous phone calls to the Roads & Traffic Authority (RTA) upon your department's advice, the study has still not arrived despite assurances that it has been posted. As I mentioned to your staff when they pointed out to me that I live in the 'country', Scone is only four hours north of Sydney and hardly likely to be affected by lengthy postal delays. It now is almost two weeks since the document was allegedly despatched from Macquarie Street.

Be that as it may, I continue to look forward to the arrival of the study in hard copy at some stage, and in the meantime the RTA (via telephone) have helpfully issued me with a study title and authors' names.

Headed by Associate Professor Andrew McIntosh, it would appear that the 2009 UNSW study is sponsored by the Australian Government, various affiliated bodies, and Delta-V Experts.[1] With regards to Associate Professor McIntosh's involvement in the study, I am concerned by a conflict of interest that arguably ought to have been disclosed.

Associate Professor McIntosh is a staff member of Delta-V Experts[2], a company who deals in crash-investigation, biomechanics, injury & ergonomics, engineering consulting and workplace safety. Moreover he is also a member of the Standards Australia committees for pedal cycle helmets, equestrian helmets and the helmet test methods.

In these roles it is questionable whether the interests of the general public stand to be served in an independent manner juxtaposed against the interests of Delta-V Experts and Standards Australia which could be said to be served by finding in favour of bicycle helmets and further crash

[1] http://www.riskandsafety.unsw.edu.au/research/helmetstudy.html
[2] http://www.dvexperts.net/staff/andrew-mcintosh

investigation studies. Notionally, implications have arisen that appear to question the independence of the research.

Furthermore, set to close in December 2010,[3] I am concerned about the widely-acknowledged academic unrest at UNSW's School of Risk & Safety Science, and the impact that may have had on the quality of the study[4]

Given that the UNSW's Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Professor Richard Henry reported that *'the external review of the Faculty of Science from a group of internationally eminent scientists recommended ...that it did not see the School of Risk & Safety Science as one of the strengths internationally of UNSW'*[5] and that the closure is *'a strategic decision to reallocate resources to the strengths in the Faculty of Science,'*[6] I am not confident that my interests have been academically and rigorously explored in the research emanating from UNSW's School of Risk & Safety Science.

Moreover, I too am also concerned that conducting sponsored policy studies for government does *'not generate valuable intellectual property or contribute to lucrative undergraduate teaching,'*[7] and wonder whether your department has had the opportunity to review the most recent study on the issue of bicycle helmet laws published in *The Journal of the Australasian College of Road Safety,* August 2010.[8] This peer-reviewed study by Associate Professor Chris Rissel suggests that reductions in the number of cycling-related head injuries may be the result of other general road safety improvements rather than mandatory bicycle helmet laws.

Prima facie, the evidence pertaining to helmets is conflicting.

Notwithstanding fierce academic debate on the matter, we are still legally compelled to wear one in Australia. Inter alia, most nation states across the globe openly acknowledge that mandatory helmet laws raise issues of civil liberties. Accordingly the decision 'to helmet or not' is left to their individual citizens. It is time this practice was adopted here, and relinquished to the realm of choice.

I respectfully submit that on the premise that the law is fragmented, uncertain and inconsistent; the law ought to be repealed. Until such time, I respectfully request again, an exemption from being compelled to wear a bicycle helmet when I ride my bicycle.

Yours sincerely,

Sue Abbott

http://freedomcyclist.blogspot.com

Cc: The Hon. Kristina Keneally MP, Premier of NSW, GPO Box 5341, SYDNEY NSW 2001; The Hon. Barry O'Farrell, MP, Parliament House, Macquarie Street, SYDNEY NSW 2000; The Hon. Clover Moore, MP & Lord Mayor of Sydney, GPO Box 1591, SYDNEY NSW 2001; The Hon. George Souris, MP, 20 Bridge Street, MUSWELLBROOK NSW 2333; Mr Bill Curnow, 27 Araba Street, ARANDA ACT 2614; Dr Paul Martin, Specialist Anaesthetist, PO Box 213, TOOWANG QLD 4066; Mr Philip Adams, GPO Box 9994, SYDNEY NSW 2001; Matthew Moore & Julie Robotham, Sydney Morning Herald, PO Box 3771, SYDNEY NSW 2001; Chris Gillham, Scribeworks, 12 Hopetoun Terrace, Shenton Park, PERTH WA 6008; Kerry O'Brien, 7.30 Report, ABC Ultimo Centre, GPO Box 9994, Sydney NSW 2001.

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[3] http://www.smh.com.au/national/education/science-purge-to-continue-at-unsw-20100722-10mzt.html
[4] http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/school-in-a-state-of-collapse-20100609-xwyb.html
[5] http://www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/content/2009/s2772195.htm
[6] http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2009/12/07/2764515.htm
[7] http://www.smh.com.au/national/education/science-purge-to-continue-at-unsw-20100722-10mzt.html
[8] http://www.acrs.org.au/srcfiles/ACRSVol21-3-WebLR.pdf