

Australia: Change to bicycle helmet laws could be a fatal mistake

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Road safety researchers said a Queensland Parliament Committee Report recommendation letting adults off the hook from wearing bike helmets could result in a spike of potentially fatal head injuries.

Professor Narelle Haworth from QUT's Centre for Accident Research and Road Safety - Queensland (CARRS-Q) said the report, which was handed down today, recommended trialling a 24-month exemption from bicycle helmet laws for cyclists aged over 16 riding in parks, on footpaths, shared or exclusive bike paths, or [roads](#) with [speed limits](#) of 60km/h or under.

"Head injuries are among the most horrific injuries to suffer," Professor Haworth said.

"Our data suggests that if the Committee's recommendation was implemented, then the total number of head injuries from bicycle crashes in Queensland could increase by up to 60 per cent.

"We also know that most cyclists don't ride on roads with speed limits over 60 km/h and so these roads only account for about 10 per cent of police-reported crashes. So requiring adults to wear helmets only on these high-speed roads is effectively the same as not requiring them at all."

The Committee recommendations were suggested as a way to help overcome public health issues such as obesity by making activities like cycling more attractive to adults.

"Helmet laws are very similar to laws regarding seatbelts," Professor Haworth said.

"Like seatbelts, helmets weren't popular at first but Australians are now used to the idea of wearing them and there's plenty of evidence to say the laws are working at reducing serious [head injuries](#).

"Based on overseas experience we are concerned that helmet wearing rates for children will drop if it is not mandated for adults.

"You can buy an approved helmet from about \$20 so I guess it's a matter of asking how much your brain is worth."

Provided by Queensland University of Technology

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