

Wednesday, 2 May 2018

The Inspector

Legislation & Development Review Service

I am aware that submissions should be concise and factual, but what follows is a somewhat lengthy plea for I believe there is a need to understand all the people behind a motorcycle visor and a "patched vest", a diverse group of individuals that should not be judged by the negative actions of a few. I believe that in any society, organisation, institution or club, there are a majority of good people but I also acknowledge there are those that choose to act in a negative manner.

Please allow me to introduce myself. I am a 57 year old female, a retired secondary Mathematics and Science teacher, having worked studiously for the Tasmanian Government and paid taxes from 1983 to 2017. I am now a self-funded retiree. I have held a motorcycle licence for many years and have had the privilege to associate with groups such as Ulysses Motorcycle Club, Motorcycle Riders Association and most recently, the Australia Social Motorcycle Club, of which I am a "patched member". I proudly wear my patched vest as it acknowledges the service of returned veterans and animals that saw active duty whilst defending our country and its values; my participation in a number of charitable organisations and events; and, my developing skill as a rider. It gives me a sense of pride in my achievements as a rider and a sense of belonging to a 'family', having lost many members of my paternal/maternal family throughout recent years.

I did not enjoy the honour of meeting and knowing my grandfather, a World War 1 veteran, but recently I attended the unveiling of his headstone in the presence of Her Excellency, The Governor General of Tasmania. I chose to ride my motorcycle, a beautiful Indian cruiser, to this event and I chose to wear my "patched vest" with the badges that recognise our returned servicemen and women and their associated animal companions. I did this to honour my grandfather, to acknowledge that he served to protect our Australian values, our freedom (of choice), to enable members of our society regardless of gender to feel equal and be treated as such. At no times, did I pose a threat to any in attendance and, in fact, was rewarded with many complimentary comments.

Amongst the motorcycle clubs with which I have ridden, I have met doctors, lawyers, professional persons and business owners, members of the Police Force, the military services, nurses, Justices of the Peace, fathers and mothers. At times, some of these people may have committed offences, some may even have been incarcerated and like me, some may even have had minor convictions such as driving infringements. This does not make them criminals and I am saddened that, in a society where we try to instil positive values in our children, an acceptance of all members of society and teach restorative practices within our schools, this proposed legislation will possibly allow the opposite. When do we stop punishing a person for past offences? How many times do we expect an individual to be shunned or to atone for previous actions? Do we not believe in our rehabilitative practices? How can we honestly judge all based on the actions of a few? Additionally, there are many incidents of victimisation, wrongful conviction and imprisonment documented within media around the world, including Australia.

Our society encourages our retirees and persons approaching the 'twilight years' to remain active and social. My association with the Ulysses Motorcycle Club demonstrated this. Many members had lost their loved ones but their love of riding allowed them a new 'family', a social outlet and a sense of belonging. The Military Brotherhood Motorcycle Club and Vietnam Veterans Motorcycle Club (these individuals wear patched vests) contain many members who left their loved ones to serve and defend our country, to act as peace-keepers in other countries around the world. Often they are at the forefront of Anzac Services. Will this proposed legislation deprive these individuals of the comradeship that has possibly saved many from the ravages of PTSD? What does having a friend, a buddy, a mate mean? It is someone to laugh with, to cry with, to share the good times and the bad, to 'watch your back', to help avoid the loneliness when there are no other family members to be at your side. In a recent period of chronic illness and subsequent period of depression, it was my "patched buddies" that visited me in hospital, rang me each day to check that I was okay. It was my club comrades that made me feel worthwhile and gave me hope. Will this proposed legislation deplete me of this sense of worth, of pride, of belonging and of knowing that somebody cares? Will this proposed legislation deprive me of the only 'family' I now enjoy?

What does riding within a group, a club really mean? It means, amongst other things, someone to assist in times of mechanical failure, or illness, someone to mentor and 'look out for you', it means somewhere to belong. Have you ever witnessed the annual Toy Run, the delighted smiles on the faces of the many children the motorcycling procession passes, the relief on the faces of their parents when they know their children will receive presents at Christmas and that there will be food on the table? Amongst this procession are many "patched members" and I have personally witnessed the hand that goes into the pocket and then places money into the collection bins for those less fortunate. Have you ever witnessed the Black Dog Ride and the tremendous effort that the motorcyclists involved, including "patched members", put in to ensure that hope is given to those suffering the ravages of depression? These individuals do not participate for self-gratification but out of respect for those less fortunate than themselves, out of a sense of empathy and the hope that they can contribute to making somebody's life just that little bit better.

In 2017, I was fortunate to attend the Blessing of The Bikes in San Remo, Victoria. Over 10,000 motorcyclists gathered in the small community of San Remo, along with members of the religious fraternity, to honour those that have passed away and to welcome the beginning of another 'riding season'. I witnessed no incidents, no negativity, although there were motorcyclists from all walks of life and a number of "patched members" present. I witnessed no threatening behaviour, no intimidation, and no evidence of drug-taking or selling.

In the purchase of my most recent motorcycle and the maintenance of my motor vehicle, I am aware that I have dealt with members of a "patched club". Importantly, as a female, I have always been treated with respect and honesty. In fact, I have felt more threatened by the presence of security guards at public events where many of the guards appeared no older than the young persons that I had the responsibility and trust to educate. I have witnessed more bullying and intimidation in public institutions than I have in any motorcycling event I have attended. I have felt more threatened by the behaviours of young people in my most recent workplace and in walking the streets of our capital cities, through 'gangs' of non-motorcycle-related youths. I have experienced more victimisation at the hands of a close neighbour and her family than within any motorcycling club.

How does one determine the display of 'club colours' and 'club affiliation'? In 2013, I spent most of my vacation period volunteering with Blaze Aid in the aftermath of the south-eastern peninsula fires in Tasmania. The group of 40 volunteers that I directly worked with all proudly wore vests, safety vests, but emblazoned with the Blaze Aid signage. Many clubs wear insignias that identify their membership. How is the display of 'football colours and club membership' so different to the display of a patch associating one with a motorcycling club? Whilst recent visits by two major "patched motorcycling clubs" to Tasmania invested much in our economy and presented very few incidents, a recent football match made headlines in all the major Tasmanian papers due to the violent and anti-social behaviour of club followers in attendance.

There is strong feeling with respect to the proposed legislation within both the motorcycling and non-motorcycling communities. Tasmania, due to its natural scenic beauty, friendly people and roads attracts many motorcyclists and motorcycling groups and clubs from other areas. Many Tasmanian residents own and ride motorcycles, many owning more than one motorcycle. It is recognised that a motorcycle is more energy efficient and has less impact on the environment than many other motor vehicles. The registration of a motorcycle contributes to the local government funds and the safety levy attached contributes to maintenance and education programmes. If this proposed legislation is passed, will the desire to own and ride a motorcycle become less strong within the many members of the motorcycling fraternity? How will this impact on our already fragile economy?

This letter/submission is long but it is heartfelt, beseeching you to think seriously about the implications of this proposed legislation. All laws are subject to interpretation and bias and, in particular, proposal 6 is of concern to me as a motorcyclist and proud member of the Australia Social Motorcycle Club. I cannot believe that my grandfather fought for a government that would allow this type of legislation to be introduced. I cannot believe that this type of legislation truly upholds our democratic values.

Respectfully

Gaye (Raynor) Edmunds

(please withhold address)

Sent with permission and approval of Australia Social Motorcycle Club Office Bearers

Tasmanian State Officer – Leon Cupit

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