



PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT

Private Members' Statements

29 July 2020

DIRT BIKE RIDERS

Ms SONIA HORNER (Wallsend) (15:03):

In my 13 years as the member for Wallsend, few issues have been as polarising to my constituents as the matter of dirt bike riders. The matter has raised lots of questions, including who should ride them; where should they be ridden; what is to be done to discourage and punish illegal and irresponsible riders; and many more. Professor Phillip O'Neill's opinion piece in May on the subject was interesting reading. He raised many valid points, though I wonder if he was a bit tough on dirt bike riders in general. In describing dirt bike riding, he used the word "mindless". He referred to riders as "no-schoolers" and set them in conflict with the average respectable citizen. Dirt bike riding is a hobby, like any other. It is enjoyed by a wide range of people and does not conform to the easy stereotypes suggested by some. Many of the average respectable citizens imagined by Professor O'Neill might enjoy a ride themselves.

It can be dangerous, but so can surfing or playing footy. It can be loud, but so can target shooting. My interactions with the community on dirt bike riding have been interesting and have brought me into contact with a lot of people from all walks of life who enjoy getting out on the trails. Many of them are responsible, considerate people—they love getting out in the bush and riding their dirt bikes—but as we all know, some of them are not. I work with the community and the police on the unlawful characters. My staff can attest that I write regularly to the local police and interact with them to report the miscreants. I urge all members of the community who witness any incidents of illegal or irresponsible dirt bike riding to lodge a complaint with the Police Assistance Line. My colleagues in the House would agree that it is great to report it on

Facebook, but we want it to be reported to the police. They love the details and data, and it is important for them to see the patterns of behaviour.

The professor was correct: It is neither a new issue, nor an easy one to address overnight. We cannot let the bad behaviour of some people destroy an activity that so many people enjoy and take part in responsibly. That is why I have tried to get recreational registration for dirt bikes in New South Wales, as has been done in Victoria. It is obvious that local riders have very few places left where they can ride and their children have even fewer options available. The only real option available for parents is to join a local club and race. That can be very expensive and not what their children are interested in doing. After I spoke with local riders, the idea of reviving the recreational registration campaign was raised. Making more space available, with similar conditions to those that operate at Stockton Beach recreational vehicle areas, would be a good start.

The scheme went very close to being implemented in 2011 and again in 2014. It is obvious from speaking with peak bodies such as the Motorcycle Council of NSW and the Dual Sport Motorcycle Riders Association that there is a real need and want for the scheme. I have circulated a petition calling on the New South Wales Government to introduce recreational registration along the lines of the Victorian model, which will help strengthen police response to illegal or dangerous riding and ensure that the bikes are kept in good condition. The revenue raised will help offset the cost of maintaining and upgrading dirt bike trails and recreational riding areas. Instead of continuing to punish riders, it is time to help them and give them the opportunity to do the right thing.