

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In general this report is about the needs of off-road motorcyclists who are not licensed and are under seventeen years of age. Such riders are not permitted by law to ride on public land. They can ride however in managed rides in private facilities or on private property. Riders with learner's permits (16.5 years of age) must ride with licensed riders in public spaces until they are licensed.

There is great diversity among underage, unlicensed and unregistered trail bike riders. Some enthusiasts are from families with socio-economic backgrounds at a level sufficient to provide them with top-of-the-range bikes, total safety equipment, transport to facilities and payment for coaching and appropriate skill development. Others have poorly maintained and dangerous bikes that are ridden spontaneously in out-of-school hours or in the holidays in local environments. Young riders at this end of the continuum have families that may not know about the ownership of the bike, or cannot afford the cost of transporting their children to managed rides, or the cost of safety equipment or club membership fees. Underage riders are found at all points along the continuum, and all have the potential for illegal riding.

The majority of underage riders surveyed in this study want safe environments, which are in close proximity to their places of residence, where they can ride without fear of being fined. (*See Chapter 7*) They and their fathers, guardians or older friends ask that local authorities provide these spaces. (*See Chapter 7*) Surrounding such a demand however are the issues of appropriate licensing, well-constructed motorcycles suited to size and age of rider as well as terrain, provision of marked trails, skill development training, codes of rider ethics, provision of riding opportunities at managed rides at reasonable cost. (*See Chapter 12*) It is clear that educational responsibilities lie with dealers at the point-of-sale, motorcycling clubs and organizations, local authorities and even Education Queensland. (*See Chapter 12*) The 'Where To Ride' book developed by TreadLightly! Australia is a welcome resource in this area. In the training and education of riders, the cooperation of parents must be sought. Local authorities must have a close working relationship with local motorcycling clubs to ascertain their changing needs.

The major concern surrounding off-road motorcycling in natural and artificial settings is the actual provision, maintenance and management of sites. Responsibility in this area lies with local authorities, state government departments like EPA (Environment Protection Agency) and DNRM (Department of Natural Resources and Mines), motorcycle clubs and private developers. (*See Chapter 12*) Local authorities must consider appropriate nomenclature of recreation activities encompassing off-road motorcycling, issues of residential development approvals, which can encroach on these sites, the need to protect areas with high conservation values, the inclusion of off-road motorcycling in outdoor recreation strategic planning, the development of lists of appropriate user groups and the provision of educational opportunities for offroad recreation activity enthusiasts. (*See Chapter 12*) Of even greater significance for local authorities is the need to engage in aggressive searches for suitable sites for provision of off-road recreational activities. This could be done in collaboration with relevant state government departments and motorcycle clubs. Once such sites have

been found and developed, relevant motorcycling clubs and organizations could be involved to lease and manage the sites and facilities. (*See Chapter 12*) Continual monitoring will need to occur concerning the viability of these clubs as they are increasingly vulnerable to escalating insurance charges.

The issue of underage, unlicensed and unregistered trail bike riders has an ephemeral or will-o'-the-wisp quality about it. While not detracting from obvious and legitimate concerns of local residents and councils about noise, dust and environmental damage from off-road motorcycles, the major problem is one of discerning the particular age of those responsible. Because of the spontaneity, speed and unstructured nature of the recreation activity of trail bike riding for its adherents, it is difficult to ascertain the extent of the "problem". While it is obvious that some residents have seen particular riders riding illegally whom they have classified as underage, it would be hazardous indeed to stereotype all illegal riders as underage, unlicensed and unregistered. The problem of illegal riding involves riders of all ages.

Consideration needs to be given by local authorities in South-East Queensland to a regional approach to solving the issues surrounding underage, unlicensed and unregistered trail bike riding. This would involve deliberation by SEQROC (South-East Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils) in association with appropriate state government departments and development of action strategies by local councils. (*See Chapter 12*) Motorcycle clubs and private developers would need to be involved in the planning and management of appropriate facilities, events and services. Because of the scarcity of suitable land in certain local authority areas it may be necessary to find appropriate land at some distance from local residential areas. A consequence of this will be the provision of transport to suitable sites for those riders who indicate that cost is a major factor in their decision to ride in close proximity to their place of residence.

Most Councils believed that the heavy-handed approach of constantly blitzing and fining would not be effective and would merely mean that illegal riders would move to another place. In general councils were more inclined to use a gradual approach with underage riders instead of fining them at the outset. Most Councils used some form of blitzing.

Current available figures for sales of off-road motorcycles, motorcycle club membership and participation in managed events point to a major expansion of interest and participation in the recreational activity of non-competitive and competitive off-road motorcycling on natural trails and in managed facilities, respectively. (*See Chapter 5*) These have contributed to increasing demand for suitable environments both natural and artificial, where the activity can be practiced. There has also been an expansion in the demand for extreme recreational activities involving higher levels of risk. Simultaneously, there has been an increase in the number of complaints to larger local authorities in South-East Queensland concerning noise and dust as well as environmental damage from off-road recreational 4WD and 2WD vehicles. (*See Chapters 5 and 9*) This has resulted in increasing numbers of fines for illegal riding / driving as well as an escalation in maintenance costs to repair environmental damage and fencing. (*See Chapter 9*) More recently the general issue of massively increasing insurance costs to cover potential litigation claims has

affected agencies involved with the management of facilities and events for public consumption. This issue has important ramifications for volunteerism and participation rates in particular recreation activities as well as attendance at big events, and for public and private providers of facilities and events.

The issue of cost linked to insurance is central for many riders in their decision to either join a club or enter a managed ride. (*See Chapters 5 and 7*) All groups need to collaborate with legal professionals on the issue of duty of care, indemnity and litigation. (*See Chapter 12*) If this issue is not dealt with urgently there will be an exacerbation in the problem of illegal riding, the closure of existing facilities and / or motorcycling clubs, and the drift of off-road motorcycling enthusiasts into illegal riding or other recreation activities.