

Ms Mikaela Meggetto
Coroners Registrar
Coroners Court of Victoria
65 Kavanagh Street,
SOUTHBANK VIC 3006



Please Quote: VRPC008529
(File No: PC035962)

Dear Ms Meggetto

INVESTIGATION INTO THE DEATH OF JENNIFER MAY TEAGUE

I refer to your correspondence dated 18 May 2018, addressed to Mr Michael Kyriakakis, Principal Lawyer, VicRoads Legal Services, regarding the investigation into the death of Ms Jennifer May Teague.

VicRoads extends condolences to Ms Teague's family and friends.

The Coroner's recommendations are:

1. *With a view to reducing harm to others and preventing like deaths, I recommend that the Transport Accident Commission and VicRoads consider facilitating public awareness campaigns that highlight the dangers of towing an overloaded trailer.*
2. *With a view to reducing harm to others and preventing like deaths, I recommend that the Transport Accident Commission and VicRoads consider any changes to driver licensing training that may include towing techniques.*

Response to recommendation 1:

An alternative to the Coroner's recommendations will be implemented: VicRoads is taking a number of actions to assist drivers to be better informed about road safety risks and contribute to better road safety outcomes. In collaboration with the Caravan Association, VicRoads has already been developing a targeted campaign to support drivers towing caravans.

A major problem with implementing a public awareness campaign is that the majority of drivers do not tow a trailer on a regular basis, if at all, so it can be difficult to target public awareness campaigns to these drivers at the right time. In response to the Coroner's report, VicRoads conducted a review of the towing related information on the VicRoads website and has identified that the website mainly consists of technical information or information related to towing caravans.

The absence of general towing information for light vehicles, including towing techniques is being addressed as a result of the Coroner's recommendation. VicRoads is currently developing a new webpage which will provide general and practical information on light vehicle towing, and will also encourage and promote the availability of towing training courses. The webpage will have an emphasis on safety and will highlight the dangers of towing an overloaded trailer. This user-friendly information will be made available on the VicRoads website and will be accessible at any time by the community.

The webpage is under development as of July 2018, and is due to be made available in September 2018. VicRoads is also considering how to effectively disseminate information on towing more broadly. Options at this stage include the use of social media channels, developing downloadable and printable factsheets and disseminating towing information through partner organisations.

VicRoads has also sought input from other jurisdictions to help identify effective and simple driver focussed towing information and education, and is presently awaiting responses. This information will be considered and if suitable, will be used to supplement our current communication strategy.

Response to recommendation 2:

An alternative to the Coroner's recommendations will be implemented: As above, towing is not an activity that is undertaken frequently or regularly by all drivers. The low prevalence of trailer towing by light vehicles also highlights the difficulty of developing or maintaining appropriate levels of proficiency when the skills are practised so infrequently, if at all.

The Victorian licensing system is consistent with other Australian jurisdictions and seeks a harmonised approach to regulations across the country. Having a nationally consistent approach helps support drivers to understand their obligations when towing and contributes to road safety.

Victoria, along with other jurisdictions, regularly reviews aspects of licensing including driver licence training content for learners and probationary drivers. Under the Victorian Graduated Licensing System, novice drivers are not trained or assessed to tow a trailer as their licence does not permit them to tow trailers. Learner drivers are not permitted to tow a trailer, and the holder of a P1 probationary car driver licence must not tow a trailer (except under strict circumstances, refer to appendix 1). As progression from the P1 to P2 licence is time based, it does not involve any additional training or assessment requirements. The Road Safety (Drivers) Regulations 2009 permit the holder of a full car driver licence or a P2 car licence to drive a car that is towing a single trailer. However, the Road Safety (Vehicle) Regulations 2009 place further restrictions on the mass that may be towed by a vehicle.

Towing increases the complexity of the driving task and presents a source of distraction for inexperienced drivers, who are less able to split their attention between the driving task and additional activities such as towing a trailer (Source: VicRoads, Young Driver Safety and Graduated Licensing Discussion Paper, VicRoads, August 2005, p10.).

Where trailer towing is more common, in line with the National Heavy Vehicle Driver Competency Framework, training is provided for coupling and uncoupling large trailers which occur for heavy combination and multi-combination licence categories. Load restraint training is provided in all heavy vehicle licence categories. Coupling and load restraints are part of the assessment.

While there is insufficient evidence at this time to warrant a change to the current driver licence system, VicRoads will give consideration to providing towing information to drivers at appropriate driving milestones such as renewing their licence and moving from P1 to P2 probationary licence.

As part of an ongoing review of the regulations relating to towing, VicRoads has formally consulted with Austroads (the peak association for Australasian road transport authorities) to assess the level of interest in exploring this matter nationally. The discussion is occurring at a national level and VicRoads is currently awaiting an outcome. VicRoads will continue to monitor and review licensing using an evidence-based approach to inform initiatives that reduce harm and improve safety outcomes for all road users.

Yours sincerely



ANITA CURNOW
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ACCESS AND OPERATIONS

9 / 8 / 2018