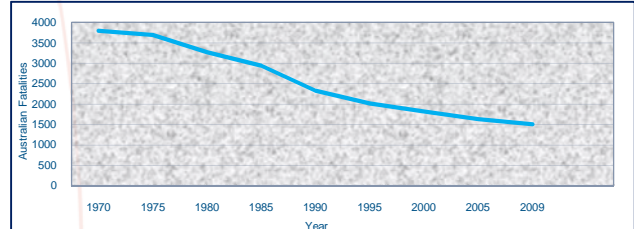


Driver knowledge about road fatalities in Australia

- Australian road fatalities have been recorded since 1925
- 700 people were killed on the road that year
- Fatalities peaked in 1970 at 3798 deaths [1]
- Fatalities have since trended downward
- In 2009 there were 1503 recorded road deaths [2]



- The term "road toll" quantifies road deaths and attracts media attention, particularly during Easter /Christmas holiday periods.
- Since the media focuses considerable attention on this issue, we might expect that this would translate into awareness among drivers the number of people killed, which in turn, would hopefully encourage safer driving.

Road safety professionals are cognisant of road toll trends but there is little information available to indicate awareness of road fatalities among the general population.

This research investigated awareness of fatalities on Queensland & Australian roads among Queensland drivers.

Method: As part of a larger study exploring factors associated with speeding, 833 drivers were recruited from food court areas of service stations in south east & central Queensland.

- Participants estimated the number of fatalities on Queensland and Australian roads in the previous year.
- After completing the survey, participants were handed a slip of paper containing the actual recorded fatalities for Australia (1601) and Queensland (336) for 2006.

Results: Overall, 12% of participants did not provide a numerical response to either question. Of these, approximately 1/3 provided written comments such as 'too many', 'no idea', and 'don't know' to both questions.

Australian Fatalities: Figure 1

- 75.8% of participants reported a number below the actual figure of 1601
- Half the sample nominated a number less than half of the actual figure
- Range 4 – 200,000 deaths, Median = 800
- Largest proportion (36.6%) reported a number between 100 and 500 deaths, well below the actual figure

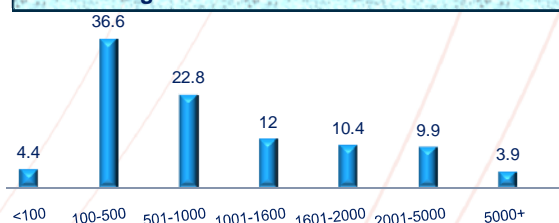


Figure 1: Percentage responses to 'How many Australian road fatalities in 2006?'

Queensland Fatalities: Figure 2

- 60% of participants reported a number below the actual figure of 336
- Half the sample nominated a number less than half of the actual figure
- Range 7 – 15,000 deaths, Median = 300
- Largest proportion (20.1%) reported a number between 301 and 400 deaths, close to actual figure

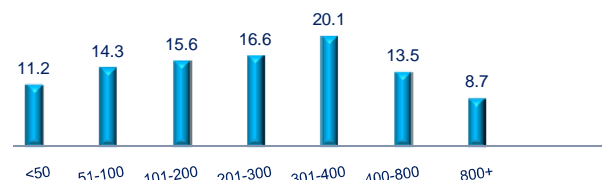


Figure 2: Percentage responses to 'How many Queensland road fatalities in 2006?'

Discussion: The majority of drivers under-estimated road fatalities. Interestingly, after being provided with actual figures, some drivers reported they had grossly under-estimated because their estimates were based on recollections of Christmas/Easter media reports. Overall, the findings suggest drivers are relatively unaware of the extent of road deaths. Somewhat paradoxically, media focus on holiday-period fatalities might, in part, contribute to under-estimates of the full extent of road trauma.

Road safety implications: These findings represent a major challenge for engaging community support for road safety improvements, relative to other health and safety promotions. Misperceptions about the extent of road fatalities may be a barrier to convincing drivers of the need to heed road safety messages and the importance of future road safety countermeasures.