

EVIDENCE BRIEF

The growing body of evidence against open speed limits includes:

Crash statistics:

- Speed is a contributing factor in many vehicle accidents and NT highways are considered to be some of Australia's most high-risk 'danger hot spots' for road crashes^{1 2 3}.
- Since 2008, seven road fatalities have occurred near the newly extended open speed limits location (near the Ali Curung turn-off)^{4 5 6 7}.
- 72% of all NT road fatalities over the past decade occurred in rural areas⁸.
- 90% of people over-estimate their driving ability and 'the faster the speed limit, the faster people drive'^{9 10 11}.
- Optimal and preferred driving speeds differ between individuals because driving considerations, perceptions and skills differ between individuals¹².
- Relying on individual responsibility for safe driving environments in the open speed limit location is risky and unpredictable.

Communities at risk:

- Any individual using the open speed limits location is at heightened risk of fatal road accident or injury.
- At risk populations may include: residents living in surrounding Local Government Areas (i.e. 35,000 residents in Alice Springs and the Barkly Shire)^{13 14}, wider NT populations, and the hundreds-of-thousands of national and international tourists travelling through the NT each year (i.e. 1.3 million visitors to the NT in 2013)¹⁵.
- Aboriginal people are also over-represented in road deaths in the NT, consistently representing around half the Territory's road death toll. Driving unrestrained, in older cars and over long distances are the main risk factors for road accidents in Aboriginal communities.¹⁶

Tourism economics:

- Poor road safety under open speed limits threatens the economy and reputation of the NT as a world-class tourist destination.
- Online travel forums caution that the long driving distances and time needed to overtake large trucks (or "road trains") on NT highways, are both confronting and dangerous experiences for tourists¹⁷.
- In 2013, over 650,000 people visited the central Australian regions of Alice Springs, Uluru and Tennant Creek¹⁸.
- There is a clear economic need to address how road safety will be sustained in the open speed limit location, particularly for visiting tourists who may be unfamiliar with remote driving conditions.

Social racing:

- Open speed limits undermine the development of a culture and national standard of road safety in Australia.

- Social media posts have emerged showing dangerous driving on Territory roads with footage of speedometers clocking driving speeds of 240km/h^{19 20}.
- The attraction to racing activities in the NT creates an added layer of risk and concern that won't be addressed by increased funding for road infrastructure²¹.
- The NT is host to the annual V8 Supercars event which attracts over 49,000 racing enthusiasts to the Territory each year^{22 23}.
- Media reports indicate that NT roads have been used for high-speed vehicle testing by motoring magazines and luxury car companies^{24 25}.
- BBC series Top Gear has visited the NT to test drive high performance vehicles in the open speed limit location for upcoming episodes^{26 27}. The international TV series may increase the attraction of the open speed limit location for motoring enthusiasts.

Communications:

- Government statements present mixed information about the actual distances covered by the open speed limits trial, for example, both 200km and 204km stretches of road have been announced²⁸²⁹.
- This ambiguity is significant because an extra 4km brings the current total open speed limits location either closer to the major town of Alice Springs, or closer to the Ali Curung turn-off, a hotspot for road accidents in recent years^{30 31 32 33}.
- The delivery of accurate and timely information is also critical for keeping remote communities informed in order to help reduce the distinct challenges of accessing timely communication services across remote-Australia³⁴.

National standards:

- Road safety is the responsibility of the Government as much as it is the responsibility of road users³⁵.
- A national standard is needed to 'align speed limits towards a safe system'³⁶.
- No other State or Territory has introduced unrestricted speed limits on other major and remote driving routes across the nation (i.e. Barrier highway, NSW/SA :> 1000km; Great Northern Highway, WA :> 3,000km)³⁷.
- According to the *National Transport Commission Regulations 2006*, the default speed limit for a vehicle over 5 tonnes is 100km/h on any length of road which is not built-up³⁸.

Public health leaders:

- Public advocates for ending the open speed limit trial include: Public Health Association of Australia³⁹; NT Police Union⁴⁰; Automobile Association of the Northern Territory⁴¹; Australian Medical Association NT; Royal Australasian College of Surgeons; and the Australasian College of Emergency Medicine.⁴²

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