



# TEEN DRIVERS FAST-TRACKED

## Safety plan offers early licence

### EXCLUSIVE REPORT P5

**Simon Kearney**

P-PLATE drivers who complete safety courses will be handed open licences early under a plan aimed at reducing the number of young people killed and injured on our roads.

The Police Federation of Australia, representing the nation's 54,000 officers, will launch the initiative on Tuesday, urging the Federal Government to seek state and territory support.

The new national standards would fast-track open licences for young drivers who do advanced driver training. Other changes include lower engine-size limits

and speed limiters or alcohol interlocks on cars for P-plate drivers who get booked.

In Queensland, you can get a learner's permit at 16 and must drive with an L-plate for a year and log 100 hours of supervised driving. Motorists who pass their test then are required to spend 12 months on a red P1 plate and two years on a green P2 plate.

Queensland Transport Minister Rachel Nolan has raised concerns about the "short cuts" for teens.

Key motoring body RACQ also fears advanced driving courses could lead young drivers to believe they have skills beyond their abilities.



# Accelerated learning

## Concern over P-platers taking 'short cuts'

**Simon Kearney  
and David Murray**

DRIVERS will be able to ditch their P-plates early if they complete advanced or defensive driving courses under a controversial national plan.

Police have won Federal Government support for the proposal but Queensland Transport Minister Rachel Nolan raised concerns about "short cuts" for young drivers.

"Students need their time on the roads," Ms Nolan said.

The Police Federation of Australia, representing the nation's 54,000 officers, will launch the plan on Tuesday and is asking all parties at the federal election to adopt the idea as part of their platforms.

Motoring body the RACQ fears advanced driving courses could lead young drivers to believe they have skills beyond their abilities.

"They think they're bullet-proof enough as it is," RACQ spokesman Gary Fites said yesterday. "Most restrictions are there for their protection."

Young drivers aged between 17 and 24 are among the most at-risk road users in Queensland, government figures show.

Crashes involving young people last year resulted in 92 fatalities or almost 28 per cent

of the state's road toll.

The figure represents a drop of 16 fatalities, or 15 per cent, on the previous five-year average. Young drivers were at fault in eight out of every 10 of the fatal crashes.

Tough new laws introduced in Queensland three years ago for young drivers were designed to provide a "balance" of professional driving and hours on the road, Ms Nolan said.

"Early evidence is that the system is working, with fewer young drivers being killed or injured. The Government is not proposing to change it."

Under the police proposal, the Federal Government would seek state and territory consensus for uniform laws.

Among national standards being sought is recognition that young drivers who take additional driving courses deserve to be given their full licence earlier. Other new standards would include lower engine-size limits for beginner drivers and compulsory speed limiters or alcohol interlocks on cars for L or P-plate drivers who get booked on the roads.

"Give P-platers some encouragement to do advanced driver training in return for some credit, then you're likely

to encourage better driving. The more that do it the better," federation chief executive Mark Burgess said.

Home Affairs Minister Brendan O'Connor said he would welcome any proposal that would help young drivers improve their skills and save lives on the roads.

"I'm keen to consider what works best in each state and territory and reach agreement with state and territory governments," he said.

This year 625 Queensland school students will take part in the Youth Drive Safe program, which provides five hours of professional lessons. Former Bremer High School student Harley-Jean Gordon, 18, took part in the Leighton Contractors-funded program last year.

"It's scary knowing I could become a statistic, so it's important to be careful on the roads," Harley-Jean said.

**With Anna Chisholm**

## FUEL FOR THOUGHT

### What the programs offer:

○ Practical and theoretical components

○ Awareness of road safety hazards, road rules, basic driving skills, on-road experience

○ Road safety issues - perception, reaction responses, correction of old habits and improving judgment for crash avoidance

○ Safe driving techniques

○ Responsible attitudes to driving and vehicle use

○ Eco-driving (greener driving to reduce carbon emission)

○ Fundamental vehicle control skills

○ Defensive driving includes on-road exercises such as emergency braking, swerving and multiple direction changes

○ Wet road conditions for suburban speeds

○ Cybercar simulates a vehicle in controlled environments, city, country and freeway, can alter weather, full working controls of car dashboard

○ Cost is about \$300 for a full-day session



**DRIVING AMBITION:** Student learner Hayden Lynch of Bremer State High takes a lesson with instructor Letisha Evers.

Picture: Adam Armstrong