Quad Bikes and Side-by-Side Vehicles: Targeted Safety Review

Submission to Building Tasmania

July 2026

Introduction

RACT enjoys a trusted position and extensive market penetration in the Tasmanian community. More than 230,000 Tasmanians are RACT members, making us the largest and strongest member organisation in the state and an award-winning Tasmanian-owned insurance company.

Established in 1923, RACT is an apolitical and independent transport infrastructure, road safety and mobility advocate. We increasingly advocate on the impacts of a changing climate and on supporting improved community resilience. We are committed to supporting and furthering the interests of Tasmanians, and we do this through a comprehensive program of consultation, education, awareness and public advocacy.

RACT is represented by senior staff on a number of stakeholder reference groups in Tasmania and undertakes structured liaison with government and other stakeholders. Nationally, RACT is a constituent member of the Australian Automobile Association (AAA), which represents around eight million Australians, and is represented on the board of the Insurance Council of Australia (ICA).

RACT has elected to participate in this targeted review of quad bikes and side by side vehicle safety as the review is focused on public streets, roads and road related areas in Tasmania. Further, our submission is guided by evidence based, transparent and data driven positions.

A note on sources: This submission draws primarily on Building Tasmania's background and consultation papers (July 2026), which provide the Tasmanian-specific evidence base for this review.[1] It is supplemented by the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons' (RACS) 2016 submission to the Tasmanian coronial inquest into seven quad bike deaths;[2] the Royal Children's Hospital (RCH) Melbourne's *Kids Health Info* safety guidance on quad bikes;[3] SafeWork NSW's current guidance on side-by-side vehicles;[4] the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's (ACCC) *Quad bike and side-by-side vehicle guide*;[5] and the ACCC's 2019 *Quad bike safety: Final Recommendation to the Minister*.[6] The RACS submission's statistics date from 2001–2016 and the ACCC's Final Recommendation from 2011–18; both are cited as evidence supporting the clinical and regulatory consensus discussed throughout. Building Tasmania's more recent Tasmanian-specific data (2016–2026) is used as the primary evidentiary basis for current conditions.

Question 1 — Do you support amending the Tasmanian Road Rules to require SSV riders and passengers to wear a motorcycle helmet when travelling on a road or road related area? Why or why not?

RACT supports amending the Tasmanian Road Rules to require SSV riders and passengers to wear a motorcycle helmet when travelling on a road or road-related area.

Helmet use is already a condition of conditional registration for both SSVs and quad bikes, and quad bike riders and passengers are already required to wear helmets under the Road Rules — extending this to SSVs is a consistency measure that closes an existing gap rather than introducing a new burden.[1]

Recent Tasmanian coronial investigations into SSV-related deaths have recommended considering whether SSVs should be brought within the same Road Rule provisions that apply to quad bikes.[1] WorkSafe Victoria's guidance also notes that helmet use reduces the risk of head injury in an SSV rollover or near-miss, where occupants may strike the roll-over protection structure, windscreen, doors, cargo screen or mounted accessories.[1]

This is consistent with SafeWork NSW's current guidance on SSVs, which lists helmet use — for both operators and passengers — as a core control measure for managing SSV risk, alongside correctly fitted seatbelts and closed doors or cab nets, noting explicitly that "using a correctly fitted seatbelt, wearing a helmet and closing the door or cab net could save your life."[4]

The ACCC's own consumer guidance is unequivocal on this point, listing "helmet on" as one of only three "golden rules" for safe quad bike and SSV use, alongside rollover protection and never letting children ride adult quad bikes.[5] The ACCC's national guidance already recommends that "drivers and passengers should always wear a helmet when using either product".[5] RACT considers this a further, and particularly authoritative, basis for closing that gap: Australia's national product safety regulator already treats helmet use in SSVs as a baseline safety expectation, not an optional extra.

Data provided by Building Tasmania reinforces this further: helmets were not worn in 8 of the 17 Tasmanian quad bike and SSV deaths recorded between 2016 and May 2026 (47%).[1]

Question 2 — Do you consider the current passenger restrictions set out in the Tasmanian Road Rules for quad bikes to be appropriate and effective from a safety perspective? Why or why not?

From a safety perspective, the current passenger restrictions for Type I (no passengers) and Type II (one passenger) quad bikes are appropriate, as they reflect the vehicles' design limitations and give effect to Coroner Cooper's 2017 recommendation.[1]

These provisions are likely to be most effective when supported by education, awareness and enforcement activity, particularly given Building Tasmania's finding that most quad bikes and SSVs involved in fatal incidents on Tasmanian public streets over the past decade were

unregistered — suggesting the rules themselves are not the primary weak point so much as compliance with them.[1]

RACS's evidence supports the underlying safety rationale for these restrictions. RACS explains the mechanical reason carrying a passenger increases rollover risk: a passenger's added weight, typically positioned high on the cargo rack, prevents the rear axle from lifting the inside wheel through corners, forcing sharper turns and increasing the likelihood the vehicle rolls onto both riders.[2] RACS's own preferred position goes further than the current Tasmanian settings — it recommends "a total ban placed on carriage of passengers or excessive loads... on quad bikes not designed for them," and, failing that, that children under 16 never be carried as passengers on quad bikes of any size.[2] This is consistent with, and lends further support to, the existing Type I/Type II framework.

Question 3 — Do you support amending the Tasmanian Road Rules to restrict the number of passengers in SSVs to the number of passengers that it is designed to carry? Why or why not?

SSVs are engineered with a specific number of seats, seatbelts and occupant protection/safety structures, determined through manufacturer testing and approval processes. Road rules should align with these specifications to ensure vehicles are operated as intended — consistent with the approach already taken for cars and motorcycles, where occupants are expected to occupy designated seating positions and use approved restraints.

Applying the same principle to SSVs ensures consistency for road users, and — as the consultation paper notes — will require the current quad-bike-specific Road Rule wording to be reviewed and adapted, since SSVs can be designed to carry up to six occupants in a side-by-side arrangement rather than a single pillion passenger.[1]

The ACCC's product guidance confirms SSVs "can accommodate 2 to 6 people" depending on the model,[5] supporting RACT's view that any Road Rule change should be capacity-flexible and tied to each vehicle's specific manufacturer design, rather than a single fixed number across all SSVs.

Question 4 — Should the same passenger age restrictions that apply to quad bikes under the Tasmanian Road Rules, also apply to SSVs? Why or why not?

RACT's position is that the same age restrictions that apply to quad bikes should apply to SSVs, on the basis that the current clinical and safety evidence does not support treating SSVs as materially lower-risk for young passengers, notwithstanding their additional design features.

Reasons for applying the same restrictions

- **Protection of young passengers.** Children are generally more vulnerable to injury due to their physical size, development and ability to understand risks. Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne notes that children under 16 "haven't developed the skills to judge speed and

distance, and they can't make lifesaving decisions" — a developmental limitation that applies regardless of which vehicle type they are riding in.[3]

- **Consistent road safety framework.** A single, consistently applied age threshold across both vehicle types is easier for the public to understand and comply with, and simpler to enforce.
- **Risk of serious injury remains real in SSVs.** Although SSVs generally offer greater occupant protection than quad bikes, they can still be involved in rollovers, crashes and other incidents that may result in serious injury, particularly for young passengers. RACT does not consider the presence of seatbelts and rollover protection sufficient reason to apply a materially different — and by implication weaker — safety standard to SSVs.
- **Consistency with current workplace safety guidance.** SafeWork NSW's control measures for SSVs state plainly that operators must "never allow kids under 16 to operate an SSV."[4] While this guidance sits in the workplace health and safety context rather than the transport regulatory context this review addresses, it reflects a consistent view across regulators, clinicians and safety bodies that under-16s should not be operating these vehicles regardless of their design features.
- **Consistent national consumer guidance.** The ACCC's current guidance is equally direct: "Never let children drive or be passengers on adult sized quad bikes," and for SSVs, "Never let children drive," with manufacturer advice to be checked before children are permitted to ride as passengers.[5]

RACT has considered the argument that SSV design differences (multiple seating, restraints, rollover protection, manufacturer-specified fit requirements) might justify a separate, more permissive approach for SSVs. However, RACT's view is that where there is a clear and considered clinical position from RACS and RCH Melbourne — both of which recommend no child under 16 ride as a driver or passenger on a quad bike, of any size[2] [3] — reinforced by SafeWork NSW's parallel workplace guidance for SSVs[4] and the ACCC's consumer safety guidance,[5] the safest and most evidence-consistent course is to apply that same threshold to SSVs, rather than carve out a lower bar based on design features that clinicians treating these injuries do not consider sufficient to change their recommendation.

Conclusion: RACT supports applying the same passenger age restriction to SSVs as applies to quad bikes. Safety and clinical evidence should be the deciding factors here, not vehicle design distinctions that have not been shown to meaningfully reduce the risk profile for young passengers specifically.

Question 5 — Should the passenger age restrictions that apply to quad bikes (and potentially SSVs) in the Tasmanian Road Rules be raised from six years old and if so, to what age?

RACT's position is that the current minimum passenger age of six years is not adequately supported by the evidence and should be raised substantially, in line with the clinical consensus from the medical sector.

RACS's 2016 submission to the Tasmanian coronial inquest found that, of Australian quad bike deaths recorded from 2001–2015, 18% occurred in children under 16, including 11 children under 6

years old.[2] RCH Melbourne's data shows 42 Australian children killed in quad bike accidents since 2001, with Victorian emergency departments treating an average of 85 children a year for quad bike-related injuries, most aged 5 to 14.[3] The injury pattern RCH describes — catastrophic head injury, suffocation under the weight of the vehicle, crush injuries to the chest and abdomen, spinal injury, and even strangulation from riding into fencing or clotheslines[3] — reflects risks that arise from the fundamental nature of these vehicles and how children interact with them, not simply from insufficient restraint fit that could be addressed by a modest age increase.

SafeWork NSW's operational guidance for SSVs reinforces the same threshold from a workplace safety perspective, directing that operators "never allow kids under 16 to operate an SSV."[4] The ACCC's 2019 Final Recommendation provides further independent corroboration: it found children under 16 accounted for approximately 14% of all recorded quad bike fatalities from 2011–18, with the majority involving a child operating an adult-sized general-use model quad bike and experiencing a rollover.[6] Taken together, this represents a consistent position across the clinical, agricultural, workplace safety and national consumer safety sectors: that 16, not a modest increase from six, is the age threshold supported by the evidence for quad bikes and SSVs alike.

On this evidence, both RACS and RCH recommend that no child under 16 ride or be carried as a passenger on a quad bike, "irrespective of the vehicle's size or specification."[2] [3] This position is shared by the Australian Centre for Agricultural Health and Safety, Farmsafe Australia, and equivalent surgical and paediatric bodies internationally.[2] [3] RACS also points to Massachusetts' "Sean's Law," which restricts under-14s from operating off-road vehicles at all, with post-law data showing a 33–50% reduction in emergency department presentations across children's age bands and a 41% reduction in hospital admissions for quad bike trauma in patients aged 0–17.[2] The ACCC's 2019 report independently confirms these figures, describing Sean's Law as having contributed to a "sustained decrease in the rates of quad bike related ED visits and inpatient hospitalisations in children younger than 18 years old."[6] This provides real-world evidence, corroborated by two independent sources, that a materially higher threshold, backed by enforceable legislation, produces measurable safety gains rather than merely shifting risk.

RACT also notes that RCH records Victoria's on-road legal requirement for quad bike operation as 18 years with a full driver's licence — a learner's permit is not sufficient[3] — a materially higher bar than Tasmania's current settings, where a provisional licence permits operation from age 17.[1]

For further jurisdictional context, Building Tasmania's own background paper notes that Queensland currently requires both quad bike and SSV passengers to be at least eight years old under its Road Rules, and in 2024 introduced work health and safety laws requiring passengers of adult-sized quad bikes to meet manufacturer minimum age specifications or be at least 16 years old.[1] This reflects a jurisdiction actively moving toward a higher standard, consistent with the direction RACT recommends.

RACT's position: Based on the available evidence, RACT supports raising the minimum passenger age for quad bikes — and, per Question 4, for SSVs — to **16 years**, aligning Tasmania's Road Rules with the position taken by RACS, RCH Melbourne, SafeWork NSW, the ACCC's evidence base, and the broader medical and agricultural safety sector. RACT acknowledges this is a more significant change than a modest increase to eight years, and that it will have practical implications for families and recreational users. However, on a question where the deciding

consideration is the physical and cognitive safety of children, RACT considers the clinical evidence — consistently reinforced by clinicians who treat these injuries directly, by workplace regulators who see SSV incidents first-hand, and by Australia's own national consumer safety regulator — should take precedence over convenience or historical practice. Safety and evidence should be paramount.

Question 6 — Of the three policy options outlined, which approach do you prefer for improving quad bike and SSV safety, and why?

RACT supports Option 1 — mandatory training as a condition of conditional registration, delivered through accredited RTO training (AHCMOM216/217) where accessible, supplemented by a lower-cost online module to manage coverage gaps.

Option 3 (retaining voluntary training) has not resolved the fatality and injury trend prompting this review. Option 2 (a standalone licensing regime) would be a significant and costly regulatory undertaking, not adopted anywhere else in Australia, and may have limited practical benefit given usage on public streets is already restricted through conditional registration.[1]

RACT notes the consultation paper's own caution: most fatal incidents on Tasmanian public streets over the past decade involved *unregistered* vehicles, so adding cost or friction to the registration process risks discouraging registration further rather than improving safety.[1] RACT would support Option 1 only if paired with a practical, low-cost or subsidised training pathway and accessible delivery outside major population centres, given rural and regional use predominates.

RACS also raises a broader caution directly relevant to this question, regardless of which option is preferred: it requests that road safety authorities "carefully monitor and evaluate quad bike usage on public roads, to ensure that current restrictions on the on-road usage of quad bikes (and similar vehicles) are not watered down to the detriment of safety."[2] RACT would endorse this as a standing principle: whichever training option is adopted, it should be tested against whether it strengthens rather than weakens existing on-road safety settings.

Question 7 — Do you have any alternative suggestions?

1. Staged or graduated access to conditional registration

Rather than treating training as a single ‘event’ a new operator must undertake before receiving unrestricted conditional registration, RACT suggests a graduated model, similar in principle to Tasmania's existing provisional driver licensing framework:

- A new operator (or a vehicle newly registered to a first-time owner) could receive an initial, time-limited or supervised conditional registration, requiring the presence or oversight of

an experienced operator, or restricting use to lower-risk settings (e.g. private property or designated recreational areas) for an initial period.
- Full, unrestricted conditional registration would only be granted once accredited training (AHCMOM216/217, or an approved equivalent) is completed.

This mirrors an approach already familiar to Tasmanian drivers through the provisional licensing system, which may make it easier to explain to the public and easier to enforce. It also directly addresses a risk RACS specifically warned against: that registration requirements should not be "watered down" in the name of reducing barriers.[2] A staged approach allows government to grant limited access quickly (avoiding a disincentive to register at all, which Building Tasmania's own data suggests is already a significant problem)[1] while still ensuring unsupervised, unrestricted use only follows demonstrated competency.

2. Rebate program

A partial or full rebate on the cost of accredited quad bike/SSV training (currently up to $615 for TasTafe's commercial rate)[1] for owners who complete training within a defined period of first registering a vehicle, or for existing owners who complete training within a transition period after any new requirement commences.

Question 11 — Do you support requiring drivers and passengers of SSVs to wear seatbelts (where fitted) when operating on a road, road-related area or a public street? Why or why not?

Yes, RACT supports requiring drivers and passengers of SSVs to wear seatbelts where fitted when operating on a road, road-related area or public street.

Seatbelts are a well-established and effective safety measure that reduce the risk of serious injury or death in the event of a collision or rollover. Where an SSV has been designed and equipped with seatbelts, occupants should be required to use them in the same way they are required in other road vehicles. Requiring seatbelt use only where fitted is a practical and proportionate approach, recognising differences in vehicle design while ensuring available safety equipment is used as intended.

SafeWork NSW's guidance is consistent with this position, listing seatbelt use — for both operators and passengers — as a core control measure for SSV safety, alongside helmet use and keeping doors or cab nets closed.[4] This reinforces that seatbelt use is not merely a design feature to be encouraged, but is already treated by workplace safety regulators as an essential, non-negotiable safety measure for SSV operation.

This is strongly reinforced by the ACCC's current guidance, which lists "side-by-side vehicle drivers and passengers should always wear a seatbelt" as one of its core safety messages,[5] and notes that "always wear a seatbelt when riding a side-by-side vehicle" is a stand-alone safety rule for SSVs specifically.[5]

RACT notes the consultation paper's observation that not all seatbelts fitted to SSVs may currently meet the AS/NZS 2596 standard used to define an "approved" seatbelt for Road Rules purposes; this gap should be addressed as part of implementation, so operators aren't inadvertently non-compliant through no fault of their own.[1]

Overall, the safety benefits of a seatbelt-wearing requirement significantly outweigh any inconvenience, and align with broader road safety objectives of reducing preventable injuries and fatalities.

Question 12 — Should enforcement of conditional registration requirements for quad bikes and SSVs be strengthened through more targeted compliance activities, and if so, what locations or time periods should be prioritised to maximise safety outcomes?

Yes, enforcement of conditional registration requirements for quad bikes and SSVs should be strengthened through targeted compliance activities. Building Tasmania's own data supports this; of the eight vehicles involved in fatal public-street incidents in Tasmania over the past decade, only one was conditionally registered — seven were unregistered.[1] This points to a genuine compliance gap rather than a rule-design problem, and supports risk-based, visible enforcement rather than further rule changes alone.

RACT assumes that vehicles (both quad bikes and SSVs) that are not conditionally registered, are not covered by the Motor Accidents Insurance Board (MAIB) in the event of injury arising from road crashes. It's RACT's view that if you are using a public road, then the vehicle should be registered.

Priority should be given to:

- Roads and road-related areas in regional and rural communities where these vehicles are commonly used for transport between properties, towns and recreational areas.
- Popular recreational destinations, including state forests, national park access roads, beaches and off-road riding areas.
- Tourist destinations and holiday regions, particularly during peak visitor periods when inexperienced or visiting riders may be less familiar with registration and operating requirements.
- Local roads connecting farms, sporting facilities, campgrounds and small townships.
- Events and organised recreational activities involving quad bikes or SSVs.

In terms of timing, compliance activities are likely to be most effective during public holidays and long weekends, school holiday periods, peak tourism seasons, weekends (particularly daylight recreational riding periods), and seasonal periods of increased agricultural activity.

Given Tasmania's per-capita quad bike death rate (2.25 per 100,000, 2016–2026) is the second-highest of any Australian jurisdiction after the Northern Territory (3.39), and well above NSW, Queensland, WA and SA (all around 0.5), RACT considers a genuinely proportionate enforcement response is warranted — while recognising Tasmania's small population means individual

incidents move the per-capita rate considerably.[1] The ACCC's most recent national data showing SSV deaths rising sharply from 4 in 2023 to 14 in 2024 — more than a threefold increase in a single year.[5] RACT considers this trend — a rapid escalation in SSV fatalities specifically — reinforces the case for treating SSV safety as an urgent, live priority for enforcement and regulatory attention, not a lower-order concern relative to quad bikes.

Enforcement should be accompanied by education and awareness campaigns. Many compliance issues may arise from a lack of understanding of conditional registration requirements rather than deliberate non-compliance. Combining targeted enforcement with clear information for vehicle owners and operators is likely to deliver better long-term safety outcomes than enforcement alone.

Question 13 — What do you believe are the best ways to communicate to recreational quad bike and SSV users about risks and safe use practices?

Communication should have a behaviour-change focus, rather than be purely informational, targeting the specific circumstances in which incidents occur (rollovers, inexperience, passenger misuse) rather than generic safety messaging. Building Tasmania's background paper notes that public awareness efforts to date have focused almost entirely on agricultural/workplace settings, with no recent campaigns targeted specifically at recreational quad bike and SSV users — this is a clear gap.[1]

Effective channels are likely to include point-of-sale and point-of-hire information (where recreational purchases and hires actually occur), partnerships with tourism operators and holiday parks in high-recreational-use regions, campaigns timed to the peak periods identified in Question 12.

Further, peak bodies with an interest and/or members who utilise quad bikes/SSVs, should be part of the consultation process when determining the best way(s) to communicate the risks and safe use practices of these vehicles.

Question 14 — What do you think are the key safety messages for recreational quad bike and SSV users?

The paramount message should be that, when these vehicles are used on public roads, drivers have the same responsibilities as every other road user, this includes issues of safety.

Key safety messages should focus on reducing the most common causes of serious injury and fatality: rollovers, loss of control, excessive speed, inexperience and failure to use safety equipment. Given Building Tasmania's finding that helmets were not worn in 47% of recorded Tasmanian deaths,[1] RACS's finding that 70% of Australian quad bike deaths with known helmet

status involved a rider not wearing one,[2] and the ACCC's corroborating national figure of 84%,[6] RACT considers helmet use should be the single highest-priority message. RCH's summary of severe injury types — head, chest and abdominal crush injuries, strangulation, burns from hot machinery, and pelvis/thigh fractures[3] — is a useful, concrete illustration for public messaging of why avoiding risky manoeuvres and riding within capability matters in practice, beyond the general risk of rollover.

The ACCC frames helmet use, rollover protection, and never letting children ride adult quad bikes as its three "golden rules" for safe use[5] — a simple, memorable framing RACT considers worth adopting directly in any Tasmanian public education campaign arising from this review (see Question 13).

Overall, the core message should be that quad bikes and SSVs are valuable recreational vehicles, but they require active risk management, appropriate protective equipment, responsible operation and adherence to safety requirements to minimise the risk of serious injury or death.

Question 15 — Are there any other measures you believe would address the risks that arise from the way quad bikes and SSVs are being used?

Yes. While registration, education and enforcement are important, a broader combination of measures would likely deliver the greatest safety benefit for recreational users.

Additional measures could include:

- Strengthening public education campaigns focused on the leading causes of serious injuries and fatalities — rollovers, excessive speed, unauthorised passengers, and riding without appropriate safety equipment.
- Supporting age-appropriate vehicle use and supervision of young riders, including public awareness initiatives encouraging parents and guardians to match vehicle size and performance to rider capability.
- Improving signage and safety information in popular recreational areas, particularly where vehicles interact with other users or where terrain presents elevated risks.
- **Continuing to collect and analyse crash and injury data.** RACS separately emphasises the importance of maintaining a dedicated injury registry with specific coding for quad bike and SSV incidents to support future evidence-based policy.[2] This reinforces a gap already evident in Building Tasmania's own background paper, which notes that serious injuries on private property are not systematically captured, and that even public-street data relies on police crash reports and coronial findings rather than a dedicated collection system.[1] RACT would support Building Tasmania investing in more systematic data collection as a foundation for future reviews.

Any new measures should be proportionate, practical and targeted at behaviours known to contribute to serious incidents. A balanced approach combining education, training, appropriate safety equipment, targeted enforcement and ongoing monitoring is likely to achieve the best

safety outcomes while allowing recreational users to continue enjoying quad bikes and SSVs responsibly.

Reference list

[1] Building Tasmania, *Targeted review of quad bike and side-by-side vehicle safety — Background paper* and *Consultation paper*, Transport Systems Policy, July 2026.

[2] Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, *Submission to Inquest into the Death of 7 Riders of Quad Bikes in Tasmania*, 7 April 2016, forwarded under cover letter to the Quad Bike Safety Taskforce, 1 March 2017.

[3] The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne, *Kids Health Info: Safety – Quad bikes*.

[4] SafeWork NSW, *Side-by-side vehicles*.

[5] Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, *Quad bike and side-by-side vehicle guide*.

[6] Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, *Quad bike safety: Final Recommendation to the Minister*, February 2019.
