



National Motor Vehicle
Theft Reduction Council
driving down vehicle theft

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The NMVTRC is an initiative of all Australian Governments and the Insurance Industry

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theft torque



A Holden Commodore repairable write-off. Picture courtesy of IAG Insurance.

Repairable write-offs under the microscope

The NMVTRC is about to commence a review into the way Australia manages its written-off vehicles. The opportunities that the current practices provide for organised criminals and unlicensed repairers and traders to launder stolen parts or on-sell shoddily repaired vehicles has become a major concern.

Currently, under the national framework developed by the NMVTRC, any damaged vehicle declared by an insurer to be a total loss must be classified as either a Statutory Write-Off (SWO) or Repairable Write-Off (RWO). Where an SWO may be sold under the condition that it can be used only for parts, RWOs may be repaired and re-registered providing they pass specific safety and identification inspections. The 'banning' of SWOs has clearly had a significant impact on preventing traditional car rebirthing practices. However, the concern lies in the purchasing of RWOs by unlicensed repairers or motor car traders and criminals, who rebuild vehicles with stolen parts or sub-standard repair techniques.

In the current environment of greatly reduced retail values for non-damaged vehicles, the economic viability of safely repairing them with legitimate parts is, on the NMVTRC's preliminary assessment, extremely marginal. Some experts currently estimate

that up to six in 10 RWOs presented for re-registration have been repaired with suspect parts.

The re-registration of RWOs also poses concerns for consumer safety and access to information about a vehicle's history. Vehicles may be shoddily repaired, making the car unreliable and risking the safety of unsuspecting buyers. If the vehicle contains stolen parts there is also the risk to consumers of having the car confiscated as evidence as part of the criminal investigation process.

The review will take the form of an expert, independent cost-benefit analysis of reforming the current regime to close-off criminal (and unlicensed repairer/trader) access to target vehicles. The review will examine a range of options across the continuum from improving the effectiveness of current procedures through to the voluntary removal of write-offs from public auction, to a partial or absolute ban on their re-registration.

The first stage of the review will focus on gathering key industry data and completing select consultation to refine the options to be fully evaluated and is expected to be completed by mid-year.

Year of review

As the NMVTRC embarks on its ninth year of operation, in accordance with the terms of the inter-governmental/insurance industry agreement, it is also a year of review for the organisation. A formal review of the NMVTRC's operations will be conducted throughout the year to enable police ministers and the Insurance Council to determine whether we are to have a continuing role in vehicle theft reduction.

While the final design of the review is yet to be settled, it is likely to follow the 2005 model and aim to determine the net community benefit that the NMVTRC initiative provides, as well as assessing the level of support from key stakeholders for the dissolution or extension of the organisation beyond 2009. The review will be completed in time for police ministers and the Insurance Council of Australia to consider its recommendations before the end of the year.

Summit to tackle motorcycle theft

With 6,875 reported thefts in 2007, motorcycles constituted more than 9 per cent of all reported vehicle theft, and 22 per cent of all unrecovered stolen vehicles. Five per cent of all stolen motorcycles were unregistered off-road categories. While 33 per cent of registered motorcycles were recovered, only 17 per cent of unregistered motorcycles were found. Unlike theft of passenger vehicles which has declined 52 per cent since 2001, reported motorcycle theft has remained relatively stable over the same period and has increased 3 per cent in the last 12 months. It is also suspected that a large number of off-road thefts are not reported.

While preventing and detecting any motorcycle theft is difficult, off-road motorcycles are particularly problematic because they are not impacted by the suite of infrastructure barriers that have been developed for passenger vehicles and registered motorcycles. Portability, demand for parts, un-regulated end use and poor identification all contribute to the overall problem.

The NMVTRC will be convening a major national summit mid-year in Sydney to bring together all of the key stakeholders who have an interest in stemming the growth in motorcycle theft. From the import and retail industries through to insurers, riders and regulatory agencies, everyone can play an important part in defining the real issues and devising workable solutions.

The summit will aim to: establish the scope and potential growth of motorcycle theft and the need for action; identify the elements that differentiate motorcycle theft from other vehicle types; examine the feasibility of implementing potential responses; and develop a blueprint for a coordinated response going forward.

The NMVTRC will be forwarding further detail on the summit to its key stakeholders soon but if you are interested in participating in the summit please register your interest by forwarding your details and how you think you can contribute to info@carsafe.com.au

Thanks and welcome

Keith Seyer, Technical and Regulatory Director of the Federal Chamber of Automotive Industries (FCAI), has announced his retirement from the NMVTRC Board. Keith's insights into vehicle manufacturing processes and operating environment have been invaluable to the development of the NMVTRC's vehicle identification reforms in particular. We would like to thank Keith for his significant support and commitment to the NMVTRC over the past five years.

Keith will be replaced by James Hurnall who has joined the FCAI after an extensive career in vehicle safety regulation and public policy with Queensland Transport and the Australian Automobile Association.

Welcome also to Ms Ann King, the New South Wales Roads and Traffic Authority's Group General Manager (Vehicle and Driver Services) who fills the Austroads vacancy on the NMVTRC's non-executive board.

Operation Bounce Back update

With the fourth round of *Operation Bounce Back* well underway, we can now confirm that 19 municipalities are participating in the program this year. They are:

- Brimbank (VIC)
- Darebin (VIC)
- Maribyrnong (VIC)
- Hume (VIC)
- Liverpool (NSW)
- Blacktown (NSW)
- Bankstown (NSW)
- Campbelltown (NSW)
- Canterbury (NSW)
- Tea Tree Gully (SA)
- Salisbury (SA)
- Glenorchy (TAS)
- Clarence (TAS)

- Stirling (WA)
- Fremantle (WA)
- Canning (WA)
- Ipswich (QLD)
- Gold Coast (QLD)
- Australian Capital Territory

Many of these local governments are past participants of the program, and are by now very familiar with *Operation Bounce Back*. Program launches are expected across March and April, with a project end date of June 30 for the majority of local government areas.

We expect that the successes of previous years' programs (which saw car crime fall in most participating municipalities at better than state-average rates) will continue this time round with the help of our business, local police, and other community partners.



Glenorchy award recipients, from left to right: Frank Pearce (General Manager Glenorchy City Council), Ross Park (Coordinator Youth and Community Safety Glenorchy City Council and Project Manager Operation Bounce Back Glenorchy), Inspector John Arnold (Tasmania Police Glenorchy Station).

Glenorchy a winner again!

Glenorchy City Council (GCC) has received a third award for their *Operation Bounce Back* program. The Council was awarded a Certificate of Merit at the annual Australian Crime and Violence Prevention Awards for 2007 for tracking vehicle theft through community partnerships and engagement.

The awards are sponsored by the Heads of Australian governments and the former Australian and New Zealand Crime Prevention Ministerial Forum. They are designed to reward outstanding

projects for the prevention or reduction of crime and violence and to recognise community initiatives in crime prevention activities. GCC's past awards include the 2006 International Association of Auto Theft Investigators' Outstanding Achievement Award, as well as the 2007 Local Government Association of Tasmania (LGAT) Award for Excellence.

Coordinator of Youth and Community Safety Development Officer for Glenorchy City Council, Mr Ross Park, was also awarded a Certificate

of High Commendation at the Tasmanian Crime Prevention and Community Safety Awards 2007. In addition to his successful youth and community initiatives in Glenorchy, Ross has continued to run innovative and successful *Operation Bounce Back* programs for the past four years.

Congratulations to Ross and Glenorchy City Council on these outstanding achievements.

StratPlan 2008 – theft reform in Australia beyond 2009

The NMVTRC's annual strategic planning workshops will kick off in April in Hobart, with workshops to be held across all capital cities. With it being a year of review for the NMVTRC, the focus of the 2008 workshops will be on identifying the potential future possibilities and directions for the NMVTRC.

The StratPlan workshops are a major input into the NMVTRC's annual Strategic Plan, which sets our future goals and projects and help us to develop a shared vision of reform priorities with senior

government and industry stakeholders. Importantly, the forums also help the NMVTRC to understand the issues and concerns specific to key organisations implementing theft reforms.

The dates and venues for the review are:

Hobart, 8 April – Hobart Function and Conference Centre

Melbourne, 9 April – Marriott Hotel

Sydney, 16 April – The Grace Hotel

Canberra, 17 April – Crowne Plaza

Adelaide, 21 April – The Sebel Playford

Brisbane, 29 April – Royal on the Park

Darwin, 30 April – Crowne Plaza

Perth, 7 May – Duxton Hotel

Invitations for the Hobart, Melbourne, Sydney and Canberra workshops have already been dispatched, with others to follow shortly.

From the vault!

VIN rage from Ford chief

Calls by the Motor Trades Association of Australia (MTAA) for the introduction of the Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) marking system extended to include Australian-made components as a means of reducing car theft have been slammed by a senior Ford Australia executive.

Manufacturers have been required to place VINs on all new cars sold in Australia since January 1, 1989. A record of these numbers is maintained by the Roads and Traffic Authority of New South Wales and can be accessed by various state authorities.

The MTAA wants manufacturers to place VINs on major body components. A report on car theft by the MTAA recommends the system be introduced on all vehicles sold in Oz from January 1, 1991.

The MTAA also recommends the existing VIN register be upgraded to provide a central register of wrecked and stolen vehicles, and that access be given to police, registration authorities and customs officials to ensure cars stolen in one state could not be reregistered in another, or wrecked vehicles rebuilt with stolen components.

Ford chairman Bill Dix said the VIN system, which is a 17 character identifying code providing information on the vehicle's place of manufacture, model and engine type, was a waste of time, however.

"What's the point when there is no centralised register? You can simply drive a car out of the state where it was registered and it will disappear."

Ford's stand had been backed by the Federal Chamber of Automotive Industries (FCAI), which represents manufacturers. FCAI chairman and Nissan chief Ivan Deveson said "it was probable government authorities that would find VIN labelling a difficult management task, and that consumers would face an added expense for what was an unproven car theft deterrent."

A reprint from Wheels Magazine, February 1990 article.