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# MEDIA RELEASE

## **SPEED LIMITS IN NORTHERN TERRITORY PART OF SAFETY PACKAGE**

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REINTRODUCING unlimited speed on the Northern Territory's major highways sends the wrong message to the population and will "eventually result in an increase of fatalities and serious injuries", according to the author of a Perspective published online by the *Medical Journal of Australia* today.

Mr David Read, from the National Critical Care and Trauma Response Centre at Royal Darwin Hospital, wrote that Northern Territorians were already three times more likely to die on the roads than the rest of the Australian population, due to a range of factors.

"Among NT road users, alcohol usage is high and seatbelt usage is low", Mr Read wrote.

"Additionally, NT roads are almost invariably single lane and unseparated, many are unsealed, they are subject to the extremes of weather and are also exposed to wandering livestock and wildlife."

Owing to light traffic and remoteness, victims of car accidents might not be found for hours, and risks for Indigenous communities were even higher "as cultural and linguistic differences are a barrier for driver licensing and training and there is a paucity of public transport, and yet there are frequent cultural demands for short notice mass transit".

In 2007 the NT government introduced speed limits of 130 km/h on the four main highways and 110 km/h on other rural roads. In February 2014, open speeds for a 200 km stretch of the Stuart Highway were introduced on a trial basis.

Mr Read said the government's argument that open speeds reduced fatigue were inadequate.

"While combating fatigue is important in improving road safety, swapping one risk factor for another is not the solution", he wrote.

"Campaigns to combat drink driving and poor rates of seatbelt use are most appropriate, but road safety is a package, and a vital element of the package is missing.

"Every crash is multifactorial, and alcohol and seatbelt use should remain a focus of a strong road safety package.

"However, allowing unlimited speed on major highways sends the wrong message to the NT population, especially when they are already three times more likely to die on the roads than people living in other parts of Australia, and at a rate that is equivalent to that in many low- and middle-income countries.

"The literature suggests that the piecemeal reintroduction of open speeds on the highways of the NT will eventually result in an increased number of fatalities and serious injuries.

“The NT Government should strengthen its road safety package and tailor it to the unique needs of its population, not abandon components due to popular demand.”

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