

RAA Member Panel

Passing Emergency Vehicles and School Speed Zones

The State Government is currently reviewing the speed limits in place when passing emergency vehicles with blue and red flashing lights.

This Member Panel survey looked at people's understanding of speed limits, both when passing emergency vehicles and in school zones.

While most Member Panel respondents appear to know the law when passing emergency vehicles, the same cannot be said for school zone speed limits.

Passing emergency vehicles with blue and red lights flashing

Until recently, South Australia was the only state to have a mandatory speed limit when passing emergency service vehicles attending an incident. When first introduced, the South Australian mandatory passing speed was 40 km/h. This was revised in 2014 and reduced to 25 km/h.

Victoria recently introduced an emergency vehicle passing speed of 40 km/h, with New South Wales and Queensland also calling for similar legislation and a 40 km/h speed limit.

Over 90 per cent of respondents know the maximum speed you may travel when passing a stationary emergency vehicle with blue and red lights flashing in South Australia. However, nearly 10 per cent believe the maximum speed is greater than 25 km/h.

Sixty five per cent of people expect the maximum speed limit to be the same when driving interstate, which is not the case.

Ninety six per cent of all Member Panel respondents believe the speed limit should be the same across all jurisdictions. This is a position RAA supports and will encourage the South Australian government to consider. We believe the best outcome for all emergency service personnel attending an incident is for **all** traffic to slow down and for **everyone** driving to be fully aware of legislative requirements, regardless of which state they may originate.

“Road/traffic rules should be identical nationally. Too many rules, too many speed zones, no consistency – means drivers are distracted from focusing on driving.” RAA Member

Verbatim comments highlighted the frustration motorists experience when a police officer has pulled over a vehicle and both are off the road safely away from traffic, or when the scene of a crash is cleared, yet traffic speed is still restricted. Over 85 per cent of panellists have witnessed a situation like this.

Nearly nine in ten people (89%) have witnessed motorists slowing down to look at an incident on the other side of the road, which is commonly known as rubbernecking. This is a driving distraction drivers must be aware of.

School speed zones

In South Australia, a 25 km/h speed limit applies:

- When passing a school bus that has stopped to pick up or drop off children.
- At a children's crossing when the lights are flashing as indicated by a children crossing sign.
- When a child is within school zone signs, on the road, footpath, median strip, or on a bicycle including outside of school hours.¹

Nine in ten panellists are aware the 25 km/h school zone speed limit applies at any time children are present, in or near the school zone. Relying on sighting a child was considered problematic and maybe not the safest option.

"The rule to say give way when children are present is illogical. If drivers do not see the children, they will not give way." RAA Member

Emu and koala crossings

There are two main treatments for crossings within school zones – emu and koala.

Verbatim comments highlighted absolute confusion over the two crossings, along with questions as to why there is a need for different treatments (e.g. wombat and zebra crossings in non-school zones).

"I had to look up emu and koala crossings on the internet. These names don't have relevance to me, and seem to have come in since I learnt to drive. I really haven't seen any advertising about them ever. I always slow down when children might be around, as they often think that they are always safe when they are crossing the road to get to school or a playground, so cross without checking."
RAA Member

Emu crossings have red and white posts and operate only when the 'children crossing' flags are displayed. Emu crossings are placed within school zones and a speed limit of 25km/h applies when children are present.

Koala crossings have red and white posts at the edge of the road and two yellow alternating flashing lights. As indicated by a sign, a speed limit of 25 km/h applies when the lights are flashing.²

The table highlights the series of options members could choose when considering what to do at a koala and emu crossing.

¹ <http://mylicence.sa.gov.au/road-rules/the-drivers-handbook/speed-limits>

² <http://mylicence.sa.gov.au/road-rules/the-drivers-handbook/crossings>

With both crossing treatments, approximately 60 per cent of members were aware that they must give way when children are present at any time. Slightly less were aware they must not exceed 25 km/h when children are present.

Slightly more people were aware what to do at a koala crossing than an emu crossing (59% and 50%), selecting give way to children at the crossing if there are alternating flashing yellow lights. However, nearly 50 per cent believed this treatment was an emu crossing.

Just over 50 per cent were aware that you must give way to children when the flags are displayed at an emu crossing.

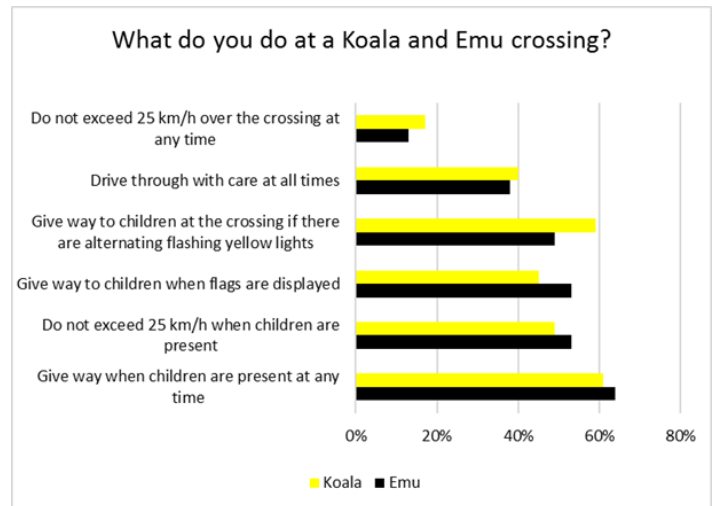
Comments included:

“What is the difference between “emu” and “koala” crossings? We used to call them “zebra” crossings?” RAA Member

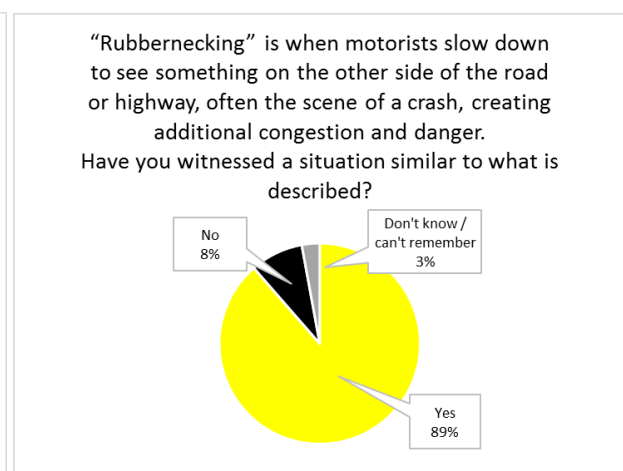
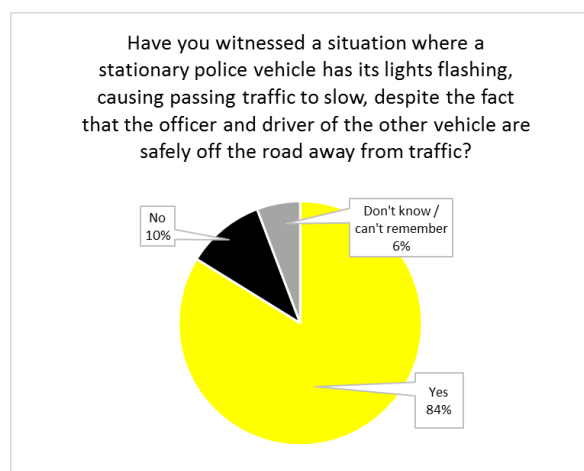
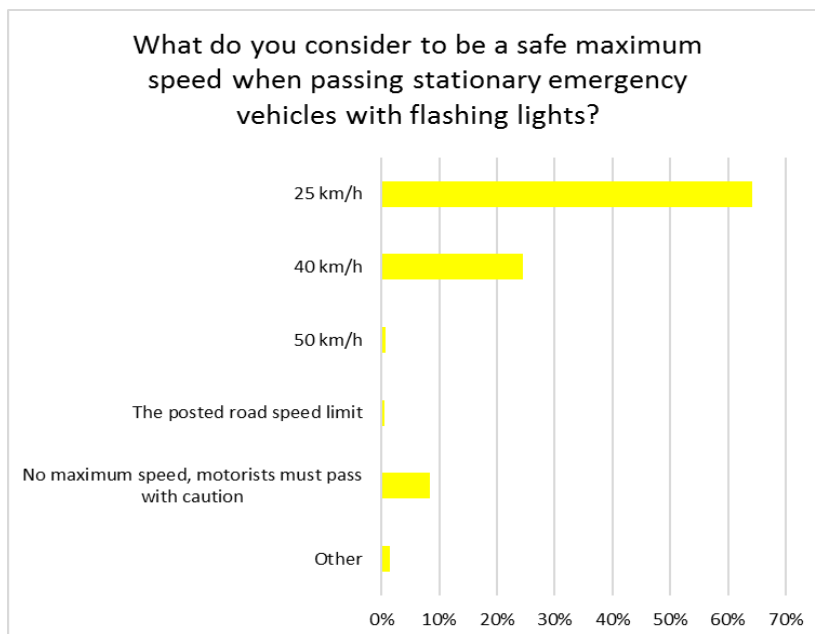
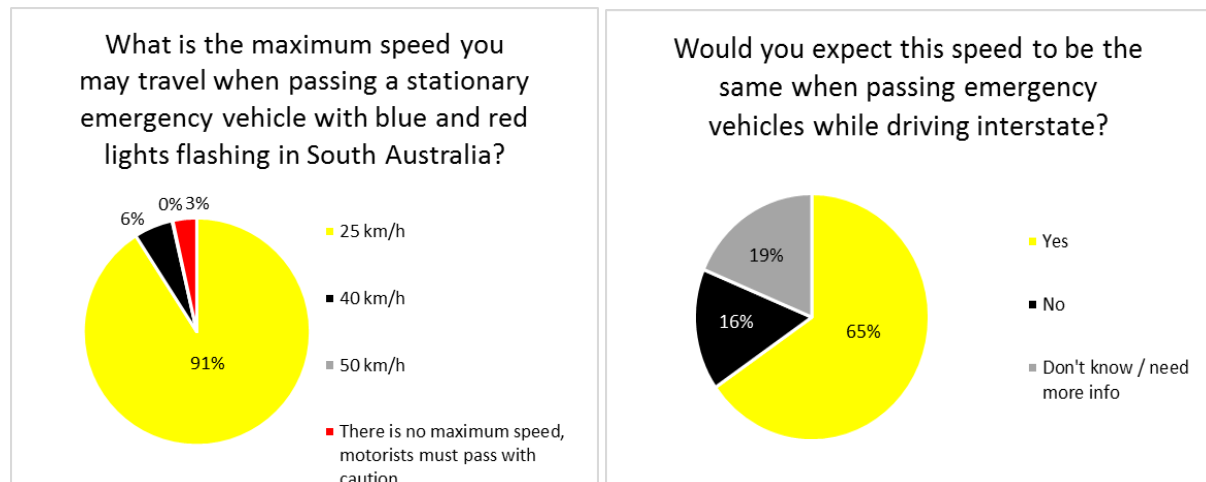
“What are emu and koala crossings? I just stop 😊.” RAA Member

“Very confusing law. I am unsure of the requirements on weekends and holidays.” RAA Member

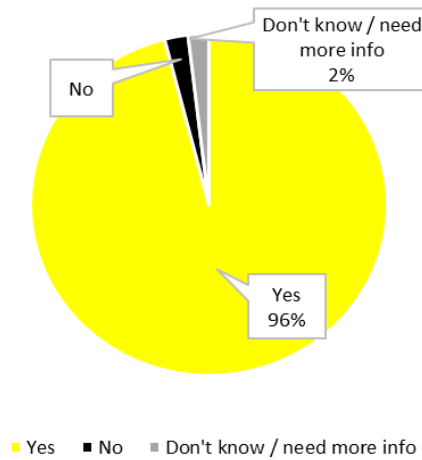
“This is another area where the same rules should apply in every state or territory. School zones interstate are often only 40km/h.” RAA Member



Results: Passing emergency vehicles with blue and red lights flashing



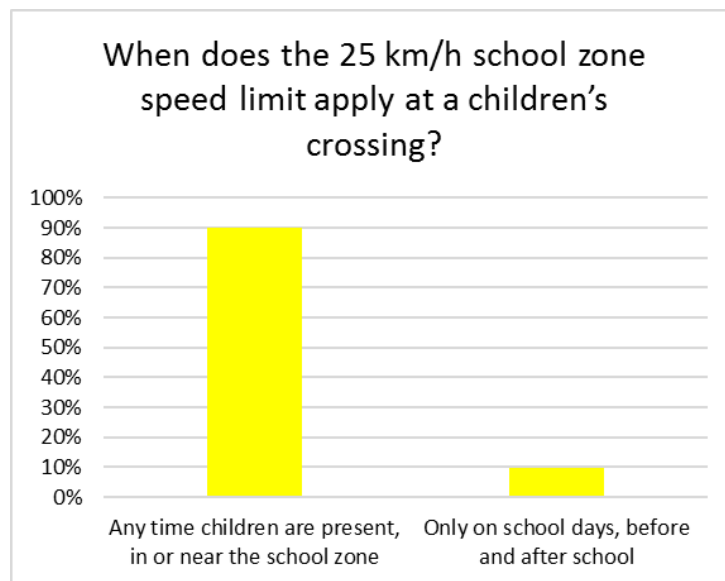
Should there be a maximum speed across all Australian jurisdictions when passing emergency vehicles with lights flashing that is the same?



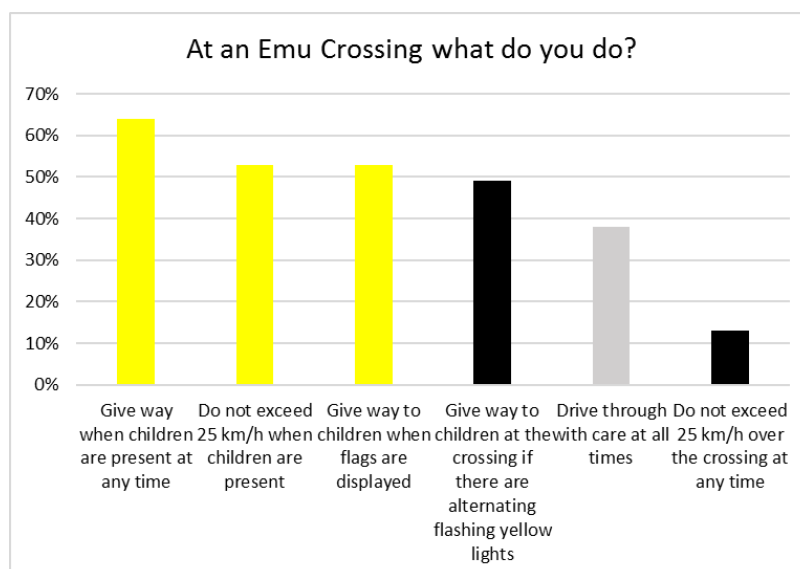
Verbatim themes

- Slowing down on the approach to emergency incidents is far more important than a definitive maximum speed.
- All jurisdictions should operate with the same speed reduction and uniform incident management.
- The nationwide speed limit past emergency vehicles with blue and red flashing lights should be 40 km/h.
- On country roads it is very difficult to reduce from 110 km/h to 25 km/h in quite often short distances.
- Recommend using flashing beacons or new treatments such as flashing triangles with the speed limit illuminated.
- The same rules should apply for road workers.
- There is frustration when drivers see blue and red flashing lights and all vehicles and drivers are safe and well away from traffic.
- No speed restrictions should be implemented for normal police business that slows or hinders traffic flow.
- Greater education is required for all the different speed restrictions.
- Crash severity should be used to determine the speed limit required.
- Another model proposes 25 km/h in 60 km/h zones, 40 km/h in 110 km/h zones.
- Police officers should be responsible for traffic control.
- Greater enforcement and speed control is required.
- Cannot legislate against stupidity.

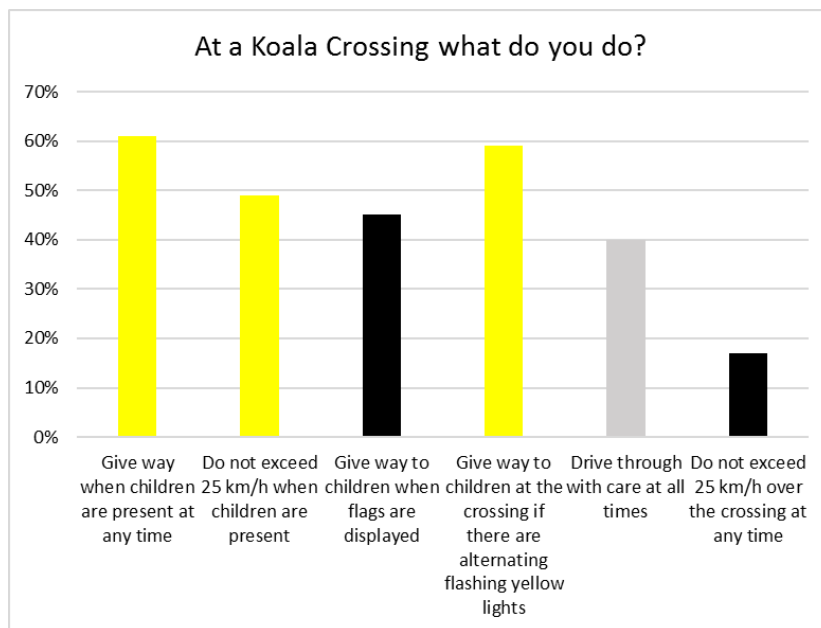
Results: School speed zones



Emu crossing



Koala crossing



Verbatim themes

- Confusion over what the difference between an emu and koala crossing is.
 - Why do they have different names to other pedestrian crossings?
 - Both emu and koala crossing signs are out on our roads warning drivers to watch out for native animals.
- Current legislation is ambiguous, using subjective words such as 'vicinity' or 'when children are present'. There is little clarity about distance or if a school fence is an acceptable barrier.
- Pedestrian crossings should all be uniform.
- Too often flags are left out at school crossings.
- New South Wales provides additional notice for drivers around school zones through line markings and clear, informative school signage.
- More police presence required at school crossings.
- Inconsistency in laws is confusing.
- Greater education for drivers on what is required, especially with so many variations of rules.
- Members were confused and looked up the meaning of emu and koala crossings.