



Nationals' push to regulate mobility scooters will punish seniors and people with disability

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Senator Williams' motion from the recent National Party conference will punish seniors and people with disability warns Assistive Technology Suppliers Australasia (ATSA);

“The National Party is calling to implement severe regulatory changes for motorised mobility devices that will disadvantage some of our most vulnerable citizens”, said David Sinclair, Executive Officer of ATSA. Sinclair said the Nationals should have sought expert advice from mobility specialists and those with real-world experience of disability before calling for such wide-reaching reform.

Assistive Technology suppliers stand by their clients and refute the over-exaggerated claims of “risk” made by the National Party.

The Nationals' proposal ignores the current well-established structures that already exist in Australia for the management of motorised mobility devices. Such devices are already regulated by State/Territory road and traffic agencies, Austroads, Standards Australia, the Therapeutic Goods Administration, Customs and the Department of Infrastructure.

People in rural and regional areas will be most affected by reducing speeds and limiting the availability of larger models with the introduction of weight restrictions. These larger devices are far more appropriate for rougher terrain and the distances covered.

“It is puzzling that the Nationals are leading a campaign against their core constituents,” said Mr Sinclair.

The current legal top speed of 10kmph is equivalent to jogging and is already limiting to individuals who rely on these devices to commute in the Australian climate. To reduce the speed further will unnecessarily place vulnerable users at risk as it will take longer for them to travel to their required destination.

100% of mobility scooters and 90% of electric wheelchairs sold in Australia are imported. They meet international standards and are designed for the large world markets of Europe, the USA and Asia. Australia represents a meagre 2% of the world Motorised Mobility Device market and manufacturers will not build specific models for such a small market. The end result, would be less choice and higher prices.

The Nationals' policy will also have a profound impact on motorised wheelchair users as they fall under the same regulations as mobility scooters. Their policy will mean Australia will have the most draconian regulatory environment in the world for such devices.

Setting a maximum weight limit of 150kgs will mean larger people and those with complex needs (i.e. quadriplegics, those with cerebral palsy etc) may not be able to get a legally compliant device that meets their needs, in effect trapping them in their homes. This is contrary to the United Nations Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities to which Australia is a signatory.

“ATSA believes in fairness and equality for people with disabilities. Rather than over-regulation leading to misalignment with internationally accepted standards ATSA considers a public awareness campaign to be a far more productive and effective proposition.

“ATSA believes that the focus should be on education, including training of scooter users and encouraging all pedestrians to look where they are going. However, the Nationals seem determined to unfairly punish the majority of motorised mobility users who do the right thing,” Mr Sinclair said

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