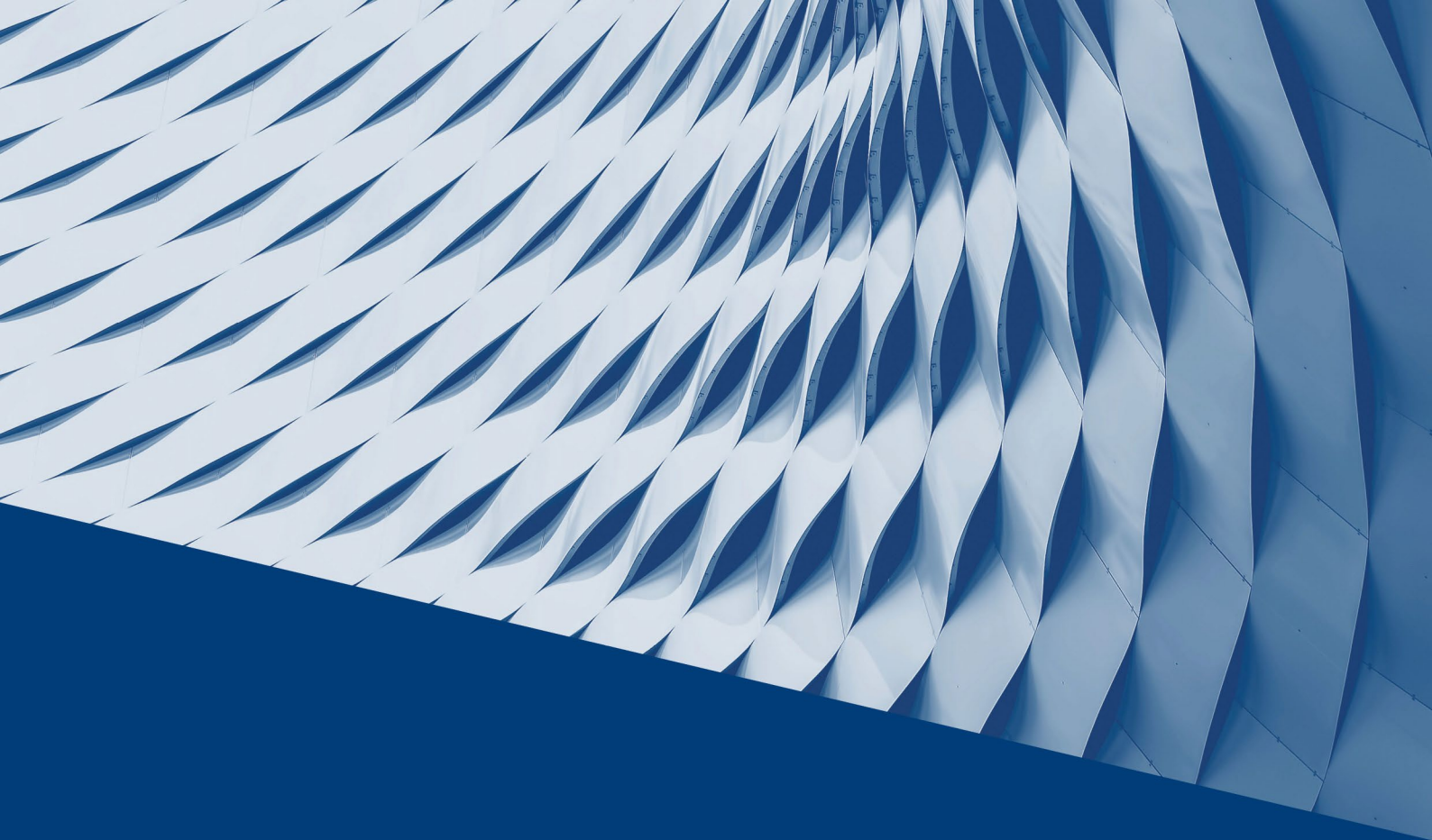




Improving quad bike safety in the workplace

Response to the Safe Work Australia Discussion Paper - June 2026

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About the Australian Council of Trade Unions

The Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) is Australia's sole peak body of trade unions, consisting of affiliated unions and state and regional trades and labour councils. There are currently 35 ACTU affiliates, which together have nearly 2 million members who are engaged across a broad spectrum of industries and occupations in the public and private sectors. As the collective voice of Australian workers, the ACTU plays a central role in shaping national policy and advocating for improved rights, conditions and protections at work.

The ACTU is committed to advancing work health and safety for all Australian workers through a rights-based, participatory approach. The ACTU has two member positions for Safe Work Australia, representing the interests of workers and ensuring that the voices and experiences of working people are central to national WHS policy and regulatory development.

The ACTU's strategy is focused on supporting unions to actively organise workers around healthy and safe work. This includes winning and embedding new health and safety rights at work and building the capacity of unions to use both new and existing rights to organise. By empowering unions and their members to take collective action, the ACTU seeks to ensure that work health and safety is not just a matter of compliance, but a fundamental right that is actively realised in every workplace.

The ACTU acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to Elders past and present. The ACTU's office in Melbourne is located on the lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation. We honour their custodianship and acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded.

Introduction: from known hazard to enforceable controls

Quad bikes are a well-known and persistent source of workplace death and serious injury. Safe Work Australia's discussion paper records that, since 2011, 245 workers have died in quad bike incidents, with 107 fatalities occurring between 2020 and 2026. It also records that 20 quad bike-related fatalities occurred in 2024, the highest number since the ACCC Quad Bike Safety Standard was fully implemented in 2021.¹

The ACTU supports Safe Work Australia consulting on regulatory and non-regulatory options to improve quad bike safety in the workplace. The continued occurrence of fatalities and serious injuries demonstrates that the existing framework, while important, has not been sufficient to ensure consistent, practical and enforceable controls across workplaces where quad bikes are used.

The current model WHS laws already require PCBU's to manage risks associated with plant, including quad bikes, so far as is reasonably practicable. The model WHS Regulations also contain general requirements for powered mobile plant, including risks arising from overturning, ejection, collision and mechanical failure. However, the absence of clear quad bike-specific requirements in the model Regulations creates inconsistency and leaves too much dependent on local practice, industry culture and the quality of individual risk assessments.

Quad bikes are used across a wide range of work settings, including agriculture, cattle work, ranger programs, tourism, local government, remote community services, infrastructure work, councils, recycling plants, lifesaving, horticulture, large venues and production work.

Recurring practical risks include workers being placed on quad bikes without adequate induction or training, use on rough terrain and in extreme heat, reluctance to wear helmets, isolated work over large distances, delayed emergency response, lack of traffic management or defined routes, poor maintenance, unsafe loading and pressure on insecure or temporary workers to work quickly. In remote and regional settings, these risks may be heightened where workers operate alone or across long distances, and where emergency response times are delayed.

The ACTU's position is that known life-threatening hazards require clear, enforceable controls. Education and guidance have a role, but they cannot be the primary response where deaths and serious injuries continue to occur. Regulatory controls should be strengthened and supported by data collection, targeted communication and practical implementation guidance.

¹ Safe Work Australia, Options to improve quad bike safety in the workplace (Discussion Paper, April 2026).

Consultation questions

Question 1: Do you support Option 1 – requiring OPDs to be fitted on all quad bikes when used in the workplace?

Yes. The ACTU supports amending the model WHS Regulations to require PCBUs to ensure operator protective devices (OPDs) are installed on all quad bikes used in the workplace.

OPDs are an engineering control. Safe Work Australia's discussion paper states that OPDs are designed to reduce the risk of injury and fatality in the event of a rollover, by providing clearance space for the operator to crawl out and increasing survivability.² This is directly relevant to the central mechanism of many quad bike deaths, including rollovers, crush injuries and asphyxiation.

The ACTU supports this requirement applying to all quad bikes used at work, not only new or imported second-hand general-use quad bikes covered by the ACCC Standard.³ A worker's level of protection should not depend on whether the quad bike is new, old, imported or already in use. Where older quad bikes remain in workplaces, particularly in agricultural and remote settings, workers may be exposed to the same rollover risks without equivalent protection.

Cost pressures are likely to create resistance, particularly in farming where quad bikes are used across large properties to reduce labour or contractor costs. Cost pressures should not be determinative where life-threatening risks are well-established. Rather, clear regulatory requirements are necessary precisely because voluntary uptake is unlikely to be consistent where cost pressures and informal work practices are present.

The requirement should be supported by practical guidance on retrofitting OPDs, assessing whether a quad bike should instead be replaced with a safer vehicle, and ensuring workers and Health and Safety Representatives are consulted before decisions are made about plant selection, retrofit programs or continued quad bike use.

² R. Grzebieta, G. Rechnitzer, K. Simmons and A. McIntosh, Quad Bike Performance Project Test Results, Conclusions and Recommendations (University of New South Wales, January 2015), as cited in Safe Work Australia, Options to improve quad bike safety in the workplace (Discussion Paper, April 2026).

³ Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, Quad bike safety: Final Recommendation to the Minister (February 2019), as cited in Safe Work Australia, Options to improve quad bike safety in the workplace (Discussion Paper, April 2026).

That guidance should also make clear that retrofitting an OPD should not be treated as a substitute for considering whether the quad bike should be replaced with safer plant. Where the task can be performed using a side-by-side vehicle, utility terrain vehicle, tractor, ute, drone or other safer alternative, the PCBU should be required to consider substitution before relying on modification of the quad bike.

Question 2: Do you support Option 2 – mandating helmets are worn on all quad bikes when used in the workplace?

Yes. The ACTU supports amending the model WHS Regulations to require PCBUs to ensure operators and passengers wear helmets when riding quad bikes in the workplace.

The evidence set out in the discussion paper strongly supports a mandatory requirement. Safe Work Australia records that, between 2011 and 12 March 2026, helmets were not worn in 151 of the 176 quad bike fatalities across Australia where helmet use was able to be determined. Helmets are a basic and low-cost control for reducing fatalities and the seriousness of head injuries.⁴

Helmet non-use remains a live issue in practice. In some farming settings, workers may prefer hats or avoid helmets because of heat. The ACTU accepts that heat, comfort and local work culture can affect compliance. However, those factors strengthen the case for a clear duty on PCBUs, rather than leaving helmet use to individual discretion.

A mandatory helmet requirement should be accompanied by practical guidance on suitable helmets for different work environments, including heat, eye protection, chin straps, fit, storage, hygiene and replacement. PCBUs should be required to provide helmets that are appropriate to the task and conditions, and to ensure helmet use through induction, supervision and enforcement of safe systems of work.

The ACTU does not support a risk assessment approach that permits PCBUs to decide, in ordinary quad bike operations, that helmets are unnecessary. Given the fatality data and the nature of quad bike incidents, helmet use should be treated as a minimum control for workplace use.

⁴ LN Wundersitz, SD Doecke, SJ Raftery and JE Harrison, Quad bikes in South Australia: an investigation of their use, crash characteristics and associated injury risks (Centre for Automotive Safety Research, University of Adelaide, January 2016), as cited in Safe Work Australia, Options to improve quad bike safety in the workplace (Discussion Paper, April 2026).

Question 3: Do you support Option 3 – restricting the carrying of passengers on operator-only quad bikes when used in the workplace?

Yes. The ACTU supports amending the model WHS Regulations to require PCBUs to restrict the carrying of passengers on operator-only quad bikes when used in the workplace.

The discussion paper states that most quad bikes in Australia are designed to carry only the operator, and that carrying passengers on type 1 quad bikes has led to incidents resulting in injury and fatality to passengers. It also notes that manufacturer's instructions generally specify passenger limits when operating a quad bike.

The ACTU supports a clear regulatory prohibition because passenger carrying is a foreseeable and preventable risk. The control should not depend on workers or supervisors interpreting manufacturer instructions in the moment, particularly in settings where quad bike use is informal, fast-paced or performed by temporary workers.

Surf lifesaving is one workplace context in which passenger transport may be raised as a practical issue, for example where a person needs urgent transport. The ACTU's position is that emergency response needs should be addressed through fit-for-purpose emergency transport systems, not by normalising passenger use on operator-only quad bikes. Where a workplace needs to transport another person, the PCBU should provide plant designed and assessed for that purpose.

The final regulatory wording should clearly distinguish operator-only quad bikes from side-by-side vehicles and other plant designed to carry more than one person. The regulation should not inadvertently capture vehicles that are designed, maintained and risk-assessed for two-person use.

Question 4: Do you support Option 4 – restricting the use of all quad bikes in the workplace to people aged 16 years and over?

Yes. The ACTU supports amending the model WHS Regulations to restrict workplace quad bike use to people aged 16 years and over.

The discussion paper states that children do not generally have the physical strength necessary to apply active riding techniques on adult-sized quad bikes, and that active riding depends partly on the rider's bodyweight relative to the weight of the quad bike. It also notes that a Queensland coronial inquest found that children who died in quad bike incidents were either on adult-sized quad bikes or on youth-sized quad bikes that were too large for their age category.

Younger people may perform rural or property-based work involving vehicles in some regions. The ACTU considers this a reason for clear regulation, not a reason for delay. Where a task requires

the operation of hazardous powered mobile plant, the minimum working age for other types of work should not determine whether a young worker can safely operate that plant.

The ACTU supports the age restriction as a minimum requirement. It should be accompanied by requirements for training, competency assessment and supervision, because age alone does not establish competence. A worker aged 16 or over may still be inexperienced, unfamiliar with the terrain, unfamiliar with the specific vehicle or vulnerable to pressure to work quickly.

The regulation should also be clear that where manufacturer instructions impose a higher age requirement or other restrictions, the PCBU must comply with those instructions as part of managing plant risk.

Question 5: Do you support Option 5 – improving quad bike data collection processes?

Yes. The ACTU supports improving quad bike data collection processes. Better data is necessary to understand where and how incidents occur, but data improvement must complement, not substitute for, stronger regulatory controls.

Safe Work Australia's discussion paper states that its quad bike fatality data is currently largely based on media reports, later verified against regulator or National Coronial Information System information when available. It also notes that the type of information recorded varies, affecting data quality and limiting reporting on factors such as OPD use, make, model, age or condition of the quad bike and road conditions.⁵

Current reporting pathways have significant limitations. Many incidents in farming and remote settings may not come to the attention of regulators unless a fatality or serious injury occurs. This means the system is likely to have weak visibility of near misses, minor injuries, unsafe work systems and repeated non-compliance.

The ACTU supports a standardised national data collection approach for quad bike and side-by-side vehicle incidents. At a minimum, data should capture:

- whether the incident occurred in the course of work
- industry, task and employment arrangement, including labour hire, contracting and seasonal work where known
- vehicle type, make, model, age, condition and maintenance history
- whether an OPD or other rollover protection was fitted

⁵ Safe Work Australia, quad bikes dashboard, accessed 14 April 2026 and 26 March 2026, as cited in Safe Work Australia, Options to improve quad bike safety in the workplace (Discussion Paper, April 2026).

- whether a helmet was worn, and the type of helmet
- whether passengers were carried
- whether loads, tools, cameras, tanks, spray units, trailers or other attachments were carried or towed
- terrain, slope, ground conditions, visibility and weather
- whether the worker was working alone or remotely
- training, induction, supervision and competency assessment
- whether a traffic management plan, route system or exclusion zone was in place
- whether the incident involved road use, road crossings, conditional registration, licence requirements or interaction with public roads or other traffic, where relevant
- whether the incident involved rollover, collision, ejection, runover, crush, fall or mechanical failure
- whether the incident was notified to a WHS regulator and whether enforcement action followed

Data collection should also be designed to capture near misses and non-fatal incidents. Without this, policy will continue to rely heavily on fatality data, which is too late for preventive intervention.

Question 6: Do you support Option 6 – conducting targeted quad bike safety communication activities?

Yes, but only as a supporting measure. The ACTU supports targeted communication activities to reinforce safe quad bike practices, provided they sit alongside clear regulatory duties and enforcement.

Communication and education can help shift norms, particularly in regional and agricultural settings where work culture and local practice strongly influence behaviour. However, the discussion paper itself records that significant education and awareness campaigns have already occurred, while quad bike deaths and serious injuries have persisted. Communication alone is not an adequate control for a known high-risk hazard.

Targeted communication should address:

- small and family-operated farms, where informal practices and limited awareness of WHS duties may be common
- remote and regional workplaces where workers may operate alone across large distances
- seasonal, labour hire, migrant and temporary workforces, where workers may be unfamiliar with the vehicle, terrain or their safety rights

- industries outside agriculture, including councils, recycling, lifesaving, horticulture, large venues and production work
- workplaces where heat and culture contribute to helmet resistance
- workplaces where quad bikes are used to carry loads, tools or equipment in ways that may affect stability
- First Nations communities and ranger programs, where communication materials should be culturally appropriate and developed with workers, unions and community representatives
- workplaces where quad bikes are used on or near roads, including work involving road crossings, conditional registration, licence requirements or interaction with other traffic

Effective communication should be practical, enforceable and worker-facing. It should clearly state minimum legal requirements, explain what PCBUs must provide and identify what workers and Health and Safety Representatives can do if unsafe quad bike practices continue. Materials should be developed in consultation with unions, workers, Health and Safety Representatives and relevant community representatives, and should be available in formats and languages appropriate for seasonal, migrant, remote and First Nations workforces.

Question 7: Do you have any other comments, or alternative options not outlined in this paper?

Yes. The ACTU recommends that Safe Work Australia consider additional regulatory and guidance measures beyond the six options identified in the discussion paper.

1. Mandatory training, induction and competency assessment

The ACTU recommends that the model WHS Regulations include specific requirements for PCBUs to ensure workers are trained, inducted and assessed as competent before operating quad bikes at work.

Workers, including workers in orchards, vineyards and farms, may be placed on quad bikes with little or no induction. Workers unfamiliar with the vehicle, terrain, route, work system or hazards may then be expected to work quickly. This creates risk even where other controls, such as OPDs and helmets, are present.

Training should cover vehicle operation, terrain, active riding, speed, load limits, passenger restrictions, helmet use, OPDs, pre-start checks, emergency procedures, incident reporting and the worker's right to stop unsafe work. Competency should be practical, not merely paper-based. Given the high-risk nature of quad bike operation, competency should not be treated as a once-off induction requirement. The ACTU recommends refresher training and reassessment at regular intervals, including every 6 to 12 months where workers operate in remote, isolated or hazardous environments.

2. Maintenance, pre-start checks and removal from service

The ACTU recommends specific obligations for quad bike maintenance, inspection and pre-start checks. Poor maintenance can contribute to serious quad bike incidents in workplace contexts. The model Regulations already recognise mechanical failure as a powered mobile plant risk, but quad bike-specific duties would improve clarity and consistency.

PCBUs should be required to keep maintenance records, conduct routine inspections, ensure faults are reported and acted upon, and remove unsafe quad bikes from service until repaired. Workers should not be required or pressured to operate defective plant. PCBUs should also be required to maintain documented records of training, reassessment, servicing, pre-start inspections, incident reports, near misses and corrective actions.

3. Loads, towing, attachments and stability

The ACTU recommends that Safe Work Australia address the risks arising from loads, towing, attachments and equipment carried on quad bikes. Loads placed on quad bikes may affect balance and contribute to tipping. Production work may also involve cameras or other equipment being carried or operated while the vehicle is moving.

Guidance and, where appropriate, regulation should require PCBUs to assess the stability impacts of tools, loads, spray units, trailers, cameras and other attachments. Workers should be given clear load limits and should not be required to perform tasks that compromise vehicle stability or safe operation.

4. Working alone, isolation and emergency response

The ACTU recommends that working alone and remote operation be addressed explicitly. Workers may undertake fence-line checks or cattle work across large properties for hours, sometimes in isolated areas where they may not be found quickly if a rollover or serious incident occurs.

PCBUs should be required to assess isolation risks and implement controls such as communication systems, check-in procedures, emergency plans, location tracking where appropriate and rescue arrangements. The risk of a quad bike incident is compounded where a worker is alone, injured and unable to summon help.

5. Traffic management, routes and terrain assessment

The ACTU recommends specific guidance on traffic management and route planning for workplaces using quad bikes. Rough terrain, orchards, vineyards, cattle work and large properties are settings where workers may operate without defined routes, mapping or traffic control systems.

PCBUs should be required to assess terrain, slopes, ground conditions, visibility, interaction with pedestrians, vehicles and animals, and to provide safe routes and exclusion zones where needed.

6. Enforcement and compliance strategies

The ACTU recommends that Safe Work Australia work with jurisdictions to support enforcement strategies that address the practical reality of quad bike use in remote and agricultural workplaces. Incidents may not come to regulatory attention unless someone is seriously injured or killed. This undermines prevention and allows unsafe practices to persist.

Improved regulation should be paired with targeted regulator activity, including proactive inspections in high-risk industries, guidance for inspectors, and engagement with unions and Health and Safety Representatives. The objective should be to ensure the new requirements are not merely written into the law, but implemented in the workplaces where quad bike risks are most acute.

7. Clear treatment of side-by-side vehicles

The ACTU recommends that Safe Work Australia ensure the final regulatory package clearly distinguishes quad bikes from side-by-side vehicles, utility terrain vehicles and other plant. Some workplaces use side-by-side vehicles, including for two-person use. Regulatory drafting should ensure controls apply appropriately to the relevant type of plant, without creating confusion about vehicles designed and assessed for passengers. The drafting should also avoid treating side-by-side vehicles only as an exclusion category. In many workplaces they may be a safer substitute for quad bikes because they are commercially available, versatile, purpose-built for carriage and do not depend on retrofitting in the same way as older quad bikes.

8. Substitution and safer vehicle selection

The ACTU recommends that Safe Work Australia include an explicit requirement, or at minimum clear regulatory guidance, requiring PCBUs to consider whether a quad bike is the appropriate vehicle for the task before it is used. This should include consideration of substitution with safer plant, including side-by-side vehicles, utility terrain vehicles, tractors, utes, drones, walking or other methods where these would eliminate or reduce the risk. The Queensland Rural Plant Code of Practice 2024 recognises that quad bikes are not always the most suitable vehicle and that alternative vehicles should be considered where appropriate. A model regulatory package should reflect that approach.

9. Road use, registration and interaction with traffic

The ACTU recommends that Safe Work Australia address road use and traffic interaction in the final package. Quad bike risks are not limited to paddocks or private property. Workers may cross

roads, travel near other vehicles, move between work sites or use quad bikes on road reserves. The package should require PCBUs to assess road use, crossings, visibility, traffic management, route selection, licence requirements and any jurisdiction-specific registration conditions. WorkSafe Victoria's Quad bikes on farms handbook, for example, states that quad bikes used strictly on private property do not need to be registered and operators do not need to hold a valid driver's licence, but that road use is subject to VicRoads Conditions of Registration. It also identifies conditions for road use, including registration in the Primary Producer Special Vehicle category, TAC coverage, no passengers apart from the driver, approved motorcycle helmets and no towing. These issues should be clearly reflected in national guidance so PCBUs do not treat off-road and on-road use as the same risk profile.

10. Model Code of Practice and the legal status of codes

The ACTU recommends that Safe Work Australia develop a model Code of Practice for rural plant, including quad bikes and side-by-side vehicles, drawing on the Queensland Rural Plant Code of Practice 2024. That Code already consolidates practical guidance on quad bikes, side-by-side vehicles, vehicle selection, training, maintenance, attachments, terrain, towing, operator factors and task-specific risk assessment. A model Code would support more consistent national expectations and provide practical content for regulators, PCBUs, workers, unions and Health and Safety Representatives. The ACTU also recommends that Safe Work Australia revisit the legal status of model Codes of Practice, including whether the model laws should adopt an approach equivalent to section 26A of the Queensland Work Health and Safety Act 2011, under which duty holders must comply with an approved code of practice or manage the hazard or risk in another way that provides an equivalent or higher standard of health and safety.

Conclusion

The ACTU supports Options 1 to 6. In particular, the ACTU supports clear regulatory requirements for OPDs, helmets, passenger restrictions and age restrictions. These should be implemented alongside improved data collection and targeted communication activities.

The continued rate of quad bike fatalities and serious injuries demonstrates that guidance and general duties have not been enough. Quad bike risks are known, foreseeable and capable of control. Workers should not be left dependent on variable workplace culture, inconsistent risk assessments or voluntary uptake of basic safety measures.

The ACTU recommends that Safe Work Australia also consider additional measures addressing training and competency, maintenance, loads and attachments, isolated work, traffic management, enforcement, substitution and safer vehicle selection, road use and registration

issues, the distinction between quad bikes and side-by-side vehicles, and the development of a model Code of Practice for rural plant.

A strengthened framework should make clear that where quad bikes are used for work, PCBUs must provide safe plant, safe systems of work, effective training, consultation and supervision, and practical controls that prevent workers from being killed or seriously injured while doing their jobs.