

Safer Farms 2020

Agricultural Injury and Fatality **TREND REPORT**



Safer Farms, Safer Farmers



Farmsafe
AUSTRALIA

Message from the Chair

Charles Armstrong



Being the Chair of Farmsafe Australia is not a role I take lightly. Agriculture in Australia is a highly dangerous industry to work in. There is no getting around the truth.

We work in the elements. We work with large animals. We work with chemicals. We work with heavy machinery. We work at heights. We work in confined spaces. We work with heavy loads. We work alone.

Farming has a very high-risk profile. And every decision I make in this position is motivated by the desire to decrease that risk for our farmers.

With that in mind, it's no secret that I am a strong supporter of quad bike safety reform. I have spent much of my advocacy career lobbying for mandatory crush protection devices due to the alarming rate of injury and fatalities that were occurring on farm.

The numbers speak for themselves. In the first six months of 2020 we have already seen 9 quad bike deaths in Australia. That is a significant rise from 2019 when there were 11 in the entire 12 months.

I will be the first to tell you how valuable the quad bike is to Australian farmers. But no tool is worth as much as a human life. And in six months we have lost 9 lives on farm and 27 people have been injured.

There are strong opinions against our position and there are accusations that we are not listening to farmers or advocating for their needs.

I cannot think of a more important need to advocate for, than the need to come home safely at night.

When rollover protection became mandatory on tractors in 1982, there were similar arguments made against the legislation. Since that time, there has been over a 70% decline in roll over fatalities.

I am genuinely saddened by the companies threatening to pull out of the Australian market due to the impending legislation and it is alarming that the wellbeing of their customers is not sufficient motivation for change.

Requiring retailers to sell safer bikes will mean that the farmers using the bikes are less liable to be prosecuted by WHS regulators. It shifts the regulatory burden from farmers to the manufacturers, where it ultimately belongs.

There is one point we do agree on though – *there would be a great safety benefit if helmets and training were mandatory and children were banned from riding adult sized quad bikes.*

Yes! And we advocate for these measures as well. The thing about safety is that it isn't just one factor that could 'save a life' or minimise injury. There are a multitude of variables at play when accidents happen and any one factor could tip the situation from being an accident that someone walks away from, to being a tragedy that friends and family are left to mourn.

So, let's minimise one risk by implementing a standard that stipulates the use of an engineered control. And let's stop looking for reasons that justify human suffering. There aren't any.

What we are trying to do is make the quad bike safer – and bring our farmers home for dinner.

Message from the EO

Stevi Howdle



Farmsafe Australia is undergoing significant changes.

As you may have noticed, Farmsafe Australia's ability to maintain a significant presence in the farm safety landscape has declined in the last five years. Due to a lack of funding that severely restricted operational abilities, Farmsafe Australia was fading into the background.

However, the National Farmers' Federation was reluctant to let go of such an important institution and advocated for Farmsafe Australia to be awarded a significant grant to fund a major revitalisation project to ensure that the critical knowledge and information that Farmsafe provided was not lost.

With substantial support provided by the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, under the National Farm Safety Education Fund, Farmsafe Australia is modernising our look, revitalising our website and enhancing our available resources and capabilities to promote and support activities relating to on-farm safety and continue in our efforts to reduce on-farm fatalities and injuries.

Before the end of 2020, Farmsafe Australia will be launching a new website that will include Toolbox Talks (downloadable to include in any farm's induction kit), a library of academic research relating to farm safety statistics and information, information on best practice and stories of farmers who are champions in the farm safety space.

We will also be commencing a significant upgrade to our Induction Tool which will provide commodity specific and cross commodity induction activities for farm employees. The tool will be much more user friendly and available offline for those farms that struggle with internet connection.

Farmsafe Australia will be increasing its engagement directly with farmers across all States and Territories. We will be coming on farm to see and hear about what we can do better.

And we are committed to increasing our communications. This is the inaugural Safer Farms Report, and

I wanted to take this opportunity to outline what it will become over the coming years.

As an industry, we need to communicate directly with our farmers about safety and we need to be consistent about the messaging that we are putting forward. Farmsafe Australia is the national body for farm safety education and needs to become better at focusing the national conversation around emerging trends in the agricultural WH&S landscape and what we, as an industry, can do to turn those trends around.

We need to make good on our founding commitment to making Australian farms safer places to live and work.

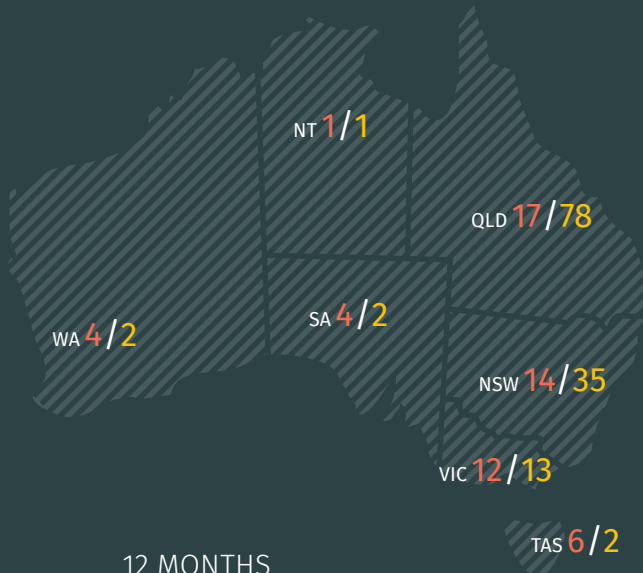
Our mission is to improve the wellbeing and productivity of Australian agriculture through enhanced health and safety awareness and practices.

So, let's get back to it.

Snapshot

The following data has been collated from information provided by AgHealth Australia and their Australian Farm Deaths and Injuries Media Monitors Snapshot.

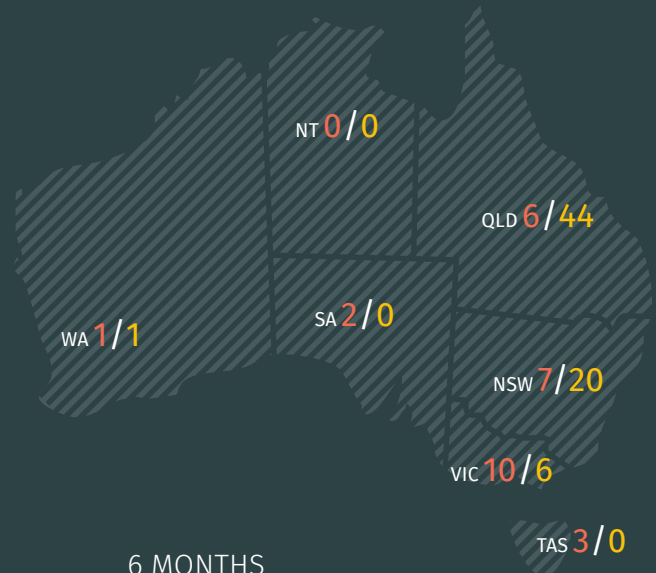
2019 JANUARY – DECEMBER



12 MONTHS

FATALITIES TOTAL 58 | NON-FATAL INJURIES TOTAL 133

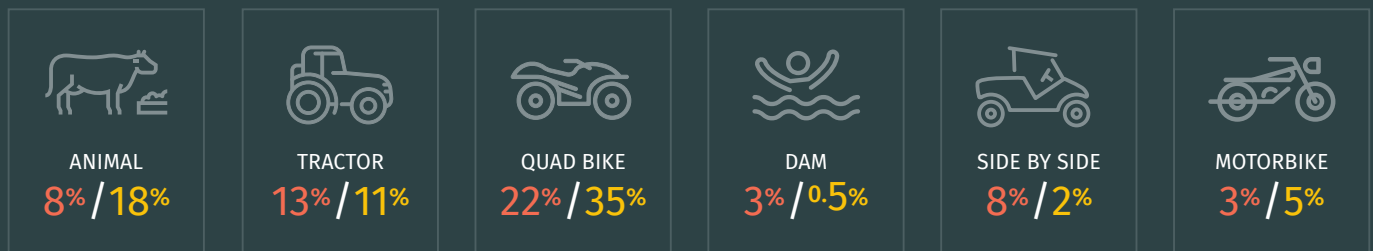
2020 JANUARY – JUNE



6 MONTHS

FATALITIES TOTAL 33 | NON-FATAL INJURIES TOTAL 71

Common Agents of Fatality of Injury



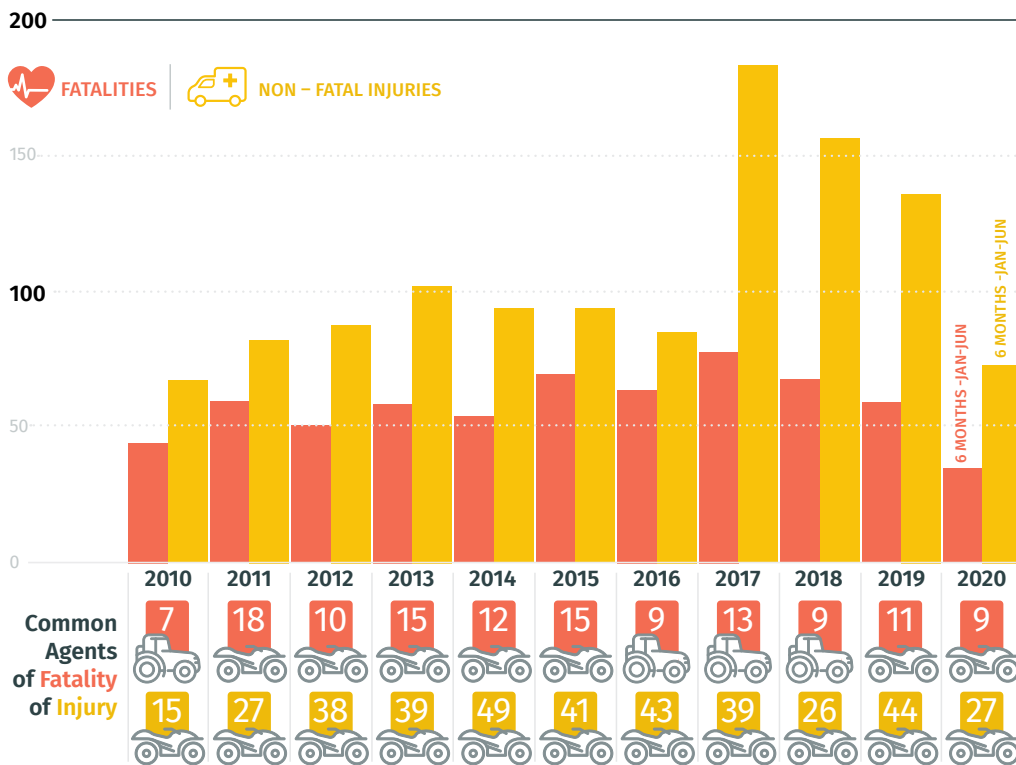
OVER THE LAST 18 MONTHS

Data Gaps

AgHealth Australia are meticulous in combining the injury and fatality data through media monitoring and coronial reports.

However, the completeness of health and safety data in agriculture is an ongoing challenge for policy makers, researchers and the industry as a whole. We think there are a range of factors that contribute to this. The Rural Safety & Health Alliance, comprised of nine Rural Research & Development Corporations, is currently working with Farmsafe Australia and other key stakeholders to review the current health and safety data frameworks, to clearly identify the uses and objectives of this data, current challenges and identify opportunities to improve WHS data architecture nationally.

10 Year Comparison



Gender and Age

89.3% FATALITIES ARE MALE

WITH OVER 50% ABOVE 50 YEARS OF AGE

IN THE LAST 10 YEARS 15% OF FATALITIES ARE CHILDREN UNDER 15 YEARS OF AGE

Emerging Trend or Consistent Issue?

It seems obvious that the emerging trends that we are looking for are not so much emerging but consistent issues with quad bike safety. For 10 years running, they are the most common agent of injury and in all but 4 years, they are the most common agent of fatality on farm.

There has been significant money spent by Federal and State governments on education and awareness campaigns as well as rebate schemes for helmets and training and yet, quad bike injuries and fatalities are still capturing all the headlines.

With the campaigns seemingly not having much effect on behaviour change, safety best practice stipulates that engineering controls are the most effective risk minimisation strategy where a risk cannot

be eliminated, substituted or isolated. OPDs and the minimum stability requirements are engineered controls and the best chance that we have at addressing the inherent risks attributed to the design of quad bikes.

And yet, attempts to implement the recent ACCC standard for quad bike safety has been met with backlash from user groups who see it as an abuse of regulatory powers and an overreach of the government into private affairs. The

criticism is wide ranging and argues everything from incorrect figures to lack of safety awareness raising campaigns. Their voices are loud and are gaining traction on social media.

The voices that we won't be hearing from in this debate sadly, are those who have the most valuable opinions; those whose lives have been cut short.

So, over the next few months, our collective voices need to be raised for them.

We need to work together to educate and inform as many farmers as we can on the importance of this standard.

We also need to combat the allegations that quads will become unavailable in the Australian market and that such a valuable tool will disappear from our landscape. The reality is this – the market will go through a period of adjustment. But we have every confidence that safer quad bikes will be available well into the future.

Why is it so hard to make farms safe?

There are two key factors that differentiate farming from other forms of employment.

There is no 'work/life balance'

Farmers generally don't drive through their front gates to start a 'day at work'. They wake up already on the job. With the workplace flowing seamlessly into the homelife and vice versa, there is often a general complacency that creeps into the day to day jobs because of this familiarity. We consider our homes 'safe'. But farms aren't just homes.

Clocking off isn't always an option

Farm work does not confine itself to Monday through Friday, 9am to 5pm.

Livestock don't wait to give birth until the station hand is on duty, nor do they care if the worm they have contracted will wipe out an entire flock if drenching isn't done immediately, potentially meaning an all-night yard party. Crops won't germinate unless they are sown within a short window of time during the right season and despite the years of drought Australia experiences, it always seems rain is forecast while the harvesters are in the middle of taking off their crops.

Farm work exists 7 days a week, 24 hours a day. And farmers are born with the attitude that the 'job just needs to get done'.

When you combine that mindset with a general trend towards reduction in staff, larger properties and prioritisation of tasks based on economic gains, it becomes evident why addressing safety culture on farm is extremely challenging.

And do we dare even mention the possibility of 'calling in sick'?

Farming Culture

Being a farmer isn't just an occupation – it is a way of life. It brings with it an entire cultural identity and set of behaviours. In 2018 Safe Work Australia released their Agricultural Insights report. The four key insights that were presented provide a lot of information on why it is so difficult to improve safety on farm. We have summarised the findings below to begin to unpack how we may need to reshape our communications to address the broader issues.



1.

Time is money and money is tight

- Investment in farm safety takes money out of the pot for other farm productivity investments or general family needs
- Time pressures increase risky behavior and working when tired or ill
- Saving time on one task only means more time to squeeze in the next task.



2.

It will never happen to me

- Farmers can be unreceptive to personal safety and danger messages, seeing incidents as bad luck rather than avoidable
- Personal experience (trial & error and near misses) and local stories are a key driver of lasting behavioural change.



3.

It's common sense and It's not my place to tell them their business

- It is assumed that contractors take on the risk involved in the work
- Language barriers can make communicating safe processes difficult
- Farmers and contractors are uncomfortable making demands of the other when it comes to safety.



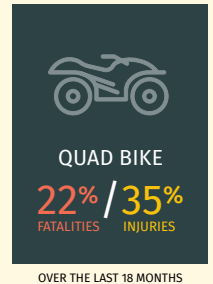
4.

My Dad did it this way and his Dad did it this way

- Farmers often learn first by watching their parents and then through trying and doing, with little consideration of risk
- Hazards and risks are often inherited with the generational transfer of the farm
- Family farms do not have a clear line between the home and the work environment.

Is there a correlation between these cultural insights and the quad bike injury/fatality trend?

It's pretty plain to see, with regard to the four key findings of the Safe Work Australia Insights Report, that we as an industry, have a lot of work to do to address the fatal flaws of the cultural belief system in relation to quad bike safety.



- If efficiency gains are being prioritised over safe work practices, then risky behavior will increase when pressure increases. That's a deadly combination on a farm where time is money.
- If the general attitude is that accidents are just bad luck and farmers won't change their behaviours until someone they know is either dead or seriously injured, we will continue to see high fatality and injury rates trending.
- If we are too worried about offending our contractors by asking them to wear helmets or adhere to a specific speed limit, then we need to better communicate what it means to look out for our mates.
- If we do not draw a firm line between work and recreation with on-farm tools such as quads, we will continue to see high numbers of accidents involving children on farm.



Awareness creates choice and both government and industry are doing their best to increase farmers' awareness of quad bike risks. **What we need to do now is figure out how to influence their decision-making processes.**

How do we make safer farms the topic of conversation?

Work, Health and Safety is seen as a very dry topic. It's depressing too. When it does garner a headline, it's for all the wrong reasons. Farm safety only becomes interesting enough to grab headlines when unsafe practices cause death or severe injury.

So we need to change the conversation.

Safety Economics

We need to frame the benefits of increasing farm safety in economic terms instead of just individual safety. We need to be able to provide statistics that detail the financial impact of fatalities and injuries to the farm and it needs to be broken down into digestible information bites. Farmers need to know that the average cost of fatality on farm in 2019 was \$1.95M per incident and that it really is more cost effective to prioritise safe practice.

'Near Miss' Influencers

Farmers need to hear other farmers stories about that 1 time in 200 where they 'nearly' lost it all. So often we hear the statistics invalidated by comments such as; 'Only idiots roll quads' or 'I've grown up doing it that way and never had an issue' or the classic 'they just need to use some common sense!'

We need champions who will step up and tell their stories so that we stop relying on that 'common sense' because as we all know, each of us have very different definitions of 'common sense' and some of them aren't so 'common'.

We've tried the training and campaigning and educating from the government and the corporate offices... what if we try co-creating the message with those who have lived experiences and delivering it through the voices of our farmers?

Responsibility and Liability

Our messaging should be clearer on the facts around liability. It is necessary for farmers, employees and contractors to have distinct delineations of responsibility for safety on farm so that there is no confusion around roles.

This is even more important in the context of the industrial manslaughter laws being applied to the agricultural sector, including family farms.

Next Generation of Farmers

We need to remember that although we face many challenges, we also have many opportunities.

Our little jack and jilleroos are super sponges who will either soak up unsafe practices through the same cultural processes that we were all raised through, or they can be our future advocates for change.

What if we focus on the latter and create messaging so that when it comes time for them to take over the family farm, they understand that the awareness that they were given has provided them with a choice on how they operate.

It doesn't always have to be done the same way Dad and Mum did it.



Committed to keeping you safe on Australian farms



Farmsafe
AUSTRALIA

NFF House 14-16 Brisbane Avenue Barton ACT 2600

Stevi Howdle – Executive Officer

P. +61 2 6269 5622 / E. info@farmsafe.org.au

farmsafe.org.au   