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Call for ban on the Cannonball

By MICHAEL WILSON

The Australian Public Health Association yesterday claimed last week's Cannonball Run was an irresponsible and unnecessary risk and "should never be run again".

PHA NT branch president John Boffa criticised the NT Government's involvement and said the run encouraged a high-speed driving culture which had developed in the Territory.

Dr Boffa said: "A responsible government would never have allowed the Cannonball Run to go ahead.

"In motor racing there is a well defined race track and barriers to protect the public.

"The tragic deaths of two drivers and two officials that occurred last Tuesday could just as well have included innocent road users with no connection to the race.

"It is totally unacceptable to expose the public to this risk of injury."

Chief Minister Marshall Perron said the majority of accidents in the Territory were alcohol-related, a point overlooked by Dr Boffa.

Mr Perron said: "Alcohol is our biggest social problem and we don't appear to have heard much from this organisation in the alcohol debate in the past couple of years.

Decision

"We respect his right to make these comments and the Government will make its own decision in due course."

Dr Boffa said the PHA, with more than 70 health professionals in its Territory membership and branches in all States as well as overseas, was recognised by the Commonwealth Government as the peak public health organisation.

He said excessive speed was a factor in more than half the Territory road fatalities last year (23 out of 43) and a concept such as the Cannonball did not help reduce the high-speed culture.

"The results of this culture are that the Territory has the highest fatality and hospitalisation rate from road injuries in Australia," he said.

"In fact, the NT fatality and hospitalisation rates are about three times the national average.

"The PHA suggests that the time and money spent by the Government on the run would have been better spent developing and implementing safe speed limits for our highways."

Dr Boffa said his group hoped last week's tragedy would force the Government to push through a reasonable speed limit for Territory highways.