

ENGLISH: LANGUAGE ANALYSIS

High-Speed Pursuits

Recently, there has been an increase in the number of deaths and injuries in Victoria as a result of high-speed police pursuits. This has caused individuals who are against such pursuits to demand either a ban on such chases or the execution of revised, safer guidelines. In his opinion piece “Police pursuits: there has to be a better and safer way” (Sydney Morning Herald- January 27, 2012), Professor Peter Norden contends that police should not be banned from pursuing criminals at high speeds. Rather, he proposes that guidelines relating to high-speed police chases need to be revised so that the lives of police and innocent bystanders are not at risk, doing so through targeting opponents of high-speed police pursuits. His piece is poignantly complemented by Ken Irwin’s photograph of a sports car involved in an accident during the course of a police pursuit. Correspondingly, Derryn Hinch targets a similar audience in his opinion piece “Police ‘damned’ either way” (10 January, 2012- 3AW radio blog), supportively suggesting that police should continue with high-speed pursuits, as criminals will be given free reign over the roads if they know they won’t be chased.

Norden bluntly asserts that police cannot be held directly accountable for the deaths or serious injuries that may occur during high-speed pursuits. In order to justify why police pursuits should not be banned, he recounts his past experiences with high-risk offenders, describing them as drivers who are unaware of who are oblivious to how their actions affect others, “be they passengers or innocent bystanders”. This serves to remind opponents of high-speed pursuits of the risky behaviour exerted by high-speed offenders, which only police officers can handle. Consequently, individuals who are against police pursuits are influenced to come to the realisation that police are needed to control high-speed offenders. This encourages them to agree with Norden that police should not be blamed for any deaths, as it is the offenders who are behaving in an irresponsible manner to begin with. Furthermore, Norden describes bystanders as innocent with the aim of eliciting a sense of sympathy in readers opposed to police pursuits. Through this, he implies to readers against police pursuits that the only way innocent bystanders can remain protected is with the help of police partaking in high-speed chases. The focus on innocent lives continues in the accompanying opinion piece from the 3AW blog, where Derryn Hinch reiterates Deputy Commissioner Kieran Walsh’s statement that high-speed offenders “were taunting police to chase them”, as they knew that police had to cease high-speed chases “if there were a risk to civilian lives”. By doing so, he endorses Norden’s notion that high-speed offenders are partly responsible for death and injury resulting from police pursuits, while also emphasising the fact that police prioritise civilian lives over catching high-speed offenders. As a result, readers are invited to consider the fact that high-speed offenders are the ones who generate a risky environment for themselves and others. This encourages them to agree with Norden’s view that police shouldn’t be blamed for any injury or death that occurs from police chases and that the onus should be placed on those criminals who attempt to flee apprehension.

Norden shifts to a serious tone, arguing that the current policy regarding police pursuits imposes risks to the public and hence needs to be reviewed to diminish the likelihood of deaths or injuries of innocent bystanders. He intends to demonstrate to readers against police pursuits that he is unbiased despite previously supporting the police force by admitting that the current police pursuit guidelines present “an unacceptable risk” to the lives of other individuals. This influences readers who are in opposition of high-speed pursuits to accept Norden’s point of view because of his acceptance of both sides of the issue of police pursuits, therefore influencing them to trust his word and accept that safer guidelines need to be implemented. Additionally, Norden compares the situation with police pursuits to the 1990s police shootings, where a need for amendment was granted “as the death toll mounted”. By doing so, he aims to reassure readers that since the death toll resulting from high-speed chases is also rising, the police force will take preventative action to ensure that safety becomes a priority in the future. As such, readers demanding the implementation of safer guidelines are encouraged to be hopeful that police will take action to help prevent deaths

arising from police chases in the future. Furthermore, Norden refers to road safety expert John Lambert's proposition that a policy similar to that in Tasmania and Queensland, "which seriously limits the number of pursuits and upholds the value of human life as paramount", should be implemented. By referring to an authority in road safety, Norden lends credence to his position, convincing readers who are against police pursuits to give more regards to Norden's opinion. Furthermore, to emphasise the notion that police pursuits should be reviewed and not banned, Norden restates Kieran Walshe's idea "that a ban on police pursuits would make criminals the winners". This influences readers wanting high-speed chases to be banned to reconsider the fact that a ban would result in high-speed offenders avoiding retribution. Hence, this encourages them to accept that police chases are essential not only to protect the welfare of the people, but also to make sure that offenders are caught and penalised. Hinch also supports this notion in his blog entry, conveying that "it would be crazy if the word went out that all police chases must be abandoned". He attempts to associate the word 'crazy' with readers demanding a ban on police pursuits. By diminishing the views of readers in opposition of police pursuits, Hinch encourages readers to re-evaluate their views and avoid being linked with such a negative description. Hence, readers demanding bans on high-speed chases are swayed to agree with Norden that the guidelines regarding police pursuits should be revised to prioritise the safety of surrounding people rather than banned. Ultimately, after discussing that police pursuits are risky but still should not be banned, Norden provides a solution; that although police need to be involved in high-speed chases, there needs to be "a broader review of police practice". By being provided with an overall solution, readers demanding the banning of high-speed pursuits are influenced to view the issue rationally, thus influencing them to accept Norden's views that police pursuits need to remain.

Norden argues in a concerned tone that police pursuits aren't of value if they are going to result in death or serious injury. He intends to alarm readers against police pursuits, mentioning that the death rate "is about 3500 times the average" when police vehicles are involved in pursuits. By seeing such a large value, opponents of high-speed chases are reminded of the reasons why they are against police chases, thus strengthening their need for safer guidelines. Moreover, Norden targets the morality of concerned readers when questioning if it is reasonable for "innocent members of community" or high-speed offenders to "die or be seriously injured over a stolen vehicle or traffic offence". In effect, concerned readers are encouraged to see how miniscule and insignificant stolen vehicles and traffic offences are in comparison to death and serious injury, which convinces them to agree with Norden that safer guidelines in regards to high-speed pursuits need to be implemented. In addition, Norden appeals to the common sense of Victorian readers by proposing that they "would rather their stolen vehicle be found with an empty tank of petrol than involved in an accident", positioning them to consider the danger caused by high-speed pursuits and hence demand a review of the guidelines behind such pursuits. This idea is reinforced by Irwin's photograph, which shows Victorian readers the extent of damage that cars may endure as a result of high-speed chases. Victorian drivers are confronted with the fact that the car's front and rear have been smashed so heavily, which serves to remind them of the danger imposed by high-speed chases. This persuades Victorian readers to take note of the costs resulting from police pursuits, consequently strengthening Norden's previous proposition that Victorian readers would prefer to have an undamaged car with an empty tank rather than a damaged car, also urging them to demand safer police chase policies. Once again, Norden repeats his suggested solution for "a broader review of police practice", this time also mentioning that "there are some circumstances when police must engage in high-speed pursuits". Through this, he insinuates that police pursuits cannot be completely banned because there are some situations where their undertaking is imperative, yet they still need to be reviewed to hold the safety of drivers and bystanders to the highest regard. Consequently, Norden invites readers requesting a ban on police pursuits to look at the situation rationally and accept that police pursuits need to exist, but to a safer extent. Lastly, Norden assuredly brings his piece to a close by claiming that before police determine whether or not to pursue a high-speed offender, they must ensure that they don't place "the lives of [themselves] and others at risk". By doing so, he aims to instill a sense of optimism in those who are opposed to police pursuits, resulting in them feeling at ease that action will be taken to ensure the safety of drivers and bystanders over the urgency to pursue a high-speed offender.

There have been requests for bans against police pursuits and demands for the implementation of safer guidelines following the latest spate of fatality rates and injuries in Victoria due to high-speed police chases. Professor Peter Norden shares similar views, contending that while police pursuits shouldn't be banned, greater emphasis needs to be placed on prioritising the safety of police and surrounding people, particularly aiming her discussion towards individuals against high-speed chases.