

A Downturn's Silver Lining, Australian Financial Review, 7 April 2009
Further details (not for publication)

The opening paragraphs refer to 1983 and 1990 as recession years. Unlike the US, which has the NBER business dating cycle committee, Australia has no authoritative body that opines on recession dates. However, I think the RBA paper by Christian Gillitzer, Jonathan Kearns and Anthony Richards (available [here](#)) is a good starting point. They argue that there have been three recessions since the early 1960s: in 1974–1975, 1982–1983, and 1990–1991.

Here are the Australian road toll figures from 1950-2008.

Year	Road Toll	<i>Change in road toll from previous year</i>
1950	1643	
1951	1926	17%
1952	2054	7%
1953	1856	-10%
1954	1976	6%
1955	2042	3%
1956	2119	4%
1957	2113	0%
1958	2146	2%
1959	2264	5%
1960	2468	9%
1961	2542	3%
1962	2535	0%
1963	2598	2%
1964	2966	14%
1965	3164	7%
1966	3242	2%
1967	3166	-2%
1968	3382	7%
1969	3502	4%
1970	3798	8%
1971	3590	-5%
1972	3422	-5%
1973	3679	8%
1974	3572	-3%
1975	3694	3%
1976	3583	-3%
1977	3578	0%
1978	3705	4%
1979	3508	-5%
1980	3272	-7%
1981	3321	1%
1982	3252	-2%
1983	2755	-15%
1984	2822	2%
1985	2941	4%
1986	2888	-2%
1987	2772	-4%
1988	2887	4%
1989	2801	-3%
1990	2331	-17%
1991	2113	-9%
1992	1974	-7%
1993	1953	-1%

Year	Road Toll	Change in road toll from previous year
1994	1928	-1%
1995	2017	5%
1996	1970	-2%
1997	1767	-10%
1998	1755	-1%
1999	1764	1%
2000	1817	3%
2001	1737	-4%
2002	1715	-1%
2003	1621	-5%
2004	1583	-2%
2005	1627	3%
2006	1601	-2%
2007	1603	0%
2008	1463	-9%
Mean (1979-2008)		-3%

Sources: 1982- from ATSB, Road Deaths Australia Statistical Summary, Table 30 (various years); 1950-81 from Office of Road Safety, Tables 6 & 6A

Mortality impacts of recessions

- Mortality figures are calculated by combining estimates in Gerdtham & Ruhm with data from ABS Causes of Death 2007 (Cat No 3303.0). See table below. 2007 is the most recent year available at the time of writing. Also note that traffic deaths in the ABS statistics are slightly lower than in the ATSB data tabulated above. In the explanatory notes to its *Causes of Death* publication, the ABS explains this as follows:

74 The Australian Transport Safety Bureau has published data in Road Deaths Australia 2007, Statistical Summary for the number of deaths due to road traffic accidents in 2007 (1,616 deaths). According to 2007 Causes of death data, there were 1,200 deaths due to road traffic accidents (V00-V79). A further 110 deaths were coded as Crashing of a motor vehicle, undetermined intent (Y32). The remaining difference in the numbers (306 deaths) between the two collections are explained by the different scope and coverage rules for each collection. In addition, a number of road traffic-related deaths may be coded to Other ill-defined and unspecified causes of mortality (R99) due to the unavailability of information on the NCIS, particularly for New South Wales and Queensland. It is important to note that the number of deaths attributed to transport accidents for 2007 will change as data is revised.

Gerdtham & Ruhm Category	ABS category	Total deaths (ABS - 2007)	Beta from Gerdtham & Ruhm	Percentage effect of a 3pp rise in unemp	Number effect of a 3pp rise in unemp
Total	Total	137,854	-0.004	-1%	-1654
Heart disease	Major cardiovascular disease (I00-I99)	46,626	-0.0036	-1%	-504
Liver disease	Cirrhosis and other diseases of liver (K70-K77)	1,437	-0.0178	-5%	-77
Vehicle accidents	Transport accidents minus air & space (ie. V01-V94, plus Y85)	1,325	-0.0211	-6%	-84
Flu/pneumonia	Influenza and pneumonia (J10-J18)	2,623	-0.011	-3%	-87

- Number of people who would lose their jobs from a 3 percentage point rise in unemployment is calculated from Feb 2009 labour force of 11,372,000 ($11372 \times 0.03 = 341$) (Labour Force Australia, Cat 6202.0).
- Much of the oped draws on a review paper by Chris Ruhm, "Macroeconomic Conditions, Health and Government Policy" (2006), National Poverty Centre Working Paper #06-26.