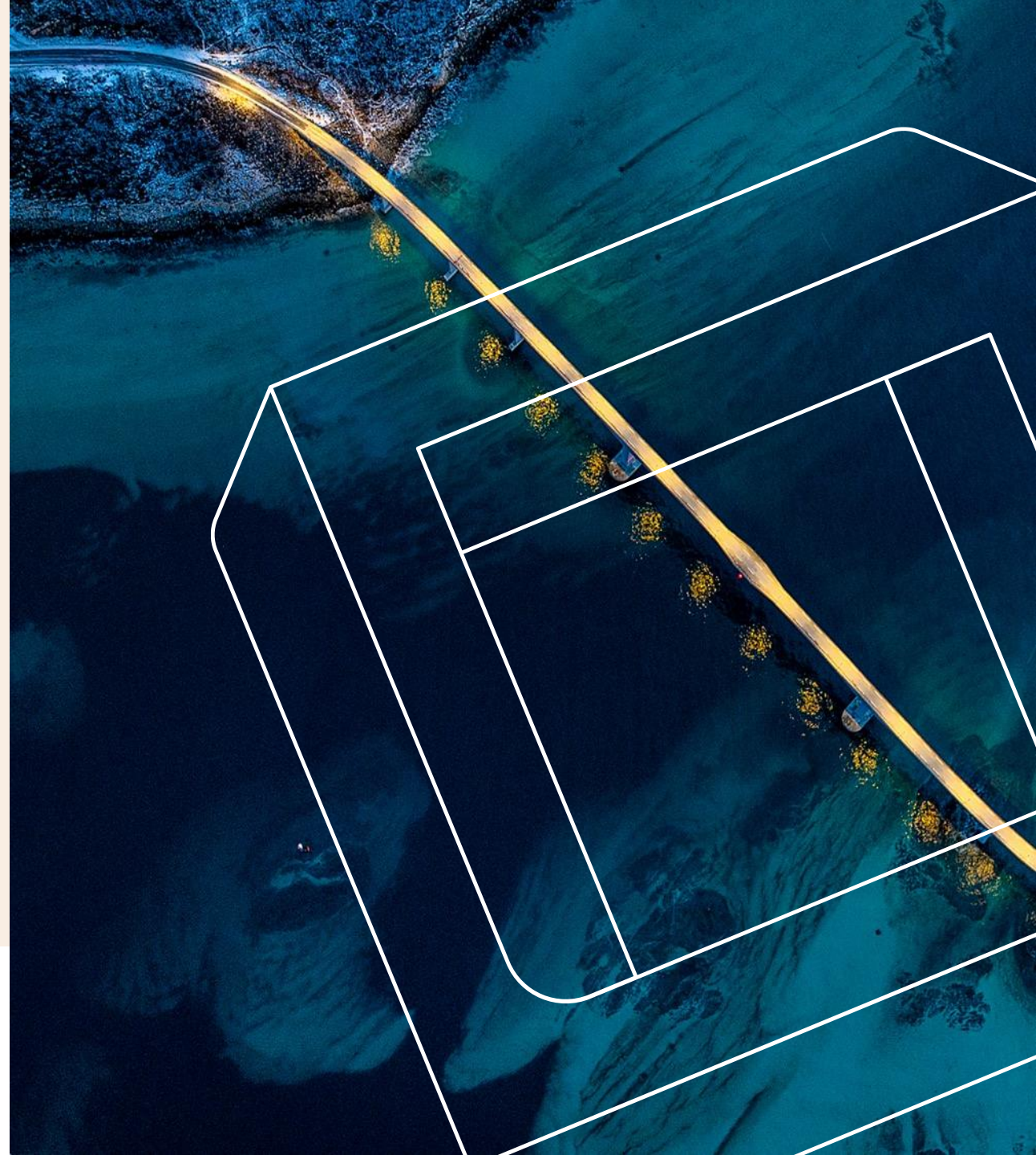


# National Road Safety Campaign

Summary Research Report

Issue Date: 28 November 2024

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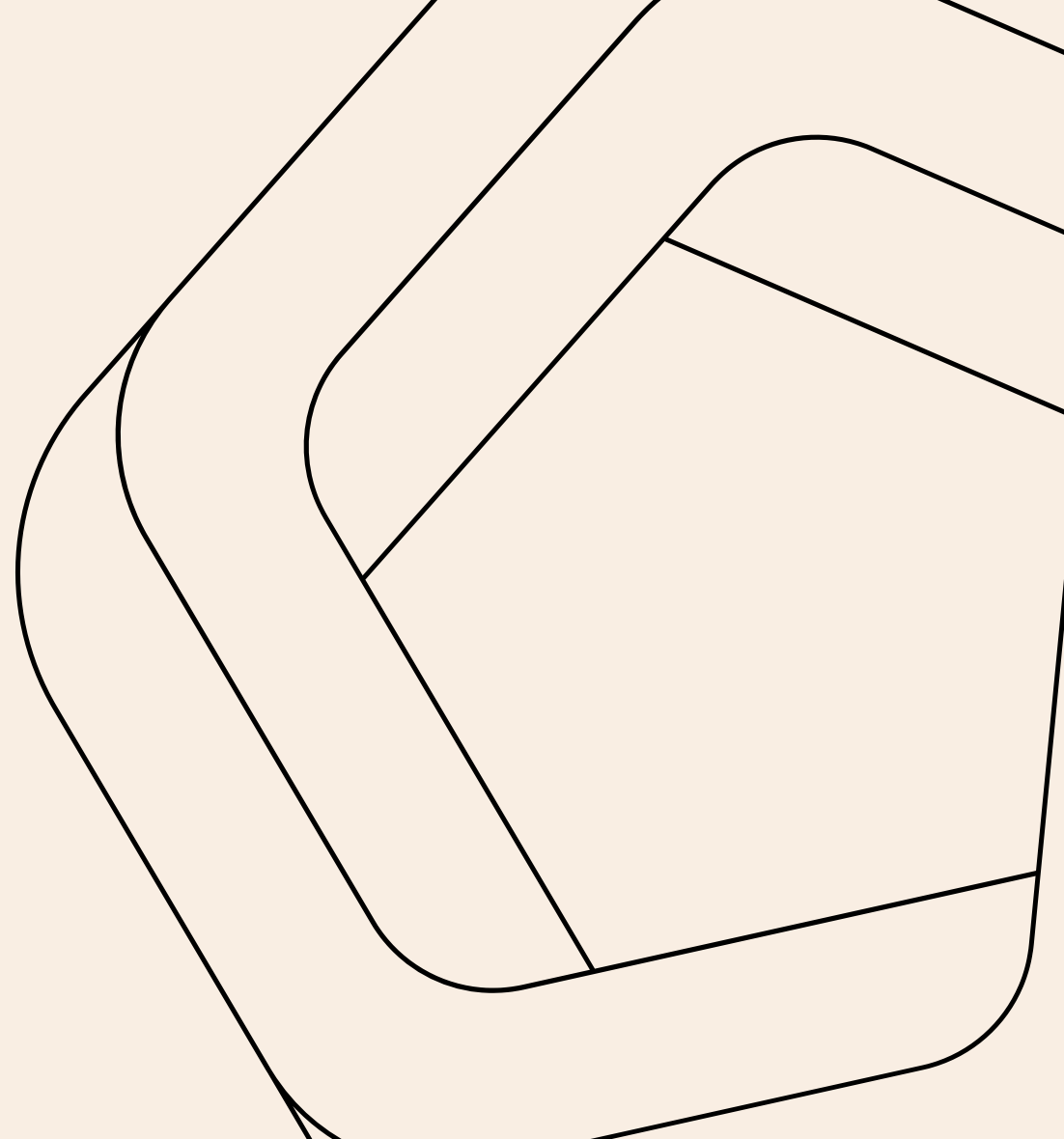


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# 1 Background and approach



# Background and Objectives

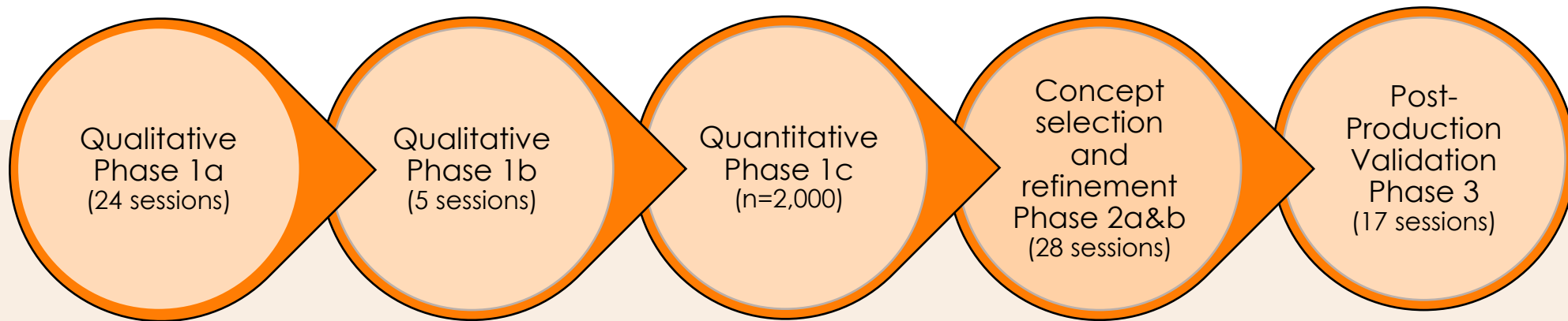
Road safety is everyone's responsibility and impacts everyone across Australia. Under the *National Road Safety Strategy 2021-30*, Australia is working towards the goal of zero deaths and serious injuries on our roads by 2050. Concerningly, Australia is currently experiencing its highest number of road fatalities in 5 years.

A key aim of the National Road Safety Action Plan 2023-25 is to increase community understanding of risky road use and address this through education and enforcement. The campaign (the National Road Safety Awareness Campaign) will complement this aim, ultimately aiming to tackle underlying attitudes to driver safety and risks at a national level. It is intended to complement existing State and Territory messages and to target an underlying mindset that can influence general road use safety.

The purpose of the research was to inform the need for a campaign to tackle underlying attitudes to driver safety and risks, with the findings and insights outlined in this report confirming there is a need for this activity. The research was also conducted to explore and develop key insights to drive forward the campaign.



# Summary of methodology



# Developmental research methodology

The developmental research included both qualitative and quantitative methodologies.

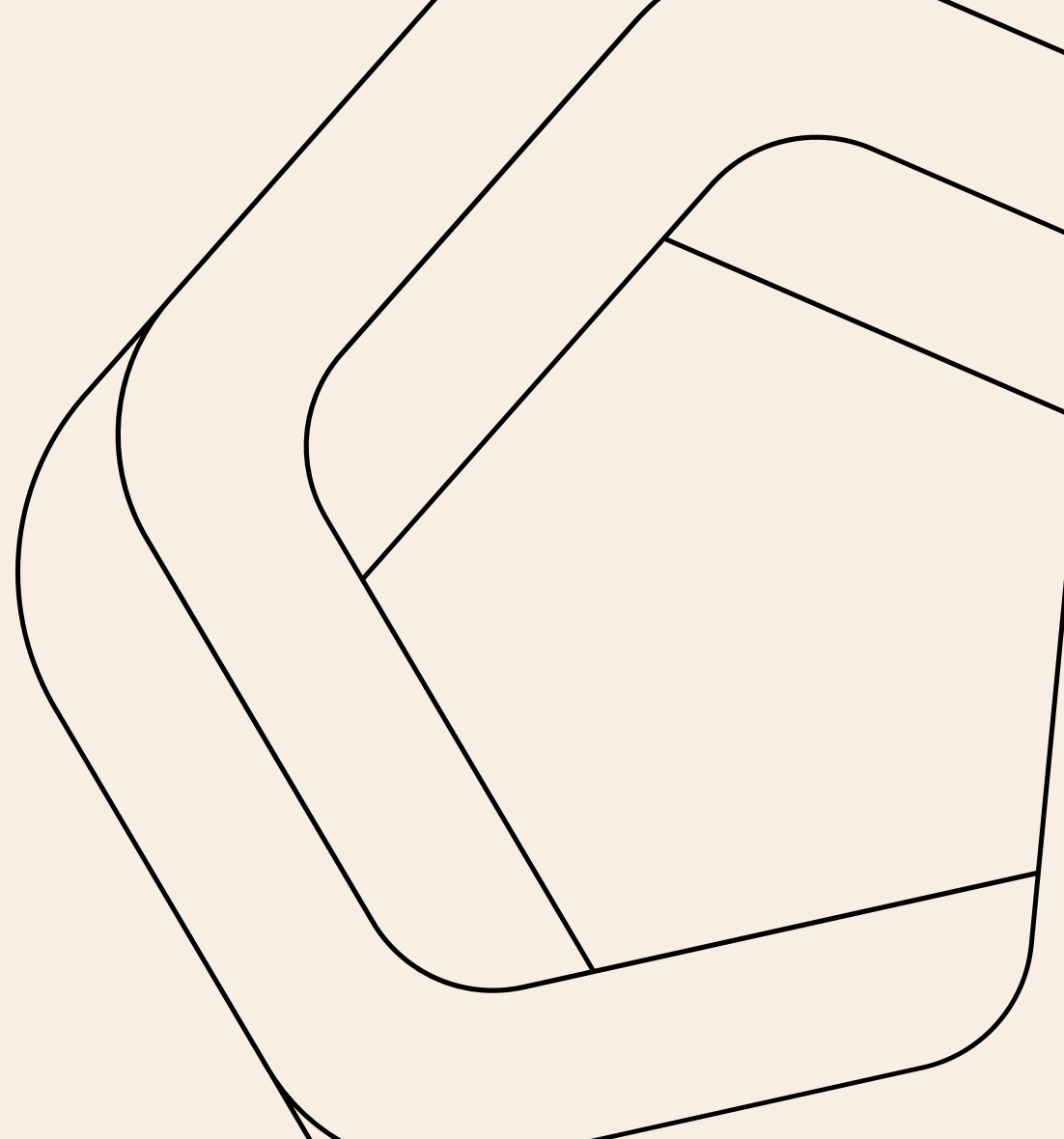
The qualitative research included 213 hours of conversations with 142 licenced drivers across 24 sessions covering a national audience, males and females, age bands between 18-64 years, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) audiences and First Nations audiences.

The quantitative approach included a nationally representative survey of 2,000 people who were licenced drivers aged between 18 and 65 years. This sample included CALD and First Nations participants.



# 2

## Developmental research insights



# Five key strategic insights

Developmental research highlighted five key insights which are summarised below and explained in more detail on the following pages. These findings were derived from extensive qualitative research with the key target audiences.

**It is important to present safety messages in a way that acknowledges the role that everyone has and that avoids perceptions of a 'typical' government voice.**

**Most believe they are safe drivers, therefore road safety messages can be deemed as for 'others' and references to 'driving safely' can unintentionally reinforce existing unsafe behaviours.**

**Statistics about death or serious injury ('the road toll') are heard but not deeply felt due to a weak link to personal attitudes and behaviours.**

**Driving is strongly perceived to be a private / individual activity - not a community activity with a shared safety agenda and burden of risks.**

**How we act as individualistic drivers can conflict with our values, but currently this feeling is very latent.**



# Insight: It is important to present safety messages in a way that acknowledges the role that everyone has and avoids perceptions of a ‘typical’ government voice

Many have become desensitised to the government “voice” or see it as inconsistent. Current messaging is interpreted as being about “danger” rather than “safety” which allows those who consider themselves “safe” drivers permission to opt out. In addition, focussing on specific behaviours across different times of the year can result in perceptions of inconsistent (albeit constant) messaging. Consequently, there is little sense of a shared agenda and understanding of road safety.

Road safety does not feel like a two-way conversation. For many, road safety is interpreted as referencing extremes of unsafe driving which they do not see as personally relevant. Their own definitions of “safe” driving are rarely tested or discussed with other drivers. Further, there are everyday experiences of frustrating or unsafe driving which are not seen to be addressed through existing road safety communications and definitions. This suggests an opportunity to address common experiences and create a dialogue between drivers.



# Insight: Most believe they are safe drivers, therefore road safety messages can be deemed as for ‘others’ and references to ‘driving safely’ can unintentionally reinforce existing unsafe behaviours

Most people believe they are “safe” drivers, which for many is justified by never having had a major crash. This lack of consequence reinforces any embedded unsafe behaviours.

Relative perceptions of driving “safely” is reflected in grouping of choices into three distinct buckets:

- There are the things that most drivers “would never do”. These tend to be the more extreme behaviours of drink driving, high level speeding etc.
- There are road rules that are routinely broken in an habitual and unconscious way which are not associated with ‘unsafe’ driving and things most drivers would “never do”. This might include low level speeding and distracted driving.
- There are the rules that knowingly broken “to keep me safe”. This is where people prioritise their own judgement over the road rules and use post-hoc justification that the behaviour is keeping them safe. This might include speeding to get away from perceived danger, or speeding while overtaking.

The tendency to prioritise judgement over rules is higher among males aged 40-64 yrs (42% compared to 34% in the general driving population).

There is a powerful heuristic (unconscious mental shortcut) that we all occasionally drive in ways that are “wrong” but potentially still safe. This leads to a tension between behaviours and choices and a feeling that even if unsafe choices are made, drivers can still be safe, and that even in these cases, one remains a “good driver”.

Due to these factors, messaging that generally talks to “driving safely” may reinforce this “good driver” heuristic and allow people to disassociate their own behaviour from the messaging.

# Insight: Statistics about death or serious injury ('the road toll') are heard but not deeply felt due to a weak link to personal attitudes and behaviours

People believe that improving road safety is important, although this is not a strong priority relative to other, more top of mind, issues (47% of drivers rate improving road safety as 'very important' compared to 72% rating improving the cost of living as 'very important').

This rating of importance and priority is likely contributed to by underestimation of the national road toll (46% underestimated the national road toll).

While people recognise driver behaviour as the main cause of serious crashes, this is anchored to the more extreme behaviours such as drink driving and high-level speeding. This is further reinforced through low personal proximity to risk. Road incidents feel like they are related to "other drivers". The absence of having personally experienced a crash is interpreted as confirmation as being a safe driver, and not part of the problem. State and national level impacts seem distanced from one's own behaviour.

In addition to extreme behaviour among "other drivers", road incidents can also feel like they are related to 'external' factors, such as quality of infrastructure and enforcement, rather than one's own behaviour.

There are a range of contextual minimisations that are used to rationally avoid having to think deeply about a confronting issue. These include discounting the severity of road toll through attributing some crashes to suicide, to unavoidable 'acts of God' and to increases in population size. This leads almost one in three to believe "there's not much more that can be done to reduce the road toll" (28%).

Thinking more about the road toll makes people feel more distant from resolving the problem. The perception of having seen many road safety campaigns, combined with improvements in technology moving towards safer, rather than more dangerous roads and vehicles, leaves people feeling that in spite of all the effort and investment the road toll continues to get worse. This undermines their sense of their ability to influence the road toll and a lack of understanding of how it can be fixed or improved.

# Insight: Driving is strongly perceived to be a private or individual activity and not a community activity with a shared safety agenda and burden of risks

Despite all the evidence to the contrary, driving can feel like it is done individually/privately and that it is not a public or shared activity where risks are shared.

There is a focus on other drivers rather than a sense of a shared responsibility:

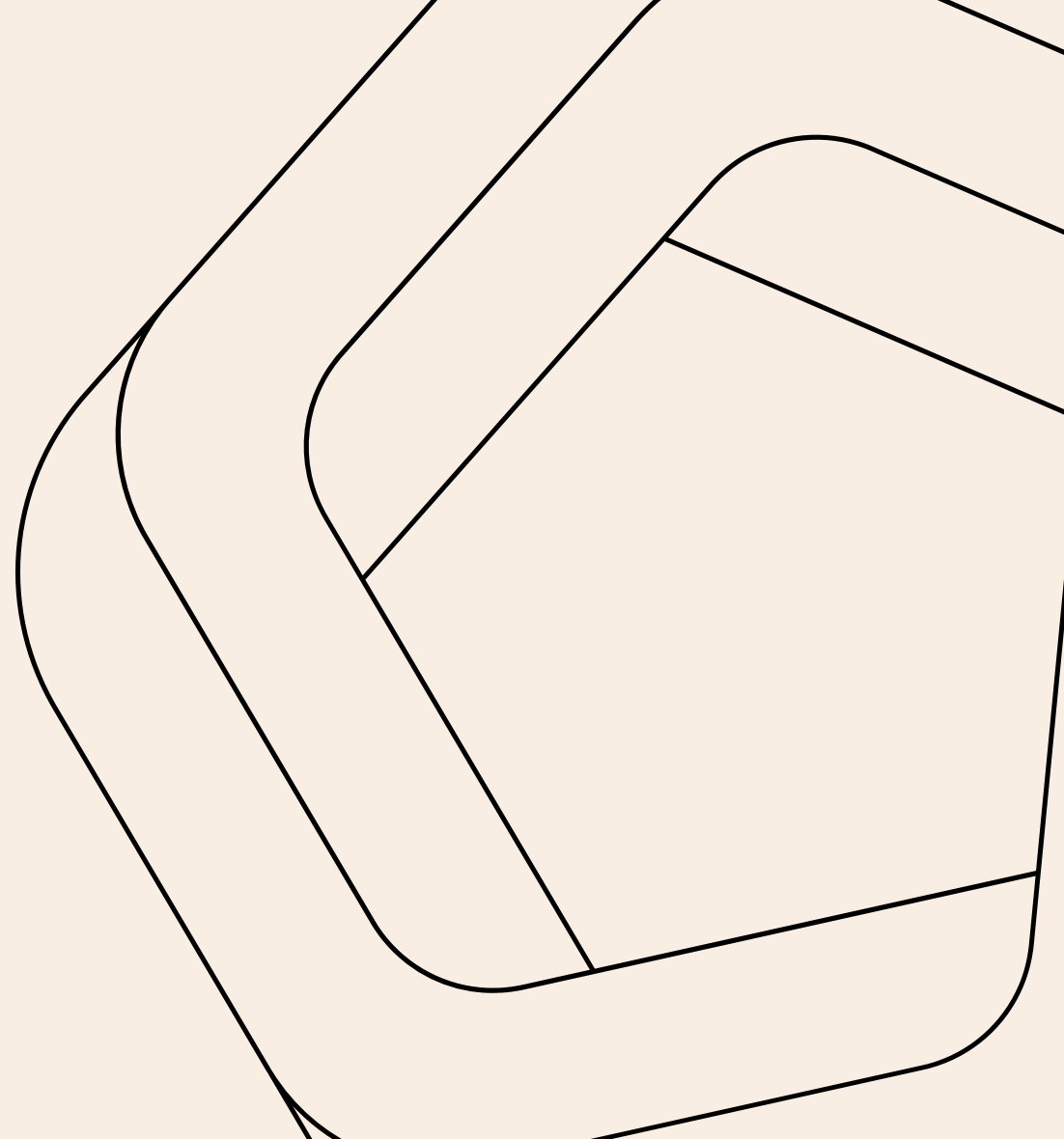
- Those outside the car don't influence my driving
- My focus is on the faults of other drivers
- Other drivers might put me at risk and this is something I can't control
- I am afraid of how other drivers might react if I respond to their poor driving.

# Insight: How we act as individualistic drivers can conflict with our values, but currently this feeling is very latent

The individualistic environment (as it is perceived to be), combined with the perceived anonymity of being in a car, means that people can act poorly while driving and behave in ways that don't align with their usual values. This is often expressed through a discourteous, inattentive, impatient and/or intolerant driving attitude.

Messaging which confronts drivers with this contradiction can start to prompt self-reflection and can elicit a desire to drive more in line with one's normal values. However, it is critical to connect this back to driving behaviours that impact safety.

# 3 Communications Approach



# The broad citizen mindset that emerged from the research can be summarized as follows:

“

I've heard about the road toll, and I've been told so many times about all the most dangerous driving behaviours. It's a morbid topic, and if I had to think about it, I'd start to wonder how this is happening – we have even more rules, enforcement, some of our roads are getting better, and many of us drive much newer and safer cars...so are we actually talking about a small number of reckless or unlucky drivers? The only road toll I'm comfortable with is zero, but it just doesn't seem realistic, and deep down, it's not something that I feel that I can control or is relevant to me.

I do sometimes worry a bit about other drivers, how they might force me to respond, or the risk of a confrontation, the ways in which they are holding me up or frustrating me, or how a bad decision of a stranger could affect me on the road. And while we all know the laws, this means that there are situations where I might choose to bend or ignore the rules a little bit, but don't we all have to use our judgement and instinct sometimes?

I don't ever feel deeply unsafe when I drive, and I'm definitely not the worst driver. It's not that I feel invincible, but I definitely don't ever head out on to the road thinking that I might die or kill someone else.

”

# Analysis of the research findings and the citizen mindset results in the following strategic communications territory:

## **You're Not You When You Drive**

We can become someone else behind the wheel. It's like our car is a shield of anonymity, a safe space for us to be unsafe.

We can go from courteous, respectful, responsible members of society to impatient, rushing, inconsiderate drivers. Depending on the moment, one of our driving alter egos can emerge, unchecked by societal norms because we have this barrier between us, the road and other people. And at times, the one we bring makes us take risks we wouldn't normally take.

You wouldn't yell at an elderly person for walking slowly.

You wouldn't make a child run across oncoming traffic.

You wouldn't risk a fine just to get somewhere sooner.

Deaths are increasing on our roads - it's getting worse, not better. At all times when driving we have the power to choose which version of us is behind the wheel. So, let's bring our best to every drive, for the whole drive and keep everyone safe.



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Powering decisions  
that shape the world.