



To: **Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources Committee**

Re: **Transport Legislation (Taxi Services) Amendment Bill 2015**

Date: **22 October 2015**

I am an Assistant Manager at Yellow Cabs, where I have worked for 44 years. I have responsibility for looking after the Yellow Cabs Call Centre.

The Yellow Cabs Call Centre services both the metropolitan and regional areas of Brisbane, (including Caboolture, Logan, Redlands et cetera), Rockhampton, Yeppoon, Tully, Magnetic Island and Warwick.

At the present time, we have about 90 call-centre staff employed on a mixture of casual, part-time, permanent part-time and full-time basis.

### **Drop in Call Centre Activity**

The illegal taxi services have really started to make their presence felt beginning noticeably about twelve months ago. But the last eight months or so have seen an enormous change in the activity we are getting through the call-centre – that is the amount of calls we are taking has dropped away by a large margin.

The drop is all throughout the day and night, at all times, but it becomes really noticeable at what we would call 'peak times', which include, for example, Friday and Saturday nights, or special events, such as sporting, or cultural events.

The recent Riverfire event in Brisbane is a really good example of the current state of the taxi industry here. Typically this is a really busy night for not just Yellow, but all cabs, and we would have an entire room full of staff and they would be busy all night. Yet this year, on the 26<sup>th</sup> of September, the night was very spasmodic, and the quietest Riverfire in terms of business we've experienced since they began.

### **Employment**

The drop in number of calls is really obvious, and staff members are aware that there is not as much work to do as there used to be at busy times.

At the moment, we are still trying to give our employees the same, or nearly the same, hours, as we continue to try to look after them.

However, if someone rings in sick we are not replacing shifts as we normally would. So, at this point, we have managed to limit the drop in employee hours to that – to not replacing absentees.

So far we have been able to keep our number of employees at approximately the same level. Our policy is, or has been, to have people ready to take calls even if there is nothing happening. We want to take every call we can, and not miss any, so we really want to have

people sitting on seats.

Yellow Cabs has always been very customer focussed, and it is our policy to make sure we have all calls answered, not having customers waiting. At the moment, everything is a *lot* more stressful, because these changes we've seen, and felt, with the rise in the illegal taxi numbers and activity, makes us even more aware of how important it is to answer every call. It's more important now than ever to be getting that work to the drivers.

As yet, we haven't had to lay off any workers, or cut casual hours, but if things don't change, or if they continue to get worse, we will likely be forced to do so.

This is the lead up to our busy time, but all indications are that it's not going to be busy, so we just won't be able to offer the hours that we've been offering up until now.

Overall, with respect to employment, we are finding it finding it difficult to plan. We have some employees leaving but we are not sure what to do about replacing staff. As we don't know what is going to happen over the next few months, we don't want to put people into positions now just to lay them off in a few months' time. This has never been an issue before.

And this does not just apply to call centre staff and drivers – it also applies to the mechanics, the workshops, people in HR and training, marketing and administration. It affects everyone. It's fair to say that everyone at Yellow Cabs is anxious about the future. What's going to happen is a constant topic of conversation. Put simply, people are afraid of losing their jobs.

Due to this fear, staff are putting off long term planning. Why would you buy a house or agree to renovations when you don't know if you'll have a job in twelve months' time? I'm glad I'm coming to the end of my working life – I'd hate to be a young one starting off now.

### **Standard of Service**

One of our great concerns with respect to the rise of the illegal services is the probable impact on service standards, especially as they apply to contract services, and our Universal Service Obligations, such as those Yellow Cabs provide to the Departments of Health, Education, Social Services and Veterans Affairs. That's a really important element of our 'public service', yet it is difficult to imagine we will be able to sustain that, or at least anywhere near the level we do now.

Furthermore, using illegal cabs is a bit like hitch-hiking. People get into illegal cabs, with no way of telling who the driver is. There are no cameras, likely no GPS tracking and no driver identification. All of this has serious potential to erode the really high safety and service standards of Queensland taxis all over the State.

### **The Future**

The future, at the moment is really uncertain. Our plan is to keep on training and re-training,

to minimise mistakes and continually improve our service – and what we do.

We are also constantly looking at ways to improve our technology. We've been around a really long time and as far as the call centre is concerned, it would be one of the best in Australia with respect to call times and service levels. The taxi industry in Queensland across the board is recognised as being world-class.

The Yellow Cabs Call centre is basically on hold at the moment, and that is not something I have seen in the more than 40 years I have been with the company.

Whilst the effect on drivers has been quite devastating, this issue affects so many other people also. Mechanics, workshops, HR, marketing, training, administration and of course call centres. Thousands of people are affected.


There is no way of telling how this is going to end up, and what will become of the taxi industry in Queensland. What I do know is that I have never seen anything like it. Not even close.

The taxi industry cannot compete with the uber because of the different cost structure. It is not a level playing field.

It concerns me that a company can set up and ignore the law. What happened if people did that in any other industry – mining, hotels, building etc? Would the authorities stand by and let new players do as they please? Why should people comply with planning regulations when they build a house?

I support the Bill because I hope it keeps the authorities the incentive to do something about illegal taxis. At the moment, the police and the government just don't seem to care.

Kind regards,



Veronica Grant  
c/- Yellow Cabs

