



ROCKHAMPTON CAB COMPANY LIMITED
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T/A **ROCKY CABS**

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• 24 Hour Service • Weddings • District Tours • Wheel Chair Accessible Vehicles • Luxury Taxis

16 October 2015

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Research Director
Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources Committee
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

BY EMAIL: ipnrc@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam

Submission on proposal to change law to make taxi drivers subject to demerit points – Transport Legislation (Taxi Services) Amendment Bill 2015

Rockhampton Yellow Cabs (Rocky Cabs) administers a taxi service in the Rockhampton taxi area. It is a significant contributor to the Rockhampton economy. The taxi industry in the area provides a livelihood for about 197 drivers and their families.

Rocky Cabs is in favour of the proposal to introduce demerit points as set out in the Bill. The reasons we support the Bill are set out below.

Rocky Cabs is proud of the role it plays in providing passenger transport services to all sections of the community. It enforces its own company standards which are parallel to the legislation standards in the interests of passenger safety.

Background to Rockhampton Taxis

Rockhampton has had regulated taxi services since the end of WWII. The licence holders were to a large extent WWII Veterans seeking a secure job and business. The typical taxi licence holder in Rockhampton has been private individuals owning one licence to support their family. Today we still have very little multiple ownership of licences and a very small percentage of passive investors. The typical Rocky Cab licence owner is middle-aged, early retiree or having recently been made redundant or sold another small business.

Rockhampton Cab Licences are worth approximately \$300,000.00. This is also the price you would pay to buy a moderate house/home in Rockhampton and Rockhampton taxi values have always been similar in comparison to the price of a Rockhampton home.

Most Rockhampton licence owners are reliant upon the value of their cab licence to form an essential part of their retirement superannuation funds. All of these owners are legal taxpaying citizens who are contributing to our region. The cost to each owner to put a vehicle on the road is approximately \$1,000.00 each week – that is before they even take the car out of the driveway.

The Central Queensland region has seen huge economic losses in recent years due to the downturn in mining which has had a flow-on effect to most businesses in Rockhampton with more and more longstanding businesses shutting their doors on a weekly basis. In addition to this, we are experiencing the worst drought in living memory. This has had a significant negative effect on the taxi industry in our region.

In 2011 we had 25% more taxi hirings per year than we did as of 31 December 2014 – this equates to a yearly loss of approximately 2,841 hirings per taxi or 55 hirings per week – this is something we have never experienced before.

The Capricorn region does not have the luxury of a public transport system. Our community is reliant on the taxis as their major form of transport. A huge part of this is customers with disabilities, children, the elderly and people in wheelchairs that require special attention. We are extremely concerned about the safety of our community, in particular these more vulnerable passengers.

Safety is a major concern in our industry for both our passengers and our drivers. Illegal taxi services cannot guarantee this in any way. They do not have in-car cameras, they are not GPS tracked, they do not have emergency alarm with the backup support of a call centre and other drivers, they are not insured, the drivers do not have to have criminal or traffic history checks. In fact we are aware of many “Uber” drivers that have been rejected from the taxi industry because they do not meet the mandated standards. In addition to this they do not undergo regular vehicle safety inspections.

Earlier this year a woman was raped by an illegal driver operator promoting himself as a Taxi in Rockhampton. The Driver was caught and charged by the Police (see **attached** newspaper clip).

Just under 20% of our fleet is wheelchair accessible vehicles – despite the high cost of providing these services, we take pride in the fact we deliver the highest quality services to the disadvantaged members of our community. Uber does not.

Uber is a foreign company. It ignores with impunity Queensland laws. The Queensland Government appears powerless, under existing laws, to stop either Uber, or its drivers from breaching the law. It seems issuing fines has been ineffective.

It becomes increasingly difficult for us to hold our fleet drivers to the requisite Government standards when others are breaching those standards with no apparent consequences. At the end of the day, the public suffers as they cannot easily see the additional risk they run in being transported by an unaccredited driver in an unapproved vehicle. Drivers suffer because they cannot understand why some drivers apparently get away with breaking the law while others do not.

Uber, we believe, is trying to test how they can manipulate Government Legislation or at least the will of Governments to enforce legislation. Uber is a direct attack on our industry and on many small businesses across the State. It is one thing to compete fairly, by doing so in a manner authorised by law, but it is another thing entirely to ignore those laws and to provide a service which introduces unacceptable risks to the travelling public. Taxi drivers have invested heavily in the Industry, and to

comply with the laws, only to see their assets and livelihoods disintegrate. Some are also facing immense losses due to being unable to even sell their businesses.

It is scary that our country, in particular our Governments, have allowed Uber and other illegal taxi service to make a mockery of our laws without taking any swift action to put a stop to the criminals.

We believe it is important to make persons accountable for their conduct. If fines are ineffective, as seems to be the case here, then another method of enforcement must be found. It seems to us that the application of demerit points to a driver who fails to comply with their obligations under the law may well encourage those drivers to think again, and to take steps to comply with the relevant laws.

Yours sincerely,



George Atwell
Chairman of Committee
Rockhampton Yellow Cabs