



Speech by

Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS

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TRANSPORT LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL; TRANSPORT OPERATIONS (TRANSLINK TRANSIT AUTHORITY) BILL

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (7.52 pm): The Transport Legislation Amendment Bill 2008 makes amendments to eight pieces of legislation. These include new driver fatigue reforms for heavy vehicle operators. Changes have been based on recommendations from the National Transport Commission. The National Transport Commission is a government established body founded to lead transport regulatory reforms to meet the needs of industry and the community. However, its recommendations on fatigue management have not taken into consideration the impact they will have on small operators and the wider impact they will have on graziers, farmers and small communities. Unfortunately, the minister for transport has endorsed the recommendations without considering the devastating impacts they will have on Queenslanders across the state.

I wish to bring to the attention of the House a motion that was carried at the North Queensland Local Government Association conference in Richmond on Friday, 9 May. The motion called on the North Queensland Local Government Association to support the immediate disbanding of the National Transport Commission and the formation of a transport advisory council to be made up of industry operators and government officials and chaired by a transport industry representative. They maintain that the current system is top-heavy with bureaucrats who have never seen the inside of a truck, and truckies have had a gutful of the draconian legislation that regulates their industry.

A new transport advisory council is urgently needed and it should be made up of industry representatives with on-road experience. The discussion at the conference centred on the necessity to rewrite the transport act, which is ambiguous and open to various interpretations by inspectors. The new logbook regulations are unworkable and to this point have resulted in many experienced truck drivers being unable to drive because of petty infringements not relating to safety; rather they are logbook infringements which include not having the numberplate filled in and other such petty requirements.

Transport inspectors are being so inflexible that it is bordering on ridiculous. People's livelihoods are at stake because of the nitpicking legislation that punishes the omission of insignificant details with the loss of demerit points. The introduction of work diaries with a host of charges attached plus increased registration and possible fuel excise increases will result in small transport operators, as well as many small to medium food producers, being unable to financially justify their livelihood. It is the impact on these people and the communities they live in that must be recognised and acknowledged in this legislation, and changes must be made to reflect their particular situation. The impacts will increasingly erode the value of primary production export food prices and place more pressure on family grocery bills and remote rural communities.

An example of these logbook infringements and the difficulties that truck drivers have was brought to my attention at the Einasleigh races by a former councillor. He ordered a livestock truck driver to be there at 10 o'clock on a particular day. The driver left Charters Towers at 4 am. He was pulled up at the Charters Towers cemetery by transport inspectors for 2½ hours, then he was pulled up at Greenvale for 2½ hours

and then he was pulled up at The Lynd Junction for one hour. In the end they had all these cattle in the yard and he did not arrive until four o'clock in the afternoon. This is just one example. These things are happening all the time, but the driver had to fulfil his fatigue management requirements which made it impossible for him to carry those cattle back to where they were supposed to go in the first place. This issue is happening all the time. It happens day in, day out.

The lack of adequate rest areas is again raised as a significant issue for transport operators to abide by the inflexible regulations being imposed on them. Austroads confirmed the lack of adequate rest areas in its recent audit of the country's major highways, including dangerous and poorly maintained roads. Drivers have reported being in breach of regulation when they were unable to use designated rest areas because they were chock-a-block full. They travelled on to the next one but were then in breach of their driving hours. There is no consideration for the fact that they were unable to find adequate rest areas to stop at.

The industry is calling on the government to provide adequate, all-weather parking and amenities for the different configurations of trucks. It is very hard to bring in these logbook laws if drivers do not have the rest areas to pull up to have their rest. There are bugger-all. There are hardly any. I think there are probably one or two—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr English): Order! That is unparliamentary. You will withdraw.

Mr KNUTH: I withdraw that statement. At present there is a call for demerit points to be scrapped as a punishment for logbook infringements and driving-hour regulation infringements. There is also a call for all fines for logbook breaches to be capped at an agreed fixed amount and to only relate to safety breaches—not according to the driver's ability to dot the i's and cross the t's. There is also a call for a reporting system whereby drivers can identify rude and unethical enforcement officers.

The shutdown of the transport industry proposed by many operators tired of being penalised for trying to provide for their families will result in action that has the potential to impact on the entire state. The transport industry needs immediate and radical reforms, and I ask for such action to be undertaken as a matter of urgency. I urge the government to listen to the experts in the field—the transport operators who are driving the trucks—and find out what their opinions are and what solutions they offer to manage fatigue. I am sure the minister would be welcome to attend the meeting planned for 25 May at the RSL commencing at 10 am to listen to the serious concerns of the truck drivers, and I believe 500 people will be in attendance there. Anything less than his attendance will result in an industry not prepared to sit back and take it anymore and a government with no contingency plan to cope with the consequences.