



Speech by

Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS

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MOTION: HEAVY VEHICLE REST FACILITIES

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (6.05 pm): I rise to speak to the motion moved by the shadow transport minister which calls on the Bligh government to act urgently to increase the number of heavy vehicle rest facilities and drop-off pads in Queensland and to improve amenities at those facilities. It is disappointing that this budget did not address the appropriate rest areas, which are so important for the sustainability of the industry. The average age of the Australian truck driver is in the mid-50s. Already the trucking industry is suffering from a shortage of experienced drivers. Several livestock transporting firms I know have presently stood down their road train units because of a shortage of experienced drivers.

Much of this is the result of the logbook demerit point system. These laws have been a disaster as they are not targeted at driving errors but at paperwork infringements. If a driver is issued with a logbook infringement and faces demerit points and fines, the demerit points are deducted not just from their truck licence but also from their car licence. It is therefore possible for them to lose their entire licence when their only crime is not completing their logbooks correctly. Regardless of whether or not they are competent drivers, their inability to complete the paperwork adequately puts them in the same category as people who drive dangerously, putting all other road users at risk. Yet this government is forcing truck drivers to comply with these laws and has introduced fatigue management laws but will not provide adequate rest areas.

How many rest areas has the state government put in place or will it put in place with shade that is suitable for livestock transporters? On the Flinders Highway between Townsville and Mount Isa there are only two government funded rest stops. The one at Marathon, on the eastern side of Richmond, does not cater for triples, especially when other road users are using it. The rest stop at Maxwellton, on the western side of Richmond, is the only suitable government provided rest facility for triples along the highway.

The lack of adequate rest areas is a significant issue for transport operators in abiding 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 regulations when they are unable to use designated rest areas because they are chock-a-block full. They travel on to the next one but are in breach of driving hours limits by doing so. There is no consideration of the fact that they are unable to find adequate rest areas to stop at.

Earlier the member for Lockyer mentioned that since 2003 the cost of truck registration has increased by 21 per cent. I do believe that it has increased by 21 per cent. There are a lot of transport firms which presently do not have drivers. But I do say that there is a concentration on the closure of rail services that is putting more of these trucks on the roads. As an example, they have just announced that they will no longer transport cyanide by rail into Charters Towers. It is all going to be trucked from Gladstone right through to Townsville through to Charters Towers when this was safely transported by rail previously. I cannot see the logic of doing something as stupid as this. I would like the minister for transport to look at this. They are now trucking cyanide from Gladstone to Charters Towers when they used to transport it by rail. They have stopped the ammonium nitrate and now they have stopped the cyanide, and we have dangerous goods going past schools and homes by truck when they could be transported by rail.

This measure is having a similar effect. This is putting pressure on the trucking industry because drivers are competing for rest stops. There is nowhere to stop. When two dangerous goods transport operators are beside each other, they have to move on because it is not lawful for them to be at the same rest area. This industry is calling on the government to provide adequate and all-weather parking amenities for the different configurations of trucks so that fatigue is managed fairly and realistically. I support the motion moved by the opposition.