




Speech By
Tony Perrett

MEMBER FOR GYMPIE

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HEAVY VEHICLE NATIONAL LAW AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr PERRETT** (Gympie—LNP) (6.08 pm): I rise to speak on the Heavy Vehicle National Law and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2016. This bill introduces changes to the Heavy Vehicle National Law and seeks to introduce a head of power for a proposed taxi and limousine industry assistance regulation. The changes to the Heavy Vehicle National Law will standardise laws and regulations regarding the operation of the heavy vehicle industry, including road network access, mass and dimensions, fatigue management and safety accreditation.

The former LNP government introduced the national law in 2012 and established the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator. Sharing the roads with heavy vehicles is a daily occurrence for drivers in regional areas like my electorate of Gympie. It is a regular sight for drivers to see heavy vehicles undergoing inspection and to share the road with heavy vehicles shifting goods, produce and livestock around the region. Understandably, this section of the bill has broad, strong support from the Australian Trucking Association, the Queensland Trucking Association and the trucking industry.

The more contentious aspects of this bill deal with the aspects which pertain to the taxi and ridesharing industries. While passenger safety is the highest priority for all who use vehicle transport, it is important to ensure that there is a fair and level playing field for the taxi industry. While members of the Labor Party prefer to operate closed shops and monopolies, the LNP has always supported competition. It leads to better outcomes for small business, for the economy, for the workforce and for consumers. However, the competition has to be conducted on a fair and level playing field.

This government does not know what it means and has been inept and reckless in how it has completely bungled the process and made policy on the run in relation to the review into ridesharing. For almost 12 months the industry, the owners, who are small business operators, and the passengers have been left dangling while the government flounders on what it should do. The government had been callously dismissive of those affected by the changes, dismissive of their property rights and dismissive of the effect and the uncertainty that has caused to business. Even now the minister keeps silent on what is going on. The minister still refuses to provide any dates, deadlines or details to provide certainty to the taxi industry.

The compensation package which the minister seeks to provide is clearly inadequate. The \$100 million industry assistance package consists of: \$60 million via a one-off payment of up to \$40,000 for existing taxi licence holders, or \$20,000 per licence, capped at two licences, and \$10,000 per licence for existing limousine service licence holders; \$26.7 million hardship fund; \$4.3 million in waived fees; \$5.6 million to incentivise wheelchair accessible taxis; and \$3.75 million for business advisory help. Regardless of the inadequacies in this government package—and there are many—it is clear the minister's bungling of the process means this bill must still be passed because the longer we wait, the longer struggling taxi owners wait for access to hardship payments.

There is so much wrong with the bill and the compensation package that the committee had to provide 27 recommendations demonstrating ongoing concerns with the compensation package, eligibility requirements, safety measures and implementation measures. The committee including the Labor members for Kallangur, Logan and Murrumba clearly have no confidence in this minister to do anything, let alone manage a compensation scheme. In contrast to the minister's dithering, I would like to thank the shadow minister and member for Glass House, who came to Gympie last month to personally meet with, listen to and take on board the concerns of our local taxi company and owner-drivers.

There are only 12 taxi licences in Gympie. They are all locally owned and operated, with their income staying within Gympie. The Gympie taxi industry is based almost solely on bookings, with only 10 per cent of the overall workload from rank-and-hail work. They operate around the clock, relying on peak hours to carry through the losses felt in the quieter periods. The problem with the nature of the ridesharing model is that it skims the cream off the peak times. It does not have to provide any other service to the disabled, elderly and those who perhaps do not carry a smart phone.

The Gympie service is typical of that within many regional towns. It is small and it is family and locally owned and operated. It is part of our local small business community. The Gympie service has been comprehensively reviewed by TransLink, with four licences being removed between 2000 and 2010. When Gympie Cabs recently applied to have its taxi service area expanded, TransLink investigated introducing another licence. This was not to be. This is because there is a limited amount of work in the Gympie area. TransLink found that during the previous three years there had been no complaints about the level of service. TransLink also found that because Gympie Cabs was meeting its minimum service level, it determined that Gympie could not sustain even one more licence. The obvious deduction from this is that, if TransLink had concluded that Gympie could not sustain a new taxi licence, then it is certainly unable to sustain both a taxi service and one or more ride-sharing services.

Prior to the regulation changes, taxi service licences in Gympie were valued at around \$300,000 each. Every licence was paid for or is still being paid for by the licence holder, whether they are a sole trader, partnership or company. The Managing Director of Gympie Cabs, Jackie Fallon, wrote to me saying—

There are so many different backgrounds and reasons why people invested in the taxi industry in the first place, however all with the common ground of buying into a government regulated industry without fear that the government would ever take that away from them without the common decency to adequately compensate them!

No matter what the financial structure of the taxi licence, the loss in value of the licence is still the same. There should also be no difference as to whether people hold one or two licences or more than that. The loss is still the same. That is why the opposition supports removing the cap on compensating only two licences as well as the restrictions on who will be compensated. Mr Les Gist from Supreme Taxi Co. in Townsville advised the committee—

... capping the licences at two is unfair, as every licence has a mortgage or covenant over that particular licence by the lending institutions. Licence compensation should be per licence and eligibility should be to every licence owner, regardless of ownership structures: trust, superannuation funds, proprietary limited companies, business names or individuals. Why should my company be deemed unworthy for any compensation to allow for adjustments or innovation?

The Taxi Council of Queensland complained that the lack of economic modelling or rationale makes it too hard to determine on what basis the government has determined to cap the licences at two. It said—

... industry adjustment must apply equally to all perpetually held licences. There are just over 3,260 in Queensland. We have not been given any rationale or any economic modelling or any kind of solid line of reasoning as to why people who may have invested in more than two licences are somehow less deserving of having their compensation or having their contribution to the Queensland economy recognised. If you have invested in multiple licences, your contribution is, by a multiplier, greater than others, yet there is a definite inequity in it. ... you cannot put an arbitrary cap on it without giving a very solid reason. To date, no solid reason has been given.

Even the committee was hampered by the lack of information from the minister. It said—

The committee was not able to compare the economic modelling undertaken by the Taxi Council of Queensland and the Government, as the PricewaterhouseCoopers analysis used by the Government was not made available to the committee.

The minister has dithered, delayed, been unforthcoming with information, mishandled the whole process and wasted time. The result has been to leave hardworking Queensland taxidivers, their families and business owners struggling and continue to put them into financial stress and hardship. The longer we wait, the longer struggling taxi owners wait for access to hardship payments. As I said earlier, regardless of the inadequacies in this government's package—and there are many—it is clear their minister's bungling of the process means that this bill must be passed with the opposition's amendments.