




Speech By
Dale Last

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

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HEAVY VEHICLE NATIONAL LAW AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (2.00 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the Heavy Vehicle National Law Amendment Bill. It is certainly an area in which I have had a lot of experience and involvement over many decades. The LNP position is to not oppose this bill as it seeks to implement key heavy vehicle policy initiatives designed to reduce the complexity and improve the effectiveness of the investigation and enforcement of the heavy vehicle national law or, as it is commonly known, the HVNL. By increasing the allowed volume on certain heavy vehicles where mass is not a constraint, it also aims to improve the productivity of the road network as well as the freight fleet.

There is a sign that is common on most of the heavy vehicles on our roads that says, 'Without trucks Australia stops.' There is no truer comment, particularly with regard to my electorate of Burdekin and the broader North Queensland region. We do not have access in a lot of those areas to rail or sea transport—to shipping—and as a consequence the transport of food and fibre on a daily basis is all contingent on heavy vehicles.

Mr Costigan interjected.

Mr LAST: I take that interjection from my colleague the member for Whitsunday. I do not think there would be a member in this House who would not have seen a Blenners truck on the road. I think they have a fleet of a couple of hundred trucks. They have the responsibility of trucking all the bananas out of Tully and Innisfail into the southern markets.

The bill also inserts a provision into that part of the act that governs the application of the HVNL in Queensland. This provision will streamline court processes for the prosecution of fatigue related offences. I will relate some of the history regarding national heavy vehicle enforcement and the need for consistency and standardisation across Australia. It was not too many years ago when a truck would be pulled up and a truck driver would get out with a handful of drivers' licences and say, 'Which one do you want?' He would have a driver's licence issued in every state of Australia. It was not that long ago when a truck would be pulled up and the truck driver would be asked to produce his logbooks and he would produce several logbooks as well.

In a lot of these cases they were trying to meet deadlines under pressure to deliver produce and that type of thing. However, that just reinforced how necessary it was to get some standardisation and consistency across the industry and across Australia because these truck drivers are driving all across Australia. On any given week they can travel from Cairns to Melbourne to Perth and back, and there needed to be that consistency in the way the law is applied and certainly that commonality.

Whilst we are generally supportive of the bill, we note the constantly changing operating environment and the importance of continual improvement in the regulatory framework for the heavy vehicle industry. Accordingly, we will confirm the need for an independent review of the HVNL to be undertaken within the next 12 months.

The bill contains amendments to the HVNL to implement key heavy vehicle policy initiatives to reduce that complexity and improve the effectiveness of the investigation and enforcement of the HVNL. By increasing the allowed volume on certain heavy vehicles where mass is not a constraint, it also aims

to improve the productivity of the road network as well as the freight fleet. I will relate this story. I was at a feedlot at Toowoomba several months ago. In Queensland we have volume loading, so the feedlot would put 60 bullocks on a B-double road train to go interstate. Then when they got to the border they were constrained by mass limits. If they were over a certain mass, they would have to unload one or two of these bullocks to meet their requirements. That highlights the inconsistencies between states and the difficulties that some of these operators and trucking industry bodies have in complying with the law. Honourable members can imagine the logistical issues and problems that would cause if they got to the border of New South Wales and all of a sudden they had to kick two bullocks out the back gate. The need for that consistency and uniformity is so important when it comes to heavy vehicle guidelines and enforcement.

I note the key amendments contained in the bill are: the strengthening of the investigative and enforcement powers for authorised officers; the increasing freight volumes where mass is not a constraint; transferring load restraint performance standards from guidelines to the HVNL; and provisions to streamline court processes for the prosecution of fatigue related offences. How important is that? Again I will use an example. On a station at Julia Creek a particular trucking operator decided to run the gauntlet, so he picked up tickets in Charters Towers, Hughenden, Richmond, Julia Creek, Cloncurry and Mount Isa. They all had their own court jurisdictions. As honourable members would appreciate, that trucking operator then had six or seven court appearances, all spaced over a period of about six months, to deal with what was a succession of infringement notices issued over a one-day period. The fact that we can now bring all of that together and have them dealt with in a single court at a single sitting certainly makes practical sense and helps to reduce the burden not only on our investigating officers but also on the justice system and our court processes.

The amendments contained in the bill will not only strengthen investigative and enforcement powers for authorised officers but will also allow an increase in freight volumes where mass is not a constraint, thereby improving the productivity of the road network as well as the freight fleet. Our road network, particularly in country areas, is under enormous pressure. I still have roads in my electorate that are unsealed and that are seeing increasing numbers of road trains that are freighting out minerals, livestock, grain and commodities. Honourable members can appreciate the number of trucks coming out of places like Bowen and the Burdekin, particularly at this time of the year when 80 per cent of Australia's tomatoes are coming out of Bowen. There is a huge pressure on our road network and there is a need to get this right.

Upon commencement in February 2014, the HVNL also established the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator to administer the HVNL. With respect to heavy vehicle matters, we recognise that the above amendments were unanimously enforced by the Transport and Infrastructure Council in November 2017 and that, importantly, heavy vehicle industry associations and other key stakeholders were consulted and had input into these measures.

I support this bill. I will just touch on a subject that my colleague the member for Hervey Bay touched on previously about the technological advancements. Earlier I mentioned logbooks and those sorts of things. Going forward there is no reason why, with the technology that now exists—and a lot of companies already do this—vehicles cannot be tracked using GPS coordinates. There is no reason why operators cannot use electronic devices to monitor those vehicles, which can be uploaded in real time to assist with compliance. I think that needs to be taken full advantage of going forward. We have already seen how that digital disruption is transforming the world in many other ways. Certainly, that is the way of the future for the trucking industry.