




Speech By  
**Dale Last**

**MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN**

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### **HEAVY VEHICLE NATIONAL LAW AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (4.53 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Heavy Vehicle National Law Amendment Bill. There is a message printed on stickers on the rear of many of our heavy vehicles that says 'Without trucks Australia stops'. That could not be truer for my area in particular and North Queensland in general. Heavy vehicles are an essential part of the Burdekin electorate, for our agricultural, resources and other industries. They certainly play a crucial role in the Isaac region, particularly down through the resource sector and the mining areas in the west of my electorate.

As a former police officer and in my work as a shadow minister, I know of the importance of heavy vehicles to regional Queensland. I also know of the dangers that are inherent in the industry. For many years there have been significant inconsistencies in the formulation and the enforcement of heavy vehicle legislation. It has taken a long time for uniform laws to be implemented across Australia. Those inconsistencies played a role in a number of incidents across the state and put at risk not only the truck drivers but also members of the general public. I recall not so many years ago intercepting truck drivers. I would ask for a driver's licence and they would pull out six licences and ask which one I wanted to deal with. Thank goodness those days are gone. However, that highlights the inconsistencies that existed previously in the heavy vehicle industry and the difficulties in enforcing compliance, regulation and legislation regarding heavy vehicle laws.

From the outset, I place on the record my support for a national approach based on ensuring efficiency, while also ensuring safety for heavy vehicle operators and all other road users. By reducing the complexity and improving the efficiency of national laws, we are ensuring that heavy vehicle operators, many of whom are self-employed, can focus on what they do best: delivering the goods that Queenslanders need. I place on the record my thanks to the transport industry organisations and key stakeholders that have played their part in the formulation of these amendments. I note that this is a perfect example of what we can achieve when we undertake full and fair consultation, which is something that is almost non-existent for this current Queensland government.

The amendment that allows specified vehicles to operate at 4.6 metres where mass is not the constraint is a common-sense amendment that will improve productivity and reduce costs for everyone. In my former role as a police officer, I had responsibility for the issuing of wide-load permits and excess-dimension permits. I can assure members in this place that, in many cases, it was a time-consuming and sometimes expensive exercise for the applicants. I know of the costs involved for heavy vehicle operators in terms of pilot vehicles and police vehicles. At the moment if you go through the coalfields of Central Queensland on any given day, you can expect to come across half a dozen wide loads. It highlights how expensive it is to move overwidth and overdimension machinery around those areas. When there is a boom in the resource sector, as we are going through at the moment, mines bring in machinery basically 24/7. We can appreciate the scale of operations involving heavy vehicles, particularly excess-dimension vehicles.

In the Burdekin, around the sugarcane areas, I know of the difficulties in moving overwidth implements, for example, behind tractors or cane harvesters. There is a ludicrous situation where farmers are required to get permits to move machinery across a road or 100 metres down a road. Sometimes it can take days or weeks to get that approval through, which is a major inconvenience to their operations and can tie up not only their time and resources but also the time and resources of issuing authorities, transport officers, police stations and so on. Any moves to streamline that process will certainly be welcomed.

Given that the bill contains amendments that ensure public safety and manage risk to infrastructure, it is logical to support national laws that will have an impact on the cost of living of Queenslanders. What is not logical is the condition of our road network. As I have said many times, road safety is something that affects every Queensland family. There is absolutely nothing worse than having to knock on the door of a household and inform the members of that family that they have just lost a loved one in a road accident. The questions that those opposite must answer are why there was a \$4 billion backlog in maintenance works on the road network and what is being done to ensure that the backlog does not continue to grow, as was forecast by the Auditor-General.

In my electorate, road project after road project is needed to provide safer roads. I can assure the House that when you are travelling on unsealed roads in some parts of my electorate and you have to pass a triple road train, it is not for the faint-hearted. You do not have to pass just one road train; it can be dozens in the course of a 12-hour day.

This highlights just how important it is that our road network be upgraded to cater for increasing volumes of vehicles. We are certainly noticing that. I have spoken to Transport and Main Roads about increasing volumes of traffic using the Bruce Highway. There has certainly been an exponential growth in heavy vehicle movements along the Bruce Highway which, as members would appreciate, is the major arterial for travelling north to south in Queensland.

Our roads, particularly in the north, are our arteries. They are the means by which people who live in rural and regional areas access their workplaces and their homes. We do not have public transport. We do not have passenger trains. It is our roads that form the basis for people to move around. As a consequence, what some people may not see as an important road project when they live in the south-east corner is absolutely crucial for those living in North Queensland. If people were to see the volumes of produce coming out of North Queensland—the livestock and grain; the horticultural produce coming out of Bowen at the moment—they would appreciate the importance of having a good road network that can cater for the increasing numbers of heavy vehicles.

I will not be opposing this legislation, but I ask the minister to realise that there is bipartisan support for road safety in Queensland and throughout the country. Now is the time to get serious on upgrading and sealing roads throughout regional Queensland as the safest roads possible are a high priority for all Queenslanders.