




Speech By
Stephen Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

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HEAVY VEHICLE NATIONAL LAW AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (5.11 pm): At the outset I want to acknowledge the heavy vehicle industry. It has been demonstrated over my time in this House that both sides of parliament think that these national heavy vehicle reforms are important, if not essential. We have to acknowledge those small business people across the nation who provide such an essential service in moving large volumes of freight and who contribute to agricultural production. There is sometimes frustration, but when we enact laws in this place we must be thinking about safety. With these policy initiatives, we will remove complexity and improve effectiveness and enforcement around the new laws.

I want to talk about the reforms that I believe are still needed. I ask the House to consider what is happening in high-value irrigated agriculture parts of the state—in particular, with harvesters and agricultural vehicles moving around regional Queensland. I would like to keep the focus on that issue, and I have raised it many times in this place. I will take this opportunity to highlight some local issues in the Bundaberg region that continue to cause us concern, and I ask that these items be dealt with as soon as possible.

The national harmonisation process that has all of the states abiding by the same laws must become a reality. There is currently an absurd situation where Queensland is the only state that continues to require the use of police escorts for national heavy vehicle movements across our road network. We need to consider what the cost of this is to the transport industry and to those small mum-and-dad businesses, particularly around the Bundaberg region. This could be for something as simple as moving a harvester from one part of the farm to another part of their farm on the other side of the road, or it could even be for a contract harvesting business moving a harvester down the road.

There is another issue that we find in Queensland. The processing of permits for vehicles over four metres wide to travel on our roads is still a concern, especially around time lines on approvals for permits. I am hearing that 90 per cent of permits are approved within six days. However, for the other 10 per cent, it can take up to 56 days for a permit to be issued. There needs to be an acknowledgement that agricultural harvesting machines are not the same as, say, mining equipment that travels on the same roads backwards and forwards every day. It is easy to give a permit to those regular transporters but, as I alluded to before, those harvesters need to go when they are called and where they are called, so they can be on any road at any time.

I again highlight the need for those vehicles over four metres to be dealt with in future legislation. This is about productivity. It is about those small business men and women, particularly in the Burnett and Bundaberg regions, who rely on those permits to be issued in a timely manner. It is still an issue, as I have raised before.

Agriculture and agricultural vehicles are the unintended victims of the national heavy vehicle law and the process for agriculture must be revised. I would like to see the establishment of an agricultural vehicles category under local TMR, QPS and DAF management and remove agriculture from the

unintended consequences of the national heavy vehicle law. This must be done to restore agriculture's ability to operate at a local level in a timely manner that is critical to crop management and the productivity of our rural sector.

The people moving the excess dimension agricultural vehicles have plenty of local knowledge of the roads and traffic flows as they have been moving their vehicles around the road network for a number of years. It is acknowledged that grain harvesters and cotton pickers do move between the states as part of the harvest trail. However, the majority of movement for agricultural vehicles wider than 3.5 metres are local movements—less than 20 kilometres and mostly under 10 kilometres—in agricultural regions.

For vehicles that are outside the current Queensland heavy vehicle class 1 agricultural vehicle dimension exemption notice, they have to apply for a permit from the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator that is administered by TMR. This was done to speed up the process as initially the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator did not have enough resources to handle the number of permits that were being applied for. Unfortunately, the current process administered by the department means that each application needs to go to TMR, QPS and the affected regional council for approval. Each of these bodies has a set time to respond. However, extensions can be granted if there is some potential issue.

Applications can also be delayed if they need to go to the policy section of TMR because the application requests something outside the current notice or regulations. These delays can be up to two months, and in some cases it has taken over six months before written notification to the applicant. These delays can mean that the applicant moves their vehicle illegally without the necessary permit—not that we condone that—and without insurance, and that can be a huge problem. This perceived increase in risk has restricted the movement of agricultural vehicles wider than 3.5 metres with additional restrictions. Some of the restrictions are not practical and so growers are moving vehicles around the road network illegally, as stated. Even when applying for permits, there are examples where the application for a permit took a long time.

Prior to the national heavy vehicle law, growers went to their local police stations and were issued permits to move excess dimension agricultural vehicles with a list of conditions based on width of vehicles and the roads traversed. Since that time, under the national heavy vehicle law, when TMR officers and QPS officers in Brisbane have assessed the risks for moving the same equipment on the same roads, the risks are higher and therefore more strict conditions have been put in place.

There have been two notices issued by TMR that allow movement of excess dimension vehicles between 3.5 metres and four metres on the road network with strict conditions that are not practical including the placement of roadside signs—originally on all roads and under a current permit on critical roads—before and after movement on agricultural roads. People are required to have a certificate II or certificate III, so there is training that goes with that.

For major roads, the option under the notice is to either use the roadside signs or to use two agricultural pilots. That is something that we have raised as an impost. In the Bundaberg Regional Council area, excess dimension agricultural vehicles up to five metres that are able to travel on council, or minor, roads with only one agricultural pilot also require an exemption notice. In other areas, vehicles from 3.5 metres to four metres are able to travel with the same conditions as for major roads but they need to apply for a permit to move the vehicle.

In conclusion, we recognise the vital contribution that the heavy vehicle transport industry makes to the national economy and have always sought to introduce measures designed to improve the productivity and safety of those working in the industry. Furthermore, the LNP has long been an acknowledged supporter of businesses large and small and especially family businesses such as trucking. That is why this bill is important to Queensland.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Kelly): Under the provisions of the business program agreed to by the House and the time limit for this stage of the bill having expired, I call the minister to reply to the second reading debate.