



Speech By
Hon. Brent Mickelberg

MEMBER FOR BUDERIM


Record of Proceedings, 18 November 2025

HEAVY VEHICLE NATIONAL LAW AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Resumed from p. 3606, on motion of Mr Mickelberg—

That the bill be now read a second time.

 **Hon. BA MICKELBERG** (Buderim—LNP) (Minister for Transport and Main Roads) (3.01 pm), in reply: I thank members for their contributions to the debate of the Heavy Vehicle National Law Amendment Bill 2025. I am pleased to see support for the bill from members across the House and recognition of the importance of improving road safety for all Queenslanders and productivity in the heavy vehicle industry, including from the Labor opposition, who, in a rare show of forthrightness—in the words of the member for Logan—accepted their failure to adequately maintain our road network over their decade in office.

As many have recognised, a key theme of our deliberations is that without trucks Australia stops. Make no mistake: those trucks would have stopped if Labor's neglect of Queensland roads had been allowed to continue any longer. By contrast, the Crisafulli government is getting on with the job of repairing and rebuilding our road network and implementing commonsense measures like this bill to keep trucks moving. This bill matters not just to the industry and to business but to every Queenslanders who relies on freight for the things they need to feed their family and keep our economy moving.

During the debate a lot has been said about the duty to be fit to drive. Let me clear up any confusion. This is not about roadside officers making snap judgements based on how someone looks. It is about empowering drivers to make the right call for their own safety and the safety of others. If drivers are unwell, impaired by drugs or alcohol, or simply know that they cannot safely drive at that point in time, they have a duty to stop. This duty now applies to drivers of all heavy vehicles over 4.5 tonnes, not just those over 12 tonnes. Importantly, however, what has not changed are fatigue management rules like work and rest limits, which still only apply to drivers of vehicles over 12 tonnes. We have heard concerns about pressure from employers; however, I want to make it very clear that drivers who feel pushed to drive when unfit can report that confidentially to the regulator's hotline and it will be taken seriously. That protection has been built into the framework to address that concern.

The member for Cooper was concerned about a potential unintended increase of regulatory burden on small operators. Many members on this side of the House come from a small business background, including the member for Redlands, who spoke about it in her contribution. We are determined to make things easier for small businesses to grow here in Queensland. The regulator will roll out targeted education, practical tools and clear communication to make sure that compliance is achievable, especially for small businesses and regional operators. I can assure the member for Cooper that the bill will deliver simpler, safer and fairer regulation of heavy vehicle operators.

Some members asked about the cost and complexity of accreditation. Accreditation is voluntary and the safety management system, SMS, requirement at the core of accreditation is scalable. A small business or owner-driver will have a much simpler, more streamlined SMS than a large, complex organisation. This means that every business, regardless of size, will have a clear and tailored plan for safety. Templates and guidance will be provided and the regulator will deliver education programs face to face where possible so that smaller operators are not left behind.

The member for Cooper also rightly said that heavy vehicle drivers can experience fatigue, tight schedules and isolation and that they require access to rest stops and shaded parking bays. A safe place for our hardworking heavy vehicle drivers to stop and rest is essential to keeping our roads safe. Queensland has around 470 rest areas across the state where heavy vehicle drivers can stop and rest. Some of those are shared with other motorists. As part of our \$9 billion Bruce Highway Targeted Safety Program, something that was secured by our government after the opposition surrendered the established 80-20 funding split, our government is delivering critical infrastructure to improve safety and support freight efficiency right across Queensland. Along with improvements for wide-centre-line treatment, narrow bridges, flood resistance and intersection upgrades, a key component of the program is the expansion and modernisation of multi-use and heavy vehicle rest areas that are essential for fatigue management and road safety.

The member for Callide was present at the last Bruce Highway Advisory Council meeting where we discussed that issue in detail, including the proposed design that has been rolled out for a new rest area at Curra, just north of Gympie, which will include capacity for 16 semi or B-double trucks. It will have disability access, toilet facilities and picnic shelters. It will be a significant step forward from what currently exists across the state. Intelligent transport systems are also being trialled at six rest areas to provide real-time parking availability which will help drivers plan their stops more effectively. These investments reflect our commitment to safer roads, stronger regional connectivity and a more resilient freight network.

The bill includes changes to improve the way minor and administrative fatigue related breaches are managed. Authorised officers will be able to use their discretion to issue a formal warning if they believe a person has contravened the law but think it is more appropriate to issue a caution instead of a fine. The bill makes it easier for drivers to comply through changes to work diary requirements. Drivers will not be excessively punished for minor clerical errors—something that many members have addressed in their contributions—like failing to record the day of the week or to add up their total work and rest hours in a work diary.

The member for Toohey noted that some submissions to the committee talked about the changes to penalties, with some penalties for fatigue related offences reducing to better align enforcement action with risk. Some penalties have increased. The National Transport Commission reviewed 349 offences using a transparent penalty assessment matrix. The result is that 50 penalties will go up for serious breaches and 21 penalties will go down for minor offences like clerical errors. Officers will also have discretion to issue warnings instead of fines for minor errors. That is a fairer and more practical approach, which is welcomed by industry.

The member for Cook shared stories from operators on corrugated dirt roads and spoke passionately about regional challenges. I hear his concerns and those of other members like the members for Gregory and Traeger. This bill does not fix all of the infrastructure problems that exist across the state, but it does create flexibility for heavy vehicle operators. Through alternative compliance accreditation and implementing an SMS, operators can work with the regulator to find practical solutions. I encourage regional operators to engage with the regulator to tailor approaches that work for their conditions and their business. Implementing a robust and effective safety framework for the entire industry with costs proportionate to the size, risk profile and complexity of each individual operator is a fantastic result.

The member for Traeger spoke about the realities of operating in a remote area, noting the enforcement blitzes in his electorate and the need for common sense. I agree that enforcement must be fair and proportionate. That is why this bill gives authorised officers greater discretion to issue warnings for minor breaches and removes outdated restrictions that previously limited flexibility. The intent of these reforms is not to create fear or drive people out of the industry—quite the opposite. It is to keep drivers and communities safe while recognising the unique challenges of heavy vehicle operators across the state and the country.

I also note and welcome the warm words and praise from the member for Bulimba and the member for Morayfield about the good work the regulator has been doing in their respective electorates. The National Heavy Vehicle Regulator has an important job to do, and I can assure the House that the regulator will bring this same dedication and care to the task of implementing the reforms in this bill and supporting industry to adjust to these changes.

What I cannot reconcile from the member for Bulimba's comments, along with those of the member for Gladstone, is the claim that Labor was focused on safety on our roads. The maintenance backlog which was left by the former Labor government—which my department estimates at \$8.6 billion—suggests otherwise. The member for Gladstone pointed out the number of bridges in Central Queensland with weight limit restrictions. I can confirm for the member for Gladstone's benefit that there are many bridges with weight restrictions in place in Central Queensland because of a decade of decline and neglect under Labor.

Still, the member for Gladstone's contribution was more relevant than that of the member for Logan, who ignored these important reforms to the Heavy Vehicle National Law and instead substituted policy analysis with a local grievance to deflect from his party's appalling record on delivering safe, reliable and efficient roads that truckies depend on. Labor failed to progress major reforms in the industry and improvements to key corridors such as the Bruce Highway, Warrego Highway and Mount Lindesay Highway, which suffered chronic bottlenecks and outdated safety features.

With Labor, trucks would have stopped but the Crisafulli LNP government is righting that record through record investment in infrastructure and regulatory improvements like the Heavy Vehicle National Law Amendment Bill 2025. The regulator plays a vital role in supporting industry compliance through education and guidance. As we implement the new obligations introduced in this bill, the regulator will ensure that operators and drivers are well informed and supported in meeting their responsibilities. Authorised officers will be fully trained to apply the new laws consistently and fairly.

Importantly, the regulator's education and guidance materials will continue to evolve, reflecting not only the changes introduced by this legislation but any improvements to address future challenges and support innovation and the adoption of new technology. This proactive approach will help ensure our regulatory framework remains responsive, practical and effective. As the member for Morayfield said, efficiency is not the enemy of safety, and the streamlined regulatory changes also improve safety.

The member for Cairns stated that the Heavy Vehicle National Law has always stood as a model of national cooperation. This bill is a testament to many hands working together. I would like to thank the interstate officers, the National Transport Commission, the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator, industry partners and the parliamentary committee in particular for their cooperation and willingness to progress these reforms.

As the member for Townsville pointed out, the heavy vehicle industry was an indispensable partner serving his electorate and many electorates in the north and far north after roads were closed following wet weather events earlier in the year. That demonstrates the strong relationship between industry and this government. That strong relationship, particularly with the Queensland Trucking Association, continues with the collaboration on this bill.

This is not the time to rest. As I said earlier, this bill is the result of seven years work on the Heavy Vehicle National Law reform. I am pleased that we have now reached this point, but these reforms are not the end of the journey; they are the foundation for ongoing improvement, working with our partners. The hard work will continue to make the Heavy Vehicle National Law fit-for-purpose, ready to meet future challenges and a world-leading regulatory framework for safe heavy vehicle operations.

We will continue to deliver for our hardworking truckies and for all Queenslanders for the road ahead. This bill is about safer roads, fairer compliance and improved productivity. It gives drivers the confidence to put safety first, it gives operators flexibility without sacrificing standards, and it gives the regulator the tools to respond to future challenges. Having noted the strong bipartisan support for these amendments, I commend the bill to the House.