



Speech By **Bryson Head**

MEMBER FOR CALLIDE

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HEAVY VEHICLE NATIONAL LAW AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

 **Mr HEAD** (Callide—LNP) (12.11 pm): Road safety is incredibly important to the people of Callide. Unfortunately, I see far too many accidents across my region. Nonetheless, we have fantastic heavy vehicle operators who go about their business often in a very safe way, but that is why it is important to have regulation and legislation that is fit for purpose.

These amendments focus on safety with a particular focus on making the Heavy Vehicle National Law simpler and more flexible. This bill includes a new duty for drivers of heavy vehicles to not drive while unfit; that is, not in sufficiently good health or fitness to drive a heavy vehicle and to not drive while fatigued. Therefore, a driver should not be driving while under the influence of drugs or alcohol, while feeling unwell, or where they believe they are not capable of driving a heavy vehicle safely. Importantly, this new duty applies to all drivers of heavy vehicles over 4.5 tonnes whereas the previous duty only applied to drivers of fatigue regulated heavy vehicles, which are vehicles over 12 tonnes.

There is no change to fatigue management work, rest limits and work diary requirements except for some minor administrative adjustments to make it easier for drivers to comply and not be punished for minor clerical errors; for example, removing the offence of failing to record the day of the week or total work and rest hours on the daily sheet in a work diary. In my travels around the electorate I often chat to transport operators who have shared their frustrations about fines for minor tasks similar to the one above. They comment that enforcement efforts should target those who are clearly not doing the right thing in the industry instead of 'wasting time like this'. That is exactly what these amendments deliver. They are sensible and they will ensure people are not being punished for simple mistakes.

Enforcement will be undertaken jointly by the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator, authorised officers and police agencies in participating jurisdictions. Of course, the NHVR is now a federal body, but it is administered through partnership with various states as well. This legislation is not only important for Queensland but also all of Australia. Drivers who feel pressured by their employer to drive even though they are unfit to do so are encouraged to contact the regulator's Heavy Vehicle Confidential Reporting Hotline, and the regulator will provide appropriate guidance to drivers and operators to support compliance with the new laws.

The National Transport Commission reviewed the penalties in the national law using an objective assessment against set criteria. The review aimed to strike a balance between compliance, enforcement and taking a fair and reasonable approach towards minor, administrative and technical breaches. It included consultation with all participating state transport agencies, the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator, state policing agencies and major heavy vehicle transport associations and industry. Following this assessment, it is proposed that 50 penalties be increased for serious offences and 21 penalties be decreased for less serious offences. These penalty changes will be monitored after commencement to ensure any unintended impacts on safety or compliance are identified and can be addressed. A further review and evaluation is planned in three years.

This bill also includes changes that will require the regulator to create and approve codes of practice and consult with industry during their development. The Crisafulli government is very clear in its approach to working with industry. We believe in genuine consultation with industry. Nonetheless, this will simplify the process that is currently in place and allow the regulator to better use its resources to focus on the development of new codes that are needed most in the industry. Overall, the changes in this bill will improve and modernise the operation of the regulator through changes to the composition and governance arrangements of its board. There are a few other changes with regard to qualification requirements and board size.

Without trucks, Australia stops. As a member of this House who has a multi-combination licence, for those who may not know that means I have a licence to drive road trains. I do come from a farming family whose enterprise relies heavily on the transport industry. I know too well the challenges they face. Unfortunately, I do not get to use that licence very often these days because I am often getting around the great electorate of Callide in my D-MAX rather than a heavy vehicle.

Thank you to the truckies who transport a lot of freight not only across Callide but also Queensland and Australia. Heavy vehicles are part of life in the bush. Not much happens in rural Queensland without a road train, B-double or, in some instances, of course, a single. I thank not only the drivers of those trucks but also the small and family business operators who are often behind them. Small and family business is often neglected by Labor governments because it does not often suit their agenda, but you can be assured that the Crisafulli government backs small and family business, including small and family business trucking operators.

In my time serving Callide I have made many representations to ministers about the condition of roads and the Heavy Vehicle National Law framework, including: the width to allow for heavy vehicles, overtaking lanes to allow traffic flow, and heavy vehicle rest areas. Legislation and frameworks with regard to NHVR and transport legislation more broadly are only part of the story, but it is important they function well.

There have been many processes in the transport industry that have let constituents down over the years, including the likes of Lee Crane Hire in Biloela, which for many years battled excessive application delays to get permits to take their cranes up a lot of roads they use regularly or to get single-trip permits. We saw delays in a lot of those processes that held up not only their business but also the government projects they were working on at the time, which in turn led to additional costs being charged to the taxpayer because equipment would be sitting onsite ready to install but they were not getting permits to take their cranes onsite et cetera. That is only one of many examples.

Heavy vehicle operators in the North Burnett have shared concerns with me regarding the decreasing availability of access to heavy vehicle inspections and the limited access to the region for heavy vehicles. As we improve the legislation that manages heavy vehicles, we can then improve the roads and access restrictions for heavy vehicle operators. Earlier this year there was some compliance and enforcement along the Gooroolba Biggenden Road near Degilbo with regard to B-double access. A lot of constituents come to me with this issue, and I did ask questions to ensure they were not being unfairly punished or there was not a policy change. Some thought they had previously been allowed to take B-doubles along that road, but it turns out that it might have been a circumstance where it had been treated as a B-double road for many years and never been enforced but all of a sudden the government started enforcing it so they raised questions and thought it was a policy change. If any of my constituents have evidence that it was a policy change and they had previously been issued permits for that route, I am more than happy to take that up with the minister once again, because I know how incredibly important it is that we have appropriate heavy vehicle access across Callide.

Another road that certainly needs widening and where it would be great to have road train access is the Mundubbera-Durong Road. I have campaigned heavily to see that this road gets widened to ensure we get heavy vehicle access into the North Burnett because the opportunities that would unlock would be significant for that region. It is fantastic to see the changes that the transport minister has been making, as well as the housing minister, with regard to procurement more recently. We need to make sure that when we do upgrade roads we get value for money for taxpayers, and those procurement changes will go a long way to deliver value for money in road upgrades.

I mention enforcement with regard to hay sitting over the side of the truck. This has been in the media over the years and I had someone contact me recently about it. It has come up time and again over the years. I say on behalf of my constituents that I always hope that those who are enforcing widths of trucks consider the genuine risk to community rather than being so prescriptive about a little piece of straw hanging out the side of a hay bale and what it might actually do and the practical implications of enforcing such a thing.

We want to see more overtaking lanes on the Leichhardt Highway for oversize overmass vehicles as well as more pullover bays. The Chinchilla Wondai Road is deteriorating and needs significant widening. One thing that would take a lot of heavy vehicles off the road and be a great thing is the inland rail from Gundy to Gladstone. We need to get great projects like that built.