



Speech By
James Lister

MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS

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HEAVY VEHICLE NATIONAL LAW AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

 **Mr LISTER** (Southern Downs—LNP) (11.57 am): Mr Deputy Speaker—

Mr McDonald: This should be a great contribution.

Mr LISTER: I take that interjection from my honourable friend the member for Lockyer. I am sure I will not disappoint you. I rise to make my contribution on behalf of the people I serve in the Southern Downs on the Heavy Vehicle National Law Amendment Bill 2025. I have heard many members before me speak about the transport industries in their electorates and how the NHVR and this law affects those who operate trucks and trucking businesses. Southern Downs is no lesser a place for the trucking industry. We are absolutely dependent on road transport to get our products to market—the fruit and vegetables, the grains and the proteins we produce in the Southern Downs. Without trucks, Australia stops. That is true, and I have heard a number of members say that.

During the last sitting week, I heard a member make a very complimentary appraisal of the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator and speak at length in a very ingratiating way. You will not find me so. I acknowledge the NHVR is a necessary entity and has a job to do, and this bill will assist in making its work more effective and better for the industry, for safety and for efficiency.

I would like to concentrate particularly on the drivers and the small businesses that run transport in my electorate of Southern Downs. I will particularly talk about the penalties and the fines. One of the aspects of this bill which I support is the ability for authorised officers to provide formal warnings to drivers if they feel that the infraction was a relatively minor one. I think that is a particularly good innovation.

I was talking to a truckie at a service station in my electorate a week ago. I had my now-one-year-old son with me. He was looking at the truck, pointing and going, 'Goo goo ga ga.' He was having a great time because he loves trucks. We got talking to the driver. He said to me—and I have heard this from others—that regularly copping large fines, from \$200 to \$1,000, here and there is just part of the business. That is how he expressed it. He did not strike me as somebody who was blase about safety or compliance. He struck me as being somebody who understood and appreciated regulation and exercised best endeavours to comply. He pointed out to me that even minor typos in a logbook and those kinds of things can result in significant fines. He felt that the inspectors who were responsible for handing them out often agreed. The ability for certain offences to be the subject of a formal warning instead of a fine is a good thing. I am sure that those inspectors who see a lot of the trucking industry can tell the difference between someone who is putting one on and someone who is exercising their very best endeavours to comply.

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. The review aimed to enhance road safety by ensuring penalty increases were proportionate

to the nature of the offences and appropriate for deterrence. The most egregious offences are treated accordingly. The value of some offence penalties has risen and the value of some has fallen. The National Transport Commission consulted all participating state transport agencies, the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator, state policing agencies, major heavy vehicle transport associations and the industry.

A total of 349 offences were reviewed using a transport methodology known as the Heavy Vehicle National Law penalties assessment matrix. Following this assessment it is proposed that 50 penalties be increased for serious offences and 21 penalties be decreased for less serious offences, and I certainly support that. The new 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 also planned three years down the track to assess the program's effectiveness. I wanted to get that on the record because I intend to give my speech to some of the trucking operators, truck drivers and farmers who operate trucks and so forth who are interested in this kind of thing.

When we talk about safety, one of the things I want to emphasise—and it is something that has been hammered home to me by the truck drivers and trucking operators in my electorate—is that regulating for safety is one thing and is necessary, but there are a whole lot of things which impact safety for the industry which escape regulation and legislative reform. I am talking about the roads. In my electorate we have large national highways. There is the Cunningham Highway, the Gore Highway, the New England Highway, the Barwon Highway and part of the Moonie Highway. These roads have been neglected for a very long time. The industry are telling me stories that it is hard to comply with their expected stop position because they are going so slow because the roads are bad. That threatens the driver having to exceed their hours to reach a safe place to pull their truck over.

Trucking operators and drivers may be in a position, particularly coming and going between Stanthorpe and Brisbane, to go there and back twice in a day within their allocated hours. However, because they are having to drive so slowly due to the standard of the roads which were bequeathed to us by the last government after the decade of neglect they inflicted upon them, I have had bitter complaints from them that they cannot rely on being able to get back in time to accept a second shift. If you are looking for extra money or you are the operator of a family owned trucking business and you cannot roster a willing driver to take that extra load back, that costs the business, it costs the truckie and his family and it costs the economy because the inconvenience, the lack of transport capacity, is then inflicted on the growers—those who need to get produce to market, those who are picking their fresh fruit and vegetables that need to go straightaway because they simply will not wait. While I support the bill and its intentions, I do want to make the point which was made to me by a number of operators when I discussed this bill with them: 'You need to go down there and tell all your mates that it is not just about regulation; it is about a whole lot of other things as well, like the roads.'

Another aspect of safety is the health of the drivers. I know that this legislation has some welcome innovations regarding fitness to drive and so forth; however, the bad roads inflict damage on the bodies of the truck drivers. I drive a blue Hilux. Members might have seen it. It has suspension that was built by the same firm that built Stonehenge and therefore is very unyielding. I feel that I can look the truckies in the eye as I drive over all of the bumpy roads in my electorate. Some of them are like a lunar landscape. I want to thank the minister, whom I see in the chamber, for his very gracious engagement with me since he has taken the position as minister and for the significant uptick in roadworks to correct problems I have complained about for many years. I thank the minister for that.

The minister might be superman, but he cannot change the world overnight. While we get around to fixing those roads after a decade of neglect, we are driving over some tough spots. It is hard on the trucks—it is hard on the suspension and it is hard on the wheels and tyres—and it is also hard on the loads. You can imagine how hard it is on the backs of the truck drivers. The House might remember that I had some time off—about two months—some months ago when I slipped a disc in my back. I want to thank everyone for their well wishes at the time. I know now what a really bad back is like. We need our truckies. We do not need them to be damaging their bodies while driving on these really bad roads.

The last thing I will say that the industry has said to me is that the produce they have to shift in some situations has to be loaded especially to account for the roads. If you have damageable fruit or sensitive machinery or equipment that has to be sent, they have to put extra packing around it. That means that fewer modules or units will fit on the truck. That is another direct impact they are experiencing.

While I support this bill—I welcome its intent and innovations—I want to put on the record on behalf of the people I serve as the member for Southern Downs that I feel for truck drivers. I experience what they do as I drive my ute with its rock hard suspension over all of the roads in my electorate.

Long-term improvement of the roads, reducing the number of unsafe places, fixing the road surface and having more stopping rest bays for drivers, in addition to this necessary legislation, will improve safety for the hardworking people in the trucking industry in my electorate.