



Speech By
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HEAVY VEHICLE NATIONAL LAW AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms BUSH** (Cooper—ALP) (6.20 pm): I also rise to speak on the Heavy Vehicle National Law Amendment Bill. I want to start by thanking the committee I am on, including, of course, the members for Aspley and Kurwongbah, who are fantastic, and our chair, the member for Lockyer, and of course the members for Cook and Mulgrave, who are also not too bad to work with as a committee, I have to say. I thank the secretariat, the department that briefed us and the 11 submitters who provided us with wonderful content for this important bill.

Earlier this year I was chatting to a truck driver named Matt. He had been hauling products through Queensland for about 20 years through droughts, floods, the pandemic and a whole range of different circumstances. I asked him over that time what he observed that had changed the most. He did not talk to me about trucks or the roads. I am paraphrasing, but he essentially said that it is the rules, because they are getting harder to follow and understand. That line really stuck with me. This bill is supposed to make those laws and rules simpler, safer and fairer.

I think it is easy in this chamber to think of the Heavy Vehicle National Law as dry legal scaffolding. The debate tonight will be quite technical in nature, but out there it is the rule book that determines how people like Matt do their jobs: how long they can drive; when they are required to rest; what records they have to keep; and who shoulders the blame when things go wrong. These are not abstract provisions: they are the guardrails of livelihoods for truckies, small freight companies and the towns that rely on them. In regional Queensland freight is not an industry that sits apart from a community; it is the community. It is the person who delivers food to the grocery store or fuel to the servo, cattle to saleyards or supplies to a regional hospital. When we amend this law we need to make sure it is working not just for regulators and bureaucrats but also for the people on the road at two o'clock in the morning with a couple of tonnes of weight on their back and a deadline to meet.

The bill before us implements the outcome of a national review of the Heavy Vehicle National Law. It introduces a new accreditation framework that requires operators to have a safety management system and expands the type of accreditation that is available. It strengthens the duty on drivers to be fit to drive physically, mentally and emotionally and updates how fatigue, record keeping and enforcement ought to be managed. It also gives the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator more flexibility, allowing it to develop modern codes of practice and adjust penalties to be more proportionate and practical. I think these are sensible reforms and the opposition supports efforts to make the system simpler and fairer.

We also know that good intentions on paper do not always translate to good outcomes out on the road. Implementation and oversight of this reform are key to ensuring they are achieving what they set out to do. Submissions to the inquiry reinforced that. AgForce, for example, welcomed the bill's direction but warned that road managers, especially local councils, need to be recognised as part of the chain of responsibility. There is not much use tightening the law for drivers if councils cannot maintain the routes that drivers rely on. Others, like the Queensland Trucking Association and NatRoad, supported the changes but called for targeted education, particularly for smaller operators and rural

drivers who do not have compliance departments or lawyers. They are right to be concerned. A 50-page safety management template is not much good to a bloke who is running one truck out of Charleville. The government says that the bill will cut red tape. Let's make sure that it does—and not by shifting that red tape onto the shoulders of small business owners.

The parliament has seen this government roll out reforms with glossy promises and little support. It is not enough to say that the regulator will educate the industry. We need a real plan with clear communication, tailored training for regional operators, and practical tools that will make compliance achievable, not impossible. Let's be honest about the realities on the road. Drivers do not work in a vacuum. They work in a system shaped by fatigue, tight schedules, isolation and often a lack of basic infrastructure. When we talk about being fit to drive we also have to talk about access to rest stops, shaded parking bays, healthy food and fair contracts, because all of that affects a driver's fitness and safety just as much as any checklist. This bill is certainly a step in the right direction, but it will not fix those deeper issues and it should not be used to pretend we can solve them.

Regional Queensland depends on a freight system that is both safe and efficient, and these two goals should not be in competition. A well-rested, well-trained driver is a more productive one. A clear and practical logbook keeps freight moving faster than a complex one that traps people into paperwork. The opposition supports the bill, but we will watch closely to see how it is implemented. We will hold the government and the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator to account for ensuring that the promised consultation with industry actually happens—not just with the big players but with the small family owned operations that form the backbone of freight in the bush. We want to see genuine engagement with those impacted, not just more press releases. We want to see education delivered face to face and in communities, not just built into a PDF on the back of a website. We also want to see ongoing reviews so that if the new framework does not deliver the simplicity and safety it promises then we can at least fix that.

When a driver like Matt finishes his run he should not feel like he is navigating a legal maze to do his job. He should know that the rules are clear, that the law values his safety and that government respects the realities of life on the road. This bill is a start, but the work of implementation will determine whether it is a step forward or another layer of bureaucracy. The opposition will support the bill, but we will hold the government to its word that this reform will make life simpler, safer and fairer for the women and men who keep Queensland's freight and our economy moving. I commend the bill.