




Speech By

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MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

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HEAVY VEHICLE NATIONAL LAW AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr HEALY** (Cairns—ALP) (7.35 pm): The Heavy Vehicle National Law Amendment Bill 2025 represents a vital step forward in modernising and strengthening the safety and productivity of Australia's freight transport sector. The legislation delivers on years of nationally coordinated reform driven by the federal Labor government in partnership with Queensland to create a more flexible, risk-based and responsive regulatory framework for heavy vehicle operations.

The Heavy Vehicle National Law has always stood as a model of national cooperation. Originally passed in Queensland in 2012 and adopted by most states and territories, it established a single, consistent regulatory system for heavy vehicles across borders. The federal Labor government's leadership through the Infrastructure and Transport Ministers' Meetings and the National Transport Commission has been central to these current reforms.

The 2025 bill implements the key outcomes of the National Transport Commission's comprehensive review, a review endorsed by all transport ministers, including Queensland's, before the 2024 election. It demonstrates how collaboration between Canberra and Queensland can drive reforms that are both nationally consistent and, more importantly, locally practical. The federal government's pivotal role cannot be understated. Through the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts, the Commonwealth continues to provide strategic oversight, funding and policy guidance. Programs such as the Heavy Vehicle Safety Initiative and the Chain of Responsibility training are examples of how federal investment complements this legislation by directly funding projects that improve safety, training and technology across the industry.

By supporting the NHVR's governance and capability, the federal government ensures this reform is not simply a rewrite of the rules but a recalibration of how road freight, safety and compliance are delivered nationally, which is absolutely essential.

At the heart of this bill is an enhanced focus on safety and shared responsibility. The introduction of a mandatory safety management system for accredited operators marks a transformative shift in how safety is embedded across all levels of this industry. Operators will now be required to proactively identify, assess and control safety risks and to verify their performance through independent audits. This reform aligns the Heavy Vehicle National Law with modern safety management standards used in aviation, maritime and rail. Importantly, it is scalable, ensuring small regional operators can comply without facing unreasonable administrative burdens. That is very positive news, particularly for operators in Cairns and the surrounds, because in the past they have been exposed to significant financial burdens.

Equally significant is the new duty to be fit to drive extending to all heavy vehicles over 4.5 tonnes. This reflects an understanding that safety begins with the individual behind the wheel. Drivers will now have a clear legislative responsibility to monitor their own health and fitness and to stop driving when unfit. For regional Queensland where long distances, heat and fatigue are daily realities, these

provisions will save lives and inevitably increase safety. This bill also strengthens accountability by empowering authorised officers to issue improvement notices and formal cautions for minor breaches while still allowing prosecution for serious or repeated offences. It is a balanced approach that distinguishes between honest mistakes and systematic compliance.

Queensland is both the home of the Heavy Vehicle National Law and the engine room of Australia's freight economy. From Mount Isa's mining exports to Cairns's regional logistics, from the Bruce Highway to the inland freight corridors that sustain agricultural towns, heavy vehicles are essential to the rhythm of regional life. For too long regional operators have shouldered the double burden of complex regulation and safety risks on aging road networks. This bill brings relief through simpler compliance, digital systems and a risk-based approach that rewards good practice rather than punishing paperwork errors. It delivers what the heavy vehicle sector has sought: clear duties, practical compliance and a modern regulator capable of working with, not against, operators. It strengthens protections for drivers and for the travelling public alike and builds on previous national transport reforms.

In supporting this bill, we affirm our commitment to safer roads, fairer regulation and a more resilient freight industry, one that keeps regional Queensland moving and keeps Australia safe.