




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR TRAEGER

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HEAVY VEHICLE NATIONAL LAW AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr KATTER** (Traeger—KAP) (8.34 pm): I am pleased to make a contribution to the debate on the Heavy Vehicle National Law Amendment Bill. I will start by saying—and I think this has already been said in the debate—without trucks, Australia stops. You become very aware of that when you represent the 429,000 square kilometre Traeger electorate with vast distances between remote towns that rely on those critical deliveries, whether they be deliveries of cattle, diesel, groceries or even grain. We could not live without those trucks and deliveries. The quality of the roads for those drivers is a big issue.

The NHVR has popped up a lot in discussions around these changes. One of the conversations I had with a very experienced truck driver about the introduction of the NHVR is that it is about removing red tape for drivers. The intention of the changes is to remove red tape and allow drivers to drive. I am sure that was the intention. The bloke who explained it to me said, 'They might have removed the red tape but now there is purple tape, green tape, yellow tape and all the other tape.' It has not achieved its initial ambitions. If anything, it has become worse in terms of the amount of compliance and paperwork that these drivers have to fill out.

What I wanted to focus on in this debate is not so much the regulation and who is doing the enforcement, but the way it is done. We experienced a big blitz in Richmond. I certainly knew about it because my phone ran hot. If someone is in Richmond and they have been on the Croydon Road—someone said they were doing 10 kilometres an hour along the Croydon Road the other week due to the corrugations; it needs grading—they could get a cracked windscreen or their lights could go out and the next thing they are in town and they get an \$800 to \$1,000 fine for having a cracked windscreen or their lights out.

They had a police blitz in Richmond. There were six police cars and six police officers. There have not been fatalities or any big accidents in Richmond. They were just doing a blitz. This can create a culture of fear in people. It is the way those duties are undertaken that makes a big difference.

The other comment that is made is that officers will be flown in from Brisbane or Townsville and they start circling a vehicle and they will not talk to the driver or owner and say what they are looking for. They will just hand them something at the end and say that they have 10 faults. There is no interaction. People might wear the faults, but they would like the courtesy of being engaged with the officer who has flown out to look at their vehicle.

Another example is someone will have their trailer parked up in Charters Towers, go to Townsville and then come back and there is a notice on their windscreen saying that they must comply but there was no discussion. Other complaints that have come in is that they have an LED light with 10 bulbs and five have gone after being on the Croydon Road and they have 24 or 48 hours to comply. There are no parts immediately available in Richmond or Hughenden. They have to take their truck off the road—that is their livelihood—because a bloke has flown up from Brisbane and said they must comply. It is not the same in Hughenden, Richmond or Cloncurry as it is in Brisbane and Townsville.

A lot of times it comes down to the competency and common sense of the officers. When we build these big institutions like the NHVR there is more of a tendency for a taskforce of people to be flown out to our areas. It does not work. Some people are lamenting that we still do not have the TMR model. There is not necessarily anything wrong with NHVR, but there is a requirement for the minister and the government to watch over the competency and culture among the officer in terms of the way they operate. I trust the minister we have. He has good experience from out in the rural areas to understand those issues as this rolls out.

Another common saying is, 'There are no Windscreens O'Brien in Hughenden, Richmond and Julia Creek.' If you have a windscreen down, you might just be docked from your pay and you have 24 hours to fix it. That is going to be a problem if you have drought-stricken cattle or there is rain coming and you have to move things. There needs to be some latitude and commonsense provided. Really, will it risk people's lives if you have a cracked windscreen driving up to Croydon? No. There has to be some commonsense applied here.

The member for Mirani made some good, sensible comments around fatigue management. I am not going to debate that we need to change log books. I would in terms of the drought because if you have drought-stricken cattle and stressed cattle on the back of the truck, and the officers are saying, 'You will be out of log books if you don't make it to there,' you say, 'Well, you can have the cattle die in the back, if you like, but I am trying to make it to there, and I had big crosswinds coming across the Barkly Highway so I am now two hours behind.' Some NHVR fellow is going to walk you down to the roadhouse and get your log books and, whooshka, two grand later and that driver will say, 'You know what? You can have it. I will go drive a loader for the council. You can have the keys to the truck because I am sick of getting these fines.' Well done, NHVR—now we have no more truck drivers out in Cloncurry. This is what is happening right now.

Everyone in most industries is saying, 'Safety is paramount. Safety is paramount. Safety is paramount.' Yes, but there is a cost to this on the other end. A lot of these businesses and owner-operators are finding it harder and harder to find drivers to fill the trucks if they are not doing it themselves.

There are the fines. Someone in Richmond the other day was chased into the roadhouse, as I am told. He was allegedly chased into the roadhouse and was asked, 'Give us a look at your log books. By the way, you weren't on a road train approved road.' The driver disputed and said, 'Yes, I was. I have been doing that for 20 or 30 years.' No—he received a \$2,000 fine, I am told. That is discouraging drivers. Everyone in town knows it is. There are experienced truck drivers up in Richmond that said, 'Well, our shed has been there for 20, 30 years. We have been driving out the road trains.' These guys just come in their taskforce.

There are a lot of things which need to be heavily watched. I really implore the minister to keep a heavy eye on this because the complaints are not going to go away, the issues are not going to go away, and we need truck drivers in the seats of these trucks, particularly in these remote areas, or everything will stop.

There is a saying which is said a lot, but I think it is a very pertinent saying. They say you have to have roadworthy trucks—for example, you have to have all 10 of your LED light bulbs working otherwise you have to take the truck off the road—but what about truck-worthy roads? Bradley Hawkins at Normanton, with his 30 or 40 trucks, has to drive across these smashed up roads in poor condition all the time, yet he pays the same registration as for a truck here in Brisbane that is going up the Bruce Highway or the Pacific Highway. It is a lot different for him to operate up there. If he fully charged to offset the cost to him to keep his trucks on the road, it would push the cost of groceries and everything up through the gulf. It would be unaffordable. He wears a lot of that cost. Next thing he knows, the likes of NHVR are breathing down his neck, making life even harder.

You have to be very careful in the application of these rules and the one-size-fits-all approach. That is the comment I would like to drive home in this debate. The truck drivers are suffering out there. A lot of the truck drivers are walking away from the industry—from the regiment of fines and everything that is going on. I implore the minister—I say again, I know he has good knowledge of that area—to keep a sharp eye on these matters because there are some overzealous officers out there.

I have one further comment to make. There have been comments made about the competency of the officers going out doing inspections where they are saying, 'You better have a look at that.' Commentary has been made to me that, 'I do not think they are in a good place to comment on the validity of some of these inspections because they are not experienced people in this field.' That is another matter to be looked at. I am not disagreeing with the legislation of the bill, but I am saying there is a lot to watch out for in this industry.