



Speech By
Hon. Tony Perrett

MEMBER FOR GYMPIE


Record of Proceedings, 18 November 2025

HEAVY VEHICLE NATIONAL LAW AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Resumed from 30 October (see p. 3558), on motion of Mr Mickelberg—

That the bill be now read a second time.

 **Hon. AJ PERRETT** (Gympie—LNP) (Minister for Primary Industries) (11.24 am): I rise to speak on the Heavy Vehicle National Law Amendment Bill. This bill implements recommendations from the National Transport Commission which were supported by transport ministers across Australia. The objectives of these amendments are to improve safety and productivity, reduce regulatory red tape, improve regulatory functions and simplify administration of the law. It will achieve this by moving a range of prescriptive details into regulations. This will make it easier for industry to understand and comply with their obligations. It will be more flexible. The Crisafulli government is committed to delivering a government that works for you. That is why we welcome changes that can help reduce red tape and provide a simpler system to boost productivity and innovation, all without compromising safety.

Truck drivers keep our state moving. As the committee noted, without truck drivers Australia stops. They drive hundreds and even thousands of kilometres across the state in a range of weather conditions, traffic conditions and road conditions. The very nature of their job means they carry an enormous responsibility to be fit and healthy and not tired.

With its strong focus on safety, this bill expands the duty not to drive while fatigued to include a duty not to drive when unfit. This duty covers all drivers of heavy vehicles over 4.5 tonnes. Previously, the duty applied only to drivers of what are called 'fatigue regulated heavy vehicles', which are those greater than 12 tonnes. The expanded use of being unfit covers when a driver feels unwell and not fit enough to drive a vehicle safely. It also includes when they are affected by alcohol or drugs. The regulator told the committee hearing that the expanded duty also allows a driver to say no when an employer asks them or they feel pressured to drive when they feel they are not up to it.

Agricultural stakeholders raised some concerns about what is covered by the term 'being unfit', record-keeping requirements and rest periods. Many of AgForce's membership of primary producers are also owner-operators or have contracting businesses. AgForce is a strong advocate for farm safety and safety across rural and regional communities. While AgForce supports the expanded duty changes, it raised with the committee some concerns about the definition of the term 'unfit'. In its submission it stated—

... this could have broad unintended consequences to an industry that is already suffering driver shortages, should the definition overstep its intent.

The committee acknowledged concerns about the subjective interpretation of what is 'unfit' and how it will be measured and assessed. I note it encourages the minister, along with national colleagues, to monitor implementation of the expanded duty to ensure it achieves its intended outcomes and is fit for purpose.

Canegrowers also supported changes to reduce red tape and remove duplication; however, it had concerns about record-keeping obligations being placed on growers. While it recognised the importance of ensuring drivers were fit to drive, it submitted—

... any additional written compliance obligations especially on tractor combinations that travel only short distances would place an unnecessary burden on businesses in our industry, with limited safety benefits.

Canegrowers also sought clarification on how rest is accounted for when determining compliance with fatigue rules. It pointed out that in the sugar industry work stoppages are common, with haul-out drivers often stopping work due to delays in bin deliveries or mill stoppages. During this period, haul-out drivers exit the vehicle and may rest for periods that could extend into hours. Growers and operators need certainty and clarity that they are operating within the law.

The Department of Transport and Main Roads advised the committee that the new duty does not impose an additional reporting or record-keeping burden on operators. They can be reassured that TMR also confirmed there had been no change to record-keeping requirements for cane haul-out operators driving within 100 kilometres of their base.

This bill improves the way minor and administrative fatigue breaches are managed. These include changes to warnings about fatigue management record-keeping breaches and discretion to issue warnings instead of fines, making it easier to comply with work diary requirements and not be punished for minor clerical errors. It includes removing offences for failing to record the day of the week or total work and rest hours on the daily sheet in a work diary and establishing a default option of standard hours for solo drivers.

Transport is fundamental to supply chains and there are not many aspects of agriculture which do not overlap with the use of heavy vehicles. That is why the efficiency of the road network and how it is used is integral to the productivity of Queensland's agricultural sector. Ms Ruth Thompson, Grains Policy Director, AgForce Queensland Farmers Ltd, told the public hearing—

I know we are pushing for \$30 billion by 2030 for agricultural output in this state, and agriculture can definitely step up to the mantle and make that happen ... Our No. 1 constraint here is getting our goods to market at a reasonable cost.

AgForce's submission noted that road networks account for up to 40 per cent of agricultural operating costs. Whether it is transporting grains or livestock or carting fertiliser, it represents a significant portion of costs. It also underpins AgForce's advocacy for increases to heavy vehicle lengths, heights and general mass limits. It has calculated that a five per cent weight increase across the network for grains, cattle, sheep, goats and sugar cane would deliver a productivity improvement worth \$400 million to \$650 million per year, with a single best estimate of \$500 million a year. Ruth Thompson told the public hearing—

Height, weight and length increases all contribute to greater productivity. We are not just talking about safety; we are also talking about long-term sustainability and viability of the trucking industry. Agriculture gets squeezed on multiple fronts: input costs are significant, diesel costs are very high and freight costs are also very significant. We would love to have the opportunity to claw back some sort of cost-saving exercise within our freight and if we have the opportunity to do that with greater weights, higher trucks and potentially longer trucks, that makes commercial sense to us.

Queensland is the host state for this law. It is being implemented here first. This bill aims to not only improve safety for truck drivers but also improve productivity by reducing red tape, improving regulatory functions and simplifying administration of the law. I commend the bill to the House.