



Speech By  
**Trevor Watts**


**MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA NORTH**

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**HEAVY VEHICLE NATIONAL LAW AMENDMENT BILL**

**Second Reading**

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (12.46 pm): I rise to make a brief contribution to the debate on the Heavy Vehicle National Law Amendment Bill. I want to thank the minister for bringing this bill to the House and for Queensland leading the way on national heavy vehicle regulation. We are the host jurisdiction in making Queensland safer. These changes are important for the safety of our roads, the strength of our freight industry and the efficiency of our transport networks right across Queensland, and that is important to the people of Toowoomba. Toowoomba is a freight and logistics hub and this bill will make a real difference to the operation and the efficiency of that hub.

We know that there are trucks driving the entire south-west of Queensland and from Darwin all the way down to Melbourne. Whether it is the Warrego or the Gore, there will be trucks driving those roads and it is important that it is safe as well as efficiently and productively managed. There are some great operators who come up to Toowoomba such as Martins Stock Haulage, IOR bringing fuel out to the west to ensure everything keeps running, Hillmans Transport taking cotton and other products to the port, as well as Qube Logistics. We know that the wind farms are being fed by these vehicles bringing the blades and other products, so it is important to ensure we have good, strong, simple legislation that keeps it both productive and safe.

I should also mention InterLinkSQ and the InterLink intermodal terminal that aims to link rail, road, air and the port. Again, that will be an important part of Toowoomba's business model in logistics, and the key feature of that is the heavy vehicles. The new CEO of the Toowoomba Regional Council should be pretty much an expert in this area. Sal Petrocchio OAM was the CEO of the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator before he came to run our council, so I am sure he will have great interest in this legislation and its effects on Toowoomba.

Locally, the minister came up last year. At our Toowoomba bus depot, Sam Davison was awarded the Queensland Regional Bus Driver of the Year and Allan Humphrey was awarded the 2024 School Bus Driver of the Year. There are a lot of people in Toowoomba who, in terms of both their income and business, find a great deal of importance in making sure that the Heavy Vehicle National Law Amendment Bill 2025 is fit for purpose and for what they do.

This law will better protect and simplify operations while keeping safety front and centre. Every day, vehicles move goods that keep our country and economy ticking over. It is vital that our laws support an efficient operation as we move goods up and down roads. It is also important to make sure that the laws have a more flexible and simple approach that is a bit less bureaucratic. Others have said ticking and flicking a box should not receive the same kind of penalty or infringement notice as something that is far more serious. We are interested in making sure that our roads are safe; not making sure someone has ticked and flicked every box in a logbook. We know from time to time logbooks will have little mistakes in them and that should not be causing as big a problem as it has for some of our drivers and people who are trying to keep goods moving.

Certainly, one of the most important changes is the new duty for drivers not to drive if they are unfit. We need to define that. As the member for Townsville said: this is not about belt buckles and running marathons; this is about if you are fit to be in charge of a vehicle. It is a methodology to make sure that if a driver feels unwell or in some way impaired that they are not punished for that. They should be encouraged to make sure that they are safe on our roads. Certainly if a driver is affected by alcohol, drugs or if they feel unwell or believe they cannot safely control the vehicle, they must not drive. What could be more sensible than putting that into legislation?

It is also really important, particularly as we see the growth in Amazon, home deliveries and smaller packages moving around and more vehicles that are below that 12-tonne capacity moving around our suburbs, streets and roads. Taking that down to 4.5 tonnes is also very sensible. It makes it very clear that the expectations are for safety and a safe workplace. It structures a support for drivers who sometimes might feel pressured to push through when they know they should not be on the road. I think that is really important.

There is a commercial reality for businesses but we all have to use these roads as we get around our electorates. As you go west, the roads get bumpier and narrower and they have more trucks on them. It is pretty important if I am cruising down one of those roads—or someone is driving down one of those roads with their family in the backseat, they know when a truck is coming towards them at 100 km/h that the driver is fit, is fully capable and was not pressured to be behind the wheel.

Our truck drivers do a fantastic job. They literally do keep everything moving. We know in Toowoomba we would not have food, we would not have fuel and we would not have much in the Grand Central Shopping Centre if the trucks were not coming up the Warrego and dropping those goods off. Knowing that those drivers have an expectation that if they do not feel safe they will not get on the Warrego is a good thing. If a driver believes they are unfit to drive, they can report any pressure that they might get from an employer in a confidential way so that we can ensure their safety and our safety is protected. That is a really good amendment for them because they will know that their job is not at risk. That they can do that via a confidential hotline is really important.

Again, another feature of this—not to be confused—is to make sure we are not changing fatigue management rules and rest hours. They stay the same for drivers of vehicles over 12 tonnes. There has been no lessening of the safety requirements in terms of fatigue, just some additional things in terms of being unfit. Enforcement will now be able to be carried out by national heavy regulators and police, with officers being trained. People would have seen the new uniforms and the new vehicles out on the road as the earlier versions of this legislation were starting to roll out.

When it comes to penalties, 349 offences were looked at. It is important that serious offences will now pay higher penalties and the less serious administrative mistakes will see those penalties reduced. That is what I was talking about before. If I am driving down the highway and someone has not ticked a box in their logbook, I am not as worried about that as I would be if there was a serious breach somewhere along the line that puts the safety of all other road users in danger. The penalties should reflect that and make sure that the serious offences are being treated as serious offences. Drivers do a difficult job in difficult circumstances living away from home and operating out of their cab. If the pen does not work and they have missed a tick, they should not get a serious fine for that. They should have an opportunity to get that corrected. It is important, but it is not critical. It is critical that they are safe when they get behind the wheel and I think this legislation reflects that much better.

Overall, I would say the people of Toowoomba will be very happy to see this legislation come through. It is critically important for all of our businesses, and for all of our households and lives. The heavy freight industry literally does keep Australia moving and delivers all of our goods to make sure that we can live inland away from the port. I commend the bill and thank the minister for it.