



The Hon Julia Gillard MP

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Joint Media Release

Safer Payment Systems For Heavy Vehicle Drivers

Joint Media Release with The Hon Anthony Albanese MP, Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government and The Hon Dr Craig Emerson MP, Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors and the Service Economy

The National Transport Commission (NTC) will investigate and report on driver remuneration and payment methods in the Australian trucking industry and make recommendations for reform.

The NTC will be assisted by Professor Michael Quinlan of UNSW and the Hon Lance Wright QC, the former president of the NSW Industrial Relations Commission.

The NTC will report by November 2008, and the report will be considered by the Australian Transport Council (ATC – Commonwealth, State and territory transport ministers). Working with the ATC, the Government's objective is to implement these reforms in the context of changes to national road transport regulation and the introduction of the new workplace relations system.

The trucking industry prides itself on being highly competitive and efficient. However, the industry's strength can also be its weakness, with truck drivers often finding themselves in a weak bargaining position and unable to maintain safe work practices.

This is especially so at a time when hard-working trucking companies and owner-drivers, who deliver essential food and supplies to supermarket shelves every day, have been hit hard by rising global fuel prices.

The report will examine how current methods and rates of pay for heavy vehicle drivers contribute to poor road safety outcomes, and will identify options for implementing a system of safe rates for both employees and owner-drivers, recognising the special vulnerabilities of independent contractors in the transport industry.

From 2000-2004, one in five road deaths involved heavy vehicles, with speed and fatigue widely acknowledged to be significant factors. During recent years several reports have also linked unsafe work practices in the trucking industry to road accidents.

The investigation follows on from an agreement between Commonwealth, state and territory transport ministers on February 29 concerning the need for a coordinated national transport plan. The NTC was requested to review and make recommendations relating to truck driver pay and remunerations methods.

The Government notes that addressing this matter touches on developments in Commonwealth and State regulations relating to transport and road safety, workplace relations, occupational health and safety and the legislative frameworks for employees and independent contractors.

The Government is committed to working with the transport industry, unions and other stakeholders to improve road safety for Australian families, ensure a fair go for both employees and owner-drivers, and sustain the long-term viability of the trucking industry.

Today's announcement continues the Government's heavy vehicle reform process and complements other safety initiatives, including:

- Implementing new laws to limit heavy vehicle driver fatigue and excessive speed; and
- A \$70 million safety and productivity package which will fund the trial of black box technologies that monitor driving hours and speed as well as the construction of more rest areas along the nation's highways.

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