

Ph : (08) 9791 4180.
Mbl : 041 718 4381.
E-Mail :diesel@bis.net.au

16 Waratah Crescent,
Bunbury W.A. 6230.
Tuesday 16th. June. 1999.

The Committee Secretary,
House of Representatives Standing Committee
On Communications Transport And The Arts
Parliament House Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir,

RE: MANAGING FATIGUE IN TRANSPORT

I write to make a formal submission on fatigue Management in road transport. Briefly I have been involved in the industry since 1974. As that is the nucleus of my experience I shall refer to that industry to outline my contentions.

In the first instance the fact is, that whilst to the best of my knowledge, there are no actual statistics, the fatality rate in the road transport sector is far greater than the other sectors and has never been addressed by a succession of governments, Federal or state.

The causes of and the continuing factors to fatigue.

The problems in road transport operations began to escalate in parallel with the introduction of better roads and improved technology in the early 1970's. Companies and drivers realised "Over-nighting" especially between Melbourne & Sydney at first, had become a reality.

In no time the geographical limitations diminished considerably. Coupled to some de-regulation, and state authorities ill-equipped to adequately control the interstate industry, or turning a blind eye; one a week Melbourne -Brisbane- Melbourne for example, became 3 a fortnight etc. and then more.

The completion of the Eyre highway, meant Melbourne- Perth became one a week, and so on. One irony of the changing situation came to me one afternoon in Flemington road North Melbourne. I was waiting at a set of traffic lights. On the other side of intersection a billboard advertised a major carriers **48-hour Melbourne to Perth road** transport service.

Of course the real joke was that the company's Perth freight was carried by sub-contractors and in most cases where a one driver operation.

2.

Some began doing trips so quickly; descriptions started to sound like they were passing themselves on the way back. As for “normal operations” with the exception of fixed daily linehaul schedules: -

There is no change of driver. Very little two up driver operations.
And days off become hours off.

To some companies everything except the freight has become expendable.

Coming originally from a rural service industry, the difference in attitude toward the day to day employee relations and logistical operations was a shock initiation.

Always asked if you were ok. to do a trip, **never instructed** became the operational strategy. Which left the fatigue equation squarely in the hands of the driver. And still does.

Even in country towns there was always a supply of replacement drivers if you pulled the pin. So you just did the job "end of story". All too often somebody would leave or was pushed because they'd had enough. The practice is however, nobody ever canvassed the idea of rectifying the situation.

Why? Probably ego to some extent, you were always considered to be a bit of a wimp if the miles became too much. Then there was always the old tart down the bottom of the yard if you were sick of it, and I'm not talking about the boss's wife either. They'd die as you drove out the gate.

But generally speaking in those days, nobody really hated the job e.t.a's were still reasonable and it wasn't too bad a life style. But that's 25 years ago.

Then the rot started with vengeance, the price of equipment went through the roof. Rates started a bungie jump and the swoosh club was conceived. All of a sudden one a week Melbourne-Brisbane-Melbourne became three a fortnight. Then more.

State authorities made some attempt in their limited capacity to control driving hours, and the odd company had a go at two up operations. However, “that” question remains. How does any transport officer really know what **any driver or co-driver** has done before or after an inspection?

All of a sudden the bubble burst, without precedent the most horrific accidents began to occur. Some so bad, driving past they looked like they'd been hit by a missile.

3.

In addition they began happening in the middle of nowhere because the weekly kilometre rate had doubled or more. Too much speed, too much pressure, no bloody sleep. Everything had been upgraded except the drivers working conditions. There were accidents that simply defied description. Half the time you couldn't tell whose truck it was.

In two separate incidences which I have never forgotten. The vehicles had left a section of flat open highway at night, gone hundreds of metres out into a flat open paddock, and rolled over. They should have been avoidable fatalities, if only the drivers had managed to stay awake.

As for the monument at Tarcutta in N.S.W those people who organised it did a fantastic job. But what a disgusting state of affairs it has become, erecting a "War Memorial" for truck drivers. - So many people killed, just because they went to work.

The authorities started making all the right sort of noises and explanations as to the causes, but the plain fact is **NOTHING WAS EVER DONE**.

2. Consequences of fatigue in air, Sea' Road and Rail Transport.

So far I've talked about "the good old days" But the background is extremely important if the industry's problems are to be addressed. Exactly what has gone on and continues to happen at the mine face; is paramount in understanding what this industry has been through, and what HAS to happen to rectify the state of the industry now.

The state of the industry in America is now desperate in relation to the shortage of operators (drivers). They've simply had a gut full and gone. Larger companies are now engaged in million dollar campaigns to encourage not just experienced operators, but "anybody" to become long haul operators.

It will happen here, absolutely no risk. And if the cynics think rail and sea's present capabilities will take up the slack, they are living in cloud cookoo land.

The biggest change be it management and/or drivers has to be their attitude of "no matter what" you must keep going. God knows how many would still be alive if only they'd taken the time and had an hour in the bunk.

Because no matter what :-

The preparation, fitness, degree of fatigue, the trip distance even the equipment.

That time comes, **night or day** when even "world experts" for some inexplicable reason **"hit the wall"**.

4.

It is **the** most sickening feeling; any sudden change in your surroundings gives you one hell of a fright. Your survival capabilities are non-existent. Worst of all you just don't think straight. In other words you're an accident waiting for somewhere to happen.

I had an incidence one night, about 2 kms further on from a parking bay on the Newell highway near West Wyalong in NSW. I came across another truck whose driver had pulled up and gone to sleep over the steering wheel. The engine was still running, lights on full beam, and smack in the middle of the highway.

To this day I believe he thought he was actually in the parking bay. What I also have never forgotten was how close I came to hitting him up the backside.

And that's just one example. Ask anybody with a couple of years long distance driving under the under their belt and you'll find a virtual book full of similar instances.

But perhaps the worst aspect is the blind expectance by those in the industry, that the situation in relation to the deaths of drivers is a fait accompli. Moreover that these deaths are a part of life, luck of the draw. Which of course is pathetic.

The consequences of the situation is simple, more deaths. Higher operational costs and further erosion in confidence of the industry's capabilities, especially from consumer interest groups, and the general public. If indeed there is any left.

3. Initiatives in transport addressing the causes and effects of fatigue.

As far as the western world is concerned, with ever expanding economies I firmly believe the fatigue management strategies the airline industry has in place, will eventually serve as a leverage point to "pinch" the majority of long distance express freight.

Moreover, I would be very surprised if such infrastructure were not already in place. My contention is, the day when economic rational and community demand for a greater degree of safety will pay for this service. All they need is a bit more freight.

Or Australia becomes part of a Southern Pacific Air cargo consortium. Because I don't think we will be siting out here in the wilderness forever.

Of course there is still a very important roll for road transport has a part to play no one sector can carry the lot. Well rail does. But in terms of performance when a push comes to shove, we are looking more than a little shaky.

5.

So if road transport is going to continue to be part of the equation, then the Australian Trucking Association (nee RTF) programs already in place and their future strategies need to be flogged to death, if you'll pardon the pun.

AND EVERY TRANSPORT OPERATOR IN THIS COUNTRY NO MATTER HOW BIG OR SMALL, MUST NOW BE PART OF THAT REFORM ---- REGARDLESS.

The day has come in Australia when every industry associated with road transport has to grow up.

After **40** plus years developing “**A TYPE**” of so called merit regulation in varying degrees, road transport in Australia has one of the most disgraceful safety records per head of population in the western world. Why there has to be a comparison I don't know. And the time has come when for the community's sake the strategy **must** change.

Even intra-state (local) operators now accumulate an extraordinary number of kilometres and hours. With drivers being stretched beyond all reasonable expectations. We have people here who drive upwards of 14/16/18 hours a day, and think its good because they are home every night. To do what?

Why road transport attracts an element of society who's sole objective in life is to run up the highway, like Ned Kelly in a biscuit box, defies description! The perception is that they drove all day and night, so they're a bloody hero mentality.

There would be nothing wrong with running from say Brisbane to Perth, as long as everybody was committed to the same code of practice, and with a reasonable e.t.a. The reality is that the current "systems" have never worked. Unfortunately, no log book, or voluntary code has or ever will, give operators an across the board "Equal Opportunity".

Pull up anybody on the Eyre highway east of Eucla and have a look at the "book". Everybody stops driving at the border? What a load of bullshit these current laws are.

So we have to grow up, cut the rhetoric and the bullshit and introduce proper bulletproof electronics to the industry. Not some two bob speed limiter type system with 2 settings and a "plug", or a mechanical speed limiter masterpiece (with horns) that "falls" off. - The system has to be **BULLET PROOF**.

"OUR" system designed specifically to cater for what is a unique logistical operation. That stops the crap and puts truck driving back up in the “proper” job classification.

6.

Ansett Freight Express got it right. They were by far the most professional linehaul operation Australia. And like a dipstick, I left and went elsewhere because we were branded too slow and always "in the bloody way".

Flavour of the month meant if you weren't in the swoosh club, and out there trying to get a 40tonne lorry to behave like a v8 holden ute, then you just weren't up there with them. Whoever they were. In hindsight of course, it was all bullshit.

4. Ways of achieving greater responsibility by:-

◆ Individuals :- (Employees)

In the first instance every employee including management must ensure that in your workplace there is agreement, which includes the right to say **NO**, I am not available.

To say NO without fear of reprisal from management **or your peers**.

And NO to any situation which endangers your health and well being and most importantly, the safety of those you work with and the others who share the road.

Because if those basic rights do not exist, then your working for the wrong people.

Moreover, you are responsible under duty of care; to have the matter brought to the attention of the appropriate authority/s. And, let's not be totally negative; there are companies who do give a stuff about their staff.

If you're an owner/driver, take a wake up call.

You must be fit and there are a lot of us who most certainly are not.

The old days of "that's all I could get to eat" are not only gone, but were stupid. There is no value in thinking you should have eaten proper food while you sit watching passing traffic from a plaque in the cemetery.

Twelve and fourteen hour shifts in fact any time in the saddle really does mean Zero alcohol level.

Keep stimulants to a bear minimum. An extra coffee at 10.p.m. can be a pain in the butt by 3 in the morning.

When you eventually get to use one, never have tea or coffee before you go to bed.

Place land mines around the bedroom and passageway to ensure a good sleep. Use earplugs if you can. (there's a problem with them if you've played front row rugby)

7.

Tell your neighbours, politely the first time, you **MUST** sleep during the day or whenever you actually get home. Explaining that continued operation of their chainsaw could be detrimental to their health.

If you're stuck with a persistent dipstick in most states the local government (council) will make arrangements to rectify the situation. –Don't leave the gigger out the front with the fridge motor going all night, its bad PR.

Put the appropriate "piss off" sign on the front door and disconnect the doorbell.

If you share a house with people explain that **your survival depends** on: (a) adequate sleep and (b) have the opportunity for a stress free **rest** period.

Body temperature is absolutely vital.

Every individual has a different variation in tolerances however: -

Too cold and the muscular tension causes stress which drains your reserves.

Too warm and you'll nod of before the brakes release.

Mental aptitude: Don't go to work with the "shits" or your whole day will come undone. Whatever the problem it just is not worth it.

Trying to sort out “ANY” problem as you drive is both physically and mentally draining. -- Besides who the hell are you going to argue with ----yourself ?

Moreover, you will change absolutely nothing until you have parked up, shut the motor off and gone back to the source of your problem.

Be a team player. Every company has its standards making your own shortcuts only contributes to other employee stress levels.

Because it is stress that "sissy" word that only "girls" get, which is one hell of a contributor to fatigue.

◆ **Companies :-**

With the advent of Worksafe in all states, I naively thought at last the unprincipled operators would be bought to heel. God knows there were enough case histories to start world war three! Instead they opened for business on a shoe string budget and took the phone off the hook.

My one inquiry to them on a health and safety issue, resulted in us nearly losing the contract.

8.

In reference to direct managerial operations the fact is, a lot of the old school, the type who were prepared to make a valued judgement have **gone**, left the industry, many in disgust. Now sadly, there's a lot around who are devoid of standard business principals, fence sitters, call them what you like.

The consequences being a deal of unexplainable and/or expensive decision making. Which further contributes to fatigue management problems. Because unless the rest of the staff happens to be as thick as two short planks, they know what's going on. They become unsettled, lose confidence, become nervous about the future etc. Just what you need starting out on a 3 or 4000 kilometre trip. Another fatigue additive.

In relation to the “where to begin” strategy, company cliental and the consumer have to be the first port of call. Because there is absolutely no point in advocating any new strategy until current freight rates and ridiculous expectations of delivery schedules are corrected. Because they are the biggest indirect contributor to fatigue.

During the 1994 National Inquiry everybody had an answer for everything - Except for rates and schedules. Again the old hero status came into play along the lines of “nothing you can do about it” or a, “we'll handle it” resolve.

I WONDER HOW MANY LIVES HAVE BEEN LOST SINCE THEN.

Moreover, I am informed that almost the entire manufacturing and/or supply industries operates on a "just in time" wholesale / retail system in relation to the shipment of most goods. Subsequently, there is yet another partner in crime because of the pressure it creates.

Quite frankly, the imposition of expecting one sector of industry to "**carry**" another in such a manner is **ABSOLUTELY LUDICROUS**. As these practices have a direct effect on stress management, there obviously has to be a national across the board professional retraining scheme in every aspect of freight logistics.

◆ Management / Employee Working Relations :-

There must be a return to the principal of respecting the people you work with.

The best boss anybody ever had in this business was just that for one very good reason: - He or she had been there, done that "at the mine face". I'm not anti-educational that's a very important part of life. But to para-phrase the Chairman of one multi national transport company, “a Phd. In everything isn't everything”.

Road transport is no different to any other industry. It's a people business and any one person is reliant on everybody else. Unfortunately there is a new breed in some management sectors that are totally inept and unexceptionable.

Put simply when a driver leaves on a trip he has to be in the right frame of mind. Not wound off the map by some two bob empire builder. Who has NO understanding of how professional organisations operate.

There has to be an acceptance that **WHATEVER THE RANK** - if indeed you insist on one, all employees are part of the whole picture, not an expendable item.

When you run the camp on an even keel there is no stress. No stress and your alleviating so many problems. **Fatigue included.** But some will not, can not comprehend such practices.

Another total misconception has been quality assurance. I am sure many at the mine face wondered why it was introduced, because there was no real reference to the problems which effected the product quality. No reference to fatigue management, employee capabilities, potential or anything else. No problem sticking a big tick on the door of a clapped out K-Mart Kenworth though. It was a joke.

Maybe if the safety issue is addressed properly, then there will be the opportunity for the industry to return "our" reputation back to a respectable level. But the implementation will cost money; that is an indisputable fact.

As for equipment manufactures, to be cynical they are halfway there. You either get a very comfortable Prime mover that does 400,000 and becomes severely ill. Or one built like a brick shithouse and drives accordingly.

However, innovation in the last ten to fifteen years indicates this sector of industry to be amongst the best. There is a constant revolution in technology as far as equipment manufactures are concerned. More than ever survival means operators will have to update constantly. The real question is **at whose expense?** Because you can't keep squeezing an industry which operates on a "cut the guts out of it" system.

◆ **Governments:-**

Well you've got the easy bit.

Introduce a national black box surveillance, downloadable, spot check system. Yes such an animal exists and is widely used in Europe. It doesn't sound too expensive if you say it quickly! Coupled to severe penalties with NATIONAL laws administered by the states using existing state authorities. And if that "may create some difficulties" so what. **IT HAS TO CHANGE.**

10.

And I remind everybody again of course that it will be a **bulletproof system**.

If that's going to be put in the states too hard basket, then its way past time somebody told the relevant ministries, they are so far behind the bloody band they can't hear the bloody music! The fact is its time the governing bodies made a "real" contribution.

Governments must financially and morally back the Australian Trucking Association to further its education and public relations programs ensuring a total restart package is directed to **every** sector of the community.

Tell the Australian public and the industrial sector, that road transport is going to get it right at some cost to the consumer. Without compromise.

Tell those with a vested interests "How sad too bad" you got it wrong for too many years and the industry has decided to grow up and do the job properly.

Because if all that's going to happen, is a carbon copy of the 1984 National Road transport inquiry, then no matter what this committee may intend, I can guarantee you "**that sector**" of the industry is just busting for a negative / status quo result.

Make no mistake if there is no substantial changes made through this inquiry, then it will most certainly **be on in the big tent again**.

To conclude, recently 5 of us were conducting one of "those" 3 a.m. conversations over the C.B. radio. The topic of conversation revolved around what we would do if we won lotto - doesn't everybody?

Anyway, I took the plunge and said I'd buy the bloody big lorry I always said I would and do a trip when "I" was ready. Another made reference to setting up a mobile brothel, but he's always been a bit hungry. Two said they'd wave to "any" trucks from the balcony of their penthouse on the Gold Coast.

And old turbo tongue the cattle carter agreed with me. "Yep" he said "your right Bainsy, I'm going to buy the biggest flashest Kenworth in Australia, with all the fruit on it. Huge mate -bigger than Ben Hur! Take it home and park it on the front lawn.

Then every morning I'm going to get up let the dog out -- and m' kelpie, walk out to the Kenworth, chuck a brick at the >#####' thing and go back t' bloody bed"!!

At least we still have a cense of humour.

11.

What's my contention? If these proposals are deemed to be un-obtainable then any value of life and a fair go does not exist in this country, and the entire Australian community should be utterly ashamed.

This industry must change the whole prospective of how the job is done.

Yours Sincerely,

John. M. Bain