



THE COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENT

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMUNICATIONS,  
TRANSPORT AND THE ARTS COMMITTEE

MEDIA RELEASE

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## Tired and Dangerous: managing fatigue in transport

The House of Representatives Transport Committee today, Monday 9 October, released its report on managing fatigue in the Australian transport industry, *Beyond the Midnight Oil: Managing Fatigue in Transport*.

"The title of the report, *Beyond the Midnight Oil*, reflects the fact that many of us are already burning the midnight oil by regularly working long hours. What the Committee found in the transport industry is that many workers are working way beyond what are reasonable and safe hours of work," House Transport Committee Chair, Paul Neville MP, explained.

Human fatigue is widely recognised as one of the major safety concerns facing the transport industry. Broad ranging research into the key contributors to workplace impairment suggests that fatigue is four times more likely as a cause of impairment than drugs or alcohol.

The inquiry focussed on the main forms of transport operating in Australia — air, sea, road and rail — as well as related services such as aircraft maintenance and air traffic control. It also extended beyond the drivers and pilots to include company managers, freight forwarders and agents, and importantly, customers of the transport industry.

"While technology, workplace changes and increased competition have allowed us to increase the speed, efficiency and capacity of the transport task, men and women are still required to operate and repair the planes, trains, trucks and ships," Mr Neville added. "Unlike the machines that they work with, these men and women cannot operate effectively 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Yet, people are regularly pushed beyond the limit in the Australian transport industry, with often tragic results.

"We are all aware of the catastrophic nature of fatigue related transport accidents. The *Exxon Valdez* oil spill and the tragic coach accident at Clybucca near Kempsey in 1989 are graphic examples of what can happen if transport workers are fatigued and pushed too hard. "

The House Transport Committee found that although there is much good work being done by governments and industry to manage the problem of fatigue, in the form of regulatory reform and industry initiatives, fatigue is still endemic throughout the industry.

Major recommendations in the report, *Beyond the Midnight Oil*, include:

- the need for an operator accreditation scheme for the road transport industry;
- making driving or operating a vehicle while fatigue an offence similar to laws regarding alcohol and driving;
- the introduction of a drug free policy into the transport industry including a requirement that all road transport companies institute and administer random drug testing;
- amendments to the Road Transport Reform (Driving Hours) Regulations to incorporate time of day considerations and increasing the minimum allowable rest periods;
- that fatigue management should be built into the basic aviation regulatory mechanisms such as Air Operator Certification;
- the development hours of duty rules for aircraft maintenance engineers, which incorporate sound fatigue management principles and auditable fatigue management systems;
- the urgent need for CASA to improve its auditing functions;
- that the Safe-T-Cam system be adopted nationally;
- the declaration of a national occupational health and safety standard on fatigue and a corresponding code of practice; and
- the development of effective codes of practice on how best to manage fatigue for all sectors of the transport industry.

The House Transport Committee began its inquiry in May 1999 at the request of the Transport Minister, John Anderson. During the inquiry the Committee held a number of public hearings and site inspections across Australia and received more than 100 submissions.

"This all leads to the point that it is obvious fatigue is the fourth and last pillar of transport safety. As a community we no longer tolerate transport workers consuming even small amounts of alcohol. We strictly control speed on our roads. And quantum leaps have been made in vehicle cabin design with seatbelts, airbags and alarms. The effective control of fatigue in land transport alone could see a 20-30 per cent drop in accidents," Mr Neville said.

"Better management of fatigue requires that governments and all players in the industry recognise the scale of the problem and accept responsibility for improving the way it is managed. The commercial costs, the environmental costs and, above all, the human costs of not accepting this responsibility are too great to ignore."

"Our report is about taking fatigue seriously as a high priority safety issue. It is about taking responsibility, forcing people to fulfil their obligations and inculcating an improved safety culture across the transport industry."

For background information and a copy of the report, *Beyond the Midnight Oil*, visit: [www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/cta/mfindex.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/cta/mfindex.htm)

For **media comment**, contact House Transport Committee Chair, **Paul Neville MP**, on 02 6277 4940 or 07 4152 0744.

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