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Official Committee Hansard

**HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATIONS,
TRANSPORT AND THE ARTS

Reference: Managing fatigue in transport

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATIONS, TRANSPORT AND THE
ARTS

Friday, 17 September 1999

Members: Mr Neville (*Chair*), Mr Gibbons, Mr Hardgrave, Mr Hollis, Mr Jull, Mr Lindsay, Mr McArthur, Mr Mossfield, Mr Murphy and Mr St Clair

Members in attendance: Mr Hollis, Mr Jull, Mr Neville and Mr St Clair

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

- . Causes of, and contributing factors to, fatigue.
- . Consequences of fatigue in air, sea, road and rail transport.
- . Initiatives in transport addressing the causes and effects of fatigue.
- . Ways to achieving greater responsibility by individuals, companies, and governments to reduce the problems related to fatigue in transport.

WITNESSES

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Committee met at 8.54 a.m.

JOHNSON, Mr Vaughan Gregory, Member for Gregory, Queensland

CHAIR—Welcome. Do you have anything to add to the capacity in which you are appearing?

Mr Johnson—I am the shadow minister for transport and main roads.

CHAIR—Would you like to make a comment with regard to the management of fatigue and transport?

Mr Johnson—Thank you. Queensland is at the forefront of fatigue management in this nation. As Minister for Transport and Main Roads in this state for 2¼ years in the Borbidge-Sheldon government, I worked very closely with people like Paul Blake and Gary Mann in the Land Transport and Safety Division of Queensland Transport. The template that was set in place in Queensland for fatigue management has probably now been looked at right across the international stage, not just the national stage. When you have a state like Queensland that is so diversified—people living in every corner of it—it is a very difficult situation, especially in the far western areas where we haul mainly livestock and also mineral content in the north-west. Those mineral areas are short hauls whereas the livestock are long hauls.

We introduced a change to the format in Queensland where if livestock hauliers were going to be outside their time frame they were given an extension of four hours to get to their destination. We believe this was a safety factor because you cannot have livestock standing on road trains for eight or 10 hours while the driver has a rest, especially in hot weather—and most of these people do travel of a night-time. The same is very much applicable to produce that is produced in North Queensland for the southern markets of Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide.

The one thing that I have always criticised—and it is something I came very close to doing in Queensland, and I ask your committee to look very closely at this—is that in Western Australia and the Northern Territory drivers are not required to carry logbooks but in Queensland and in the other states drivers are compelled to carry logbooks. I believe that logbooks are one of the greatest impediments in driver operation today. When we talk about fatigue management, you know yourself that if you are driving a motor car and you feel a little tired you will pull up and have a rest. I think the same is applicable to road transport operations.

We have to bear in mind here that we are all different and our make-up is different and some of us need sleep sooner than others. I think this is applicable to truck drivers too. If a driver wants to pull up for three or four hours, he or she should be allowed to pull up for those three or four hours. If they are compelled to carry on and get the goods delivered and drive in the time frame allotted, I believe that is an impediment to safety. That is something I believe the committee should be looking very closely at in relation to fatigue management.

I know I am going to be criticised for making this statement, but I think logbooks are one of the greatest impediments to the road transport industry in this country today. It may

be different in New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia where some of those drivers are travelling shorter distances. But in places like Queensland, the Territory and Western Australia and some areas of South Australia I think logbooks are an absolute nonsense. The majority of people who are driving heavy road transport are very astute and upstanding citizens and they are very responsible behind the wheel of those rigs. Not just anyone can drive those machines. I come from a family that is heavily involved in road transport and I understand the industry fully. It is something that I believe has to be looked at more closely by authorities as well as government.

CHAIR—We received a lot of positive evidence from the academics about the Fatigue Management Program in Queensland transport. Was that introduced in your day or was that a more recent phenomenon?

Mr Johnson—No, it has been coming in over the last five or six years.

CHAIR—That is not important. But you are familiar with it.

Mr Johnson—Absolutely.

CHAIR—We found in evidence that there is no cooperation with the New South Wales police and the New South Wales authorities in general with this program. So even though a trucking company and its drivers may participate in Queensland, when they come to the border they have to go back to the logbooks. Is that the idea?

Mr Johnson—Absolutely. New South Wales and Queensland both have logbooks. I will use the example of Nolans Transport at Gatton. We put in place a quality assurance type operation where some operators have been able to operate without logbooks because of their very high quality type operation. Nolans of Gatton, who are carriers of fruit mainly and vegetables, are certainly one of those operators. Again, as you say, there is too much conflict between police and the road transport authorities, and I believe that if we are going to have national uniformity then we have to have uniformity right across the board. You cannot just have one jurisdiction running off at a tangent and others doing something else.

I think for too long the rules and regulations—and I will be very blunt about this—have been made by New South Wales and Victoria for everybody else to uphold to their disadvantage. I think it is about time either the federal government or the state government jurisdictions all came together and said, ‘We have to address this anomaly. Let’s work it out in a sensible, practical manner.’

CHAIR—When you were a minister, at the council of Australia-New Zealand transport ministers did this matter come up?

Mr Johnson—Not so much the matter of logbooks but fatigue management, yes. I believe that fatigue management was starting to find its feet at that time. Western Australia and the Territory have certainly come well on side with it. Now with the National Road Transport Commission, under the stewardship of Stuart Hicks, I believe it will grow more legs and it will be a better operation for that. But the NRTC has got to be listening to what is going on in all the states. Every state is different: Queensland is different from Victoria,

and Victoria is different from Western Australia. We have to identify with that and that has to be illustrated clearly if we are going to make rules and regulations.

CHAIR—Haven't there got to be regulations for the corridors? The two big corridors in land transport are Brisbane-Sydney and Sydney-Melbourne.

Mr Johnson—You are talking about the New England Highway, the Newell Highway and the Pacific Highway, yes.

Mr HOLLIS—What would be the average journey—and I know every journey is different—of livestock transportation?

Mr Johnson—If you load a truck out of, say, Winton tonight to come to Brisbane, you are looking at about 1,400 or 1,500 kilometres. If you are loaded, you don't want that stock standing on that truck any longer than they have to be. They are type 1 configurations where they are pulling two trailers. They can pull three trailers. Type 2 road trains can travel to Morven and then from Morven inwards is a distance of say 600 kilometres and that is a type 1 operation and you need to get that stock through as quickly and as practically as possible.

Mr HOLLIS—But how long would that take from Winton to Brisbane?

Mr Johnson—You could work on about 18 hours or 19 hours.

Mr HOLLIS—How many drivers would they have? One driver or two drivers?

Mr Johnson—One driver.

Mr HOLLIS—One driver comes right through.

Mr Johnson—Yes. That is what I am saying. When I was minister I put in place the time frame where if a driver was not at the destination within the 12-hour period we could give him or her an extension of, say, four hours to get to the destination. If you have a loaded road train and you get to a place like Dalby and you only need to go the extra 80-odd kilometres to Toowoomba, it is a ridiculous scenario to make that truck stay there to do its time, standing all those cattle there on that road train for a period of seven or eight hours or five hours or whatever until that driver gets back into time.

Mr HOLLIS—I accept all that, but it is a hell of a long time to be behind the wheel. You said yourself that it is not like driving a small sedan; you are driving a road train or its equivalent.

Mr Johnson—I am pleased you raised that point, Mr Hollis. That is exactly why the logbook issue is an impediment. If you have a driver behind the wheel of one of those rigs, it is going to be a safer driving environment if there is no logbook issue because you could drive up the road for, say, five or six hours and if he feels a bit tired he will pull up for a couple of hours. You know yourself if you are driving a long way in a motor car and do that you feel fresher. The same is applicable to a road train operator. It is going to be a safer environment for all and sundry. That is an issue I ask you to look at very closely.

Mr St CLAIR—Have you had any experience with fatigue related accidents as far as out west is concerned either because of the logbook decision or because of the long distance they are driving?

Mr Johnson—No, I have not. During the cattle season, which is one season of the year from now through to Christmas time—the early part of the year through to the latter part of the year because it is cooler weather—a lot of western operators haul from the far western stations to rail heads at places like Cloncurry, Winton and Quilpie and maybe even places further north such as Charters Towers where they are shorter hauls. But the fellows who are hauling from the Wintons or Quilpies or Mount Isas right through are a lot of the time hauling cattle referred to as fats. Also a lot of the cattle that come from the Territory into western Queensland are stores and they come in on long hauls from places further afield than the Territory and a lot of those store cattle, you also have to bear in mind, come to feedlots on the Downs or feedlots east of Emerald. The situation again is that you cannot be standing them around; you have to get them through.

Mr St CLAIR—Is there any problem with drug taking?

Mr Johnson—No. I think that is a factor that has been cleaned up very well in recent years and operators themselves are very responsible now. The owners certainly do not endorse that type of practice any more. Looking at the cost of a prime mover today, you do not get much change out of \$300,000 for a Kenworth, or a Mack or a Western Star. That is what most of these people use. By the time you put one of these type 1 or type 2 configurations on the road, there is not too much change out of \$600,000 or \$700,000.

Mr St CLAIR—Are they owner-drivers or mostly drivers for companies?

Mr Johnson—A lot of them are owner-drivers, but the majority are drivers for companies, yes.

Mr St CLAIR—Is that typical of the bigger western districts?

Mr Johnson—Yes. The biggest operator in the west—

Mr St CLAIR—Because that is a significant difference to what is happening on major transport routes.

Mr Johnson—Absolutely. A lot of them are owner-drivers. A couple of companies come to mind. I do not want to mention those companies because they are very good operators, too, that carry the fruit and vegetable from the north through to the south. But you have companies in the west—there are probably four or five companies there that come to mind—and most of those have been in the industry for two and three and four generations. They are very professional people, very able people, and they have a very credible record.

Mr St CLAIR—Thank you.

CHAIR—Mr Johnson, thank you for that. It was very kind of you to come in this morning. I know you have had a torrid week in parliament and you have made yourself

available for us today. We appreciate that. Please convey our apologies to the people of your electorate.

Mr Johnson—Thank you, Mr Chairman, and I thank the committee for your time this morning.

Committee adjourned at 9.07 a.m.