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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATIONS,
TRANSPORT AND THE ARTS

Reference: Managing fatigue in transport

FRIDAY, 8 OCTOBER 1999

MELBOURNE

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

Friday, 8 October 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

Subcommittee members: Mr Gibbons (*Chair*), Mr Lindsay, Mr McArthur, Mr Neville

Members in attendance: Mr Gibbons, Mr Lindsay, Mr McArthur, Mr Neville

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

HEALY, Mr David, Manager, Road Safety, Transport Accident Commission 563

**STAINDL, Mr Anton, General Manager, Communications and Road Safety,
Transport Accident Commission 563**

WILLIAMS, Mr Mark Gilbert, Director, Sanmar Consulting Group 574

Subcommittee met at 3.02 p.m.**HEALY, Mr David, Manager, Road Safety, Transport Accident Commission****STAINDL, Mr Anton, General Manager, Communications and Road Safety, Transport Accident Commission**

Mr NEVILLE—I declare the committee resumed as a subcommittee and I call to the table the Transport Accident Commission. I welcome Mr Anton Staindl and Mr David Healy. Gentlemen, before you commence giving evidence I have to caution you, as we caution all witnesses, that the committee does not require you to take evidence under oath, but committee hearings are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House itself. The giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of the parliament. I would also ask you to refer to the *Hansard* reporters before you leave in order to verify any quotations or spellings. Could you give us a five minute overview of your submission and then we will go into questions.

Mr Staindl—I just want to spend a minute providing a brief overview of TAC and then David will talk through the paper a little more. Firstly, we welcome the opportunity to present to the committee and thank the committee for the invitation on what is a very serious issue in road trauma in Australia in particular. As I say, we welcome the opportunity to submit here today. I will give just a little bit of background on the TAC for those non-Victorian members. TAC is a government-owned statutory authority. It is a compulsory monopoly third-party personal injury insurer and we oversee a scheme which provides benefits to accident victims for life. As the administrator of a lifetime scheme we have a very strong vested interest in promoting road safety effectively. Any small impact that we can have on the level of road trauma in this state has a significant impact on our balance sheet, apart from which we have a statutory—and I believe a social—obligation to the effective promotion of road safety.

Along those lines we have sought, particularly over the past 10 years, to target key road safety issues in an attempt to impact the level of road trauma in Victoria. Fatigue certainly measures up as one of those key issues. On that basis, David, if you could just talk through the paper a little.

Mr Healy—I will speak very briefly to the lines of inquiry and as per our submission to the committee. With respect to causes and contributing factors to fatigue, I think research has identified a number of factors which are important. They include, of course, lack of sleep. In fact, the research literature makes reference to things such as a sleep debt over time which increases risk of crash involvement.

Certainly, the pattern of driving is very important. Whether you drive at times you would normally be asleep or at times when potentially the circadian rhythm, the natural body cycle, is such that you are more inclined to sleep is an important area. Whether indeed you have a certain sleep disorder such as sleep apnoea is an important risk factor in terms of fatigue. Certainly, research would also suggest that alcohol in any amount—we are not necessarily talking about illegal amounts here, but small amounts of alcohol either before or during a long trip—can certainly increase the risk of crash involvement.

With respect to the actual consequences of fatigue or sleepiness in transport, it is surprising that it is really very difficult to gauge that from mass accident data. We collect police accident report forms but you will not gauge that. One of the best studies I believe that has been conducted in Victoria was in the late 1980s, conducted by the Australian Road Research Board for VicRoads. That examined a sample of crashes in the Gippsland area. There was a sample of single vehicle crashes in which at least one person was hospitalised. There was a multidisciplinary approach in which the vehicle was examined, the road environment where the crash happened and where possible, both witnesses and occupants of the vehicle were interviewed.

The result of that very detailed research was that in terms of contributions of fatigue or sleepiness there was a factor in about 30 per cent of those very severe crashes. I believe that that is one of the best indicators that I have as to the extent of the problem, at least in rural Victoria.

With respect to how we address the issue: the Transport Accident Commission is a partner with VicRoads and the Victoria Police in the Victorian road safety strategy. One of the roles that we undertake in terms of modifying attitudes and behaviours is through public education. Over time we have developed three quite different campaigns addressing fatigue. They have involved a number of facets of media. I guess the central media has been television, but it has also been supported by radio, outdoor advertising and press advertising.

Very much the central theme of the television advertising has been to put the issue on the public agenda to say, the government thinks this is an important issue and you, as a member of the community, need to realise that fatigue or drowsiness is an important road safety issue. Underlying that, we also provide specific, practical messages, because we believe that that is one of the roles that TAC can play to provide to the broader driving population with specific, practical messages with respect to avoiding, or at least alleviating, the consequences of fatigue.

To that extent we have promoted messages such as share the driving, take a break every two hours, do not drive at times you would normally be asleep. Most recently we have drawn upon research conducted in the United States and with reference to experts in VicRoads, where we have promoted the concept of a power nap. That is essentially the notion. If you take a 15- or 20-minute nap on a trip, there are definite benefits in terms of improved performance. We are not suggesting that that is a panacea for all ills, but we believe that that was a useful piece of information for the motoring public. I am quite happy to talk about the results of those public education campaigns if you wish.

The final line of inquiry related to achieving greater responsibility. We believe that there is a role, particularly within corporate fleet safety, in terms of the relationship between employer and employee, particularly in the context of occupational health and safety acts that, in developing an appropriate program, the employer is in a position to make certain demands, if you like, of the employee with respect to the use of vehicles. That can cut across the board well beyond fatigue in terms of speeding, behaviours and use of seat belts. But one important area of the course is in terms of ensuring that employees adopt sensible, practical habits with respect to alleviating or reducing fatigue. That concludes my presentation.

Mr NEVILLE—That is very good. We had evidence from Professor Dinges. Would you be familiar with his work?

Mr Staindl—Yes.

Mr NEVILLE—We were a bit surprised that America was about 24,000 parking spots or truck stops short. If that was extrapolated to the Australian experience, purely on a population basis we would be about 2,500 road stops short, assuming that all other things were equal. That troubles us, because we have looked at the service station type of truck stops at Guyra and at Kempsey, and we have looked at plans for these new ones with swimming pools gyms and banks and so on. But what did concern us a little bit was that the Driver Reviver program people were invited in all states, and I do not think one has responded. Not one has responded. We thought that we could have got some good evidence from them on whether there is a case for the improvement of Driver Reviver—whether there should be state or federal government subsidies, whether there were any studies being done into their strategic placement. In New South Wales, for example, they like to have them close to the town on the premise that if you can slow someone down on the outskirts of the town and give them a cup of coffee they might even stop in the town and have an even longer rest. Queensland takes the view, however, that you put it out between two major towns to maximise the impact of stopping along the highway—not waiting to come to the next town. So there you have got two points of view and they are quite divergent. Victoria might have a different philosophy again. Any influence as the Accident Commission you could bring to your colleagues in that field would be helpful to us. We are not trying to put them under some unrealistic pressure; we want to talk to them to understand where they are coming from. I think they have probably got a wealth of data albeit anecdotal that could be very helpful to lots of organisations. So that was the first thing I wanted to raise with you. Have you any comment on that?

Mr Healy—With respect to Driver Reviver, it is called Operation Coffee Break in Victoria but it is exactly the same program. Certainly it is a loose coalition of groups, if you like, including the Lyons Club—

Mr NEVILLE—Mainly Lyons clubs—

Mr Healy—and SES in Victoria, certainly—State Emergency Services—who, I think, choose locations which they deem to be safe. Now I cannot tell you in answer to your question the actual criteria they use with respect to placement in each region. So that is something which I could certainly take back and make inquiries about.

Mr NEVILLE—We want to know whether the Victorian government considers it has been a success; should it go further; what assistance the state or federal governments could give it. It seems to me an admirably sensible thing to do but, after all these years, I am surprised we do not have more data on it—on the value it could be in the community.

Mr Healy—I agree. There is in fact I think there was a small survey undertaken by VicRoads some years ago looking at the level of patronage at each of the particular stops in Victoria and, while levels of patronage did vary quite significantly from one to the other, it was also overall quite high. Not only that, there was a significant number of young people

who we thought may be less likely to actually stop at these stops within those groupings. With respect to Driver Reviver, because it actually operates only on very specific weekends, with respect to the total trauma picture that relates to fatigue it can only have a very limited impact in terms of the total picture. However, I think that, quite apart from that benefit that directly accrues—and we do not know how big that is from Driver Reviver stops at those particular times—I think it that it serves a broader purpose in terms of a signal to the community so that, even if people do not stop there, they may well choose to stop at the next town and they may well choose to stop on the next trip outside the holiday period.

Mr NEVILLE—Plant the seed of the idea in their mind.

Mr Healy—Exactly, but it is actually creating a climate in which it is an important issue to take a break. So while there have not been specific studies along those lines I believe that that is one of the broader goods arising out of the Driver Reviver program.

CHAIR—Coming from Victoria I am familiar with your education and especially your television campaign—as is Mr McArthur—but the other two members of the panel are from other states. Could you perhaps elaborate and tell us what are some of the communication campaigns which you have developed and how successful they have been and what evidence you gather to ascertain the effectiveness of that education program?

Mr Healy—Certainly, there have been three major campaigns directed at fatigue. They have been aired at different times. That is not just three appearances on television. That is over a period of about six or seven years, I would say.

Mr Staindl—Seven years.

Mr Healy—Yes, seven years since the first campaign was introduced. The specific message within the television component has been that fatigue is a definite problem, the outcomes are very severe, and you can do something to alleviate that. Sitting under that have been a series of specific messages, sometimes incorporated within the television, such as the most recent power nap reference—to take 10 or 15 minutes sleep. The others have been sitting under that by virtue of the regional media such as radio, or outdoor advertising, which contains specific practical messages with respect to sharing the driving—

Mr Staindl—Including a link directly to Operation Coffee Break.

Mr Healy—That is right. When they are operating, we actually do provide press advertising to state the exact locations of those throughout the state to assist some form of trip planning during the holiday periods. With respect to effectiveness, we do not have a specific link between the advertising per se and direct crash involvements. Our evaluation has been at the level of the degree to which the messages have penetrated our target audience, the degree to which the message is understood and the extent to which there is at least self-reported changes of behaviour.

For instance, in our last campaign, which was the campaign which advocated taking a small nap, when we undertook our survey, 68 per cent, after prompting, remembered the campaign and the messages. I think one in five of those admitted to changing their behaviour

to some safer form. So that is really the limit in terms of evaluation. It is very difficult to link it to crash outcomes.

Mr Staindl—The same issues David alluded to with regard to measuring fatigue related trauma applies also, I think, to evaluating fatigue related countermeasures.

Mr McARTHUR—We received evidence on the Pacific Highway that in the holiday periods it was predictable that drivers would leave Sydney on a Friday night over a holiday weekend; they would get half-way at 2 o'clock in the morning and, statistically, there were likely to be some accidents take place. Have you got any evidence here in Victoria of similar situations—of people driving from Melbourne after work to go to seaside resorts?

Mr Healy—We have no definitive study in that regard, but anecdotally at times on the weekend you notice that, particularly in holiday periods, you do notice at times some of the fatal crashes. Without looking at the details of the crash or the factors leading up to that crash, it is very likely that fatigue is implicated in many of them.

Mr NEVILLE—What about an advertising campaign, along the lines that Mr McArthur is suggesting, at the beginning of holiday periods saying, 'Do you really need to leave tonight, or do you really need to leave on Christmas Eve?' Do you know what I am saying?

Mr Healy—I do.

Mr NEVILLE—Especially an organisation like yours which is in a position to influence government advertising.

Mr Staindl—In fact, that is a strategy that we have adopted. Particularly with fatigue related campaigns, it is very much targeted at those known holiday periods. Easter is a classic example: people are likely to be driving long distances over a short period of time. We have tried numerous approaches, over those three campaigns that David described, to actually educate motorists as to, firstly, the risks involved in attempting a long stint of driving, particularly after a day's work and, secondly, some potential alternatives: whether it be planning your trip, breaking it in two where you will actually stop somewhere half-way along the route or whether in fact you decide to stay home that night and leave in the morning having had a full night's sleep.

Mr McARTHUR—Are you planning to do that, or are you having any impact on that whole regime?

Mr Staindl—No, we have done that in different ways as part of the various fatigue related campaigns that we have run. Again, evaluating those is somewhat problematic. What we have seen is that when we have launched campaigns which have been shown in retrospect to be highly prominent in the minds of television viewers or media consumers we have also had traditionally a low road toll over the Easter period, which is traditionally quite a dangerous time on the roads. The problem in looking at those sorts of numbers is that we are talking low figures and there does tend to be a fair bit of variation regardless. Again, evaluation is a problem.

Mr McARTHUR—What would you people say is the reason for the death toll reducing from 1,100 down to, I think, it is 350 or 400 per annum? Would you like to give a brief summary from where you see it?

Mr Staindl—If I can start on that and David can also give some comments. The 1,100 figure—it was a bit below that—goes back to about the late 1960s, 1970. If you look at the graph from there over 30 years to where we are today, you will see quite a significant drop-off from the early 1970s where you saw introduction of mandatory seat belt legislation, and there is no doubt that that had a significant impact. I think you then see another dip around the late 1970s, early 1980s, and David is probably better versed on those figures.

Mr Healy—At that point of time too, I think, random breath testing was introduced for the first time in Victoria. I think that gave considerable impetus to reduction in trauma. That was the first time it has been introduced worldwide. It was actually introduced, I think, in 1977, but I would need to check on that. Programs were starting to be introduced such that your chances of getting caught for drink driving were growing quite considerably, at least during blitz periods.

Mr Staindl—And then you look from say, the mid-1980s through to the late 1980s when there was a gradual trending upwards and then a very dramatic drop-off from the beginning of 1990 through to about 1993, and that has sort of plateaued since then.

Mr McARTHUR—The reason for that?

Mr Staindl—That is about a halving of the road toll over that period. You saw the introduction of a massive booze bus campaign where there were dedicated buses designed and delivered to Victoria police for distribution and testing throughout country Victoria and metro Victoria. We saw a more than doubling of breath tests in a very short space of time. You saw the introduction of 54 speed cameras throughout the state, which was the first time that technology had been sighted in the state and you saw for the first time hard hitting media campaigns produced by TAC. Those three factors really came into play over a very short space of time. I think it really served to awaken public consciousness to the issue of road trauma—and very successfully.

Mr McARTHUR—Would it be fair to say that, because of the success of these campaigns, the fatigue factor might be overlooked, that we have overcome the road trauma problem and therefore fatigue on country roads is something that somebody else will look at, not me?

Mr Staindl—I certainly would not agree that it has been overlooked, because it is something that we have specifically targeted.

Mr McARTHUR—No, in the public mind?

Mr Staindl—I think it is probably an issue that we have not been as successful in alerting the community to the potential severity of driving when fatigued. Some research would indicate that, after a full day, a 24-hour stint without sleep actually can be equated to driving with a blood alcohol level in excess of .05 per cent. Most people, I think, would not

consider driving if they think they are were over the blood alcohol limit but would be far less concerned at the prospect of driving if for whatever reason they had had a full day without sleep. So I think your point is well made.

Mr NEVILLE—That is not uncommon on the Thursday before Easter or Christmas Eve—not uncommon for people to have partied the night before, to have worked hard all day, to have packed up the kids and taken off at nine or 10 o'clock at night onto a busy road.

Mr Healy—That is very true. With respect to fatigue too, the TAC has certainly played a role in recent times with respect to people understanding it as an issue and in practical ways responding. But in terms of solving the whole issue of fatigue in a framework where there is no regulation—certainly there is some regulation within the heavy vehicle industry—if we look at the broader population, we do not have the advantages, as we have had with drink driving and speeding, to have a regulatory and hence an enforcement framework for change as well as education.

Mr McARTHUR—We are not expecting that but, as a Victorian citizen, I was just drawing the comparison that you have been very successful in the speed camera, the alcohol and the seat belt. Seat belts were the first one you mentioned, weren't they?

Mr Healy—That is right, in 1970.

Mr McARTHUR—So three things have been very successful so there would be a tendency for the Victorian public to overlook the fatigue, although your coffee break stops and your Drowsy Drivers Die sort of program probably needs beefing up? We would say on this committee that the evidence is that that is a factor.

Mr Healy—I take your point.

Mr McARTHUR—The final question is: if you were recommending to government that driver fatigue was a problem and that it was important to have stops for domestic vehicles, what would you be recommending as to how they would be placed, how many and what the program would be?

Mr Healy—It is very difficult. We do not necessarily pretend to be experts with respect to locations of particular sites but it would clearly make sense based on the evidence that you have a reasonable gap between them in the order of an hour or more. Obviously, signage is very important—advanced signage with respect to usage of the sites, so that people are well aware and have had a chance for discussion within the car to make a decision, 'Will we or won't we stop?'

Mr McARTHUR—Are you putting that argument to the policy makers?

Mr Healy—These have certainly been discussed around the table.

Mr McARTHUR—Yes, but you are the experts in this fatigue thing. You are the closest to the argument.

Mr Staindl—It is actually something we enact. With the Operation Coffee Break we will use mobile billboards to actually alert motorists some way in advance of the site approaching for that very reason. David, you are probably more aware that VicRoads regulations—

Mr McARTHUR—Let me put it to you that it is very difficult to find a roadside site on some of the major roads in Victoria, even if you know the roads very well. I come from country Victoria and I know most of them, but even then it is hard to find them and sometimes there is an element of concern about the location and somebody attacking you.

Mr NEVILLE—In Queensland they use the diagrammatic tree with the criss-cross leg of a picnic bench—and that is the rest area symbol.

Mr Healy—Okay.

Mr NEVILLE—As Mr McArthur is suggesting, the whole state gets to know that that particular symbol means there are picnic type facilities—rest facilities available.

Mr Healy—I understand. VicRoads is in fact undertaking a review of the number and locations of its rest stops throughout the state, but I could not tell you the result of that review.

Mr McARTHUR—Are you making a contribution to that argument because you are close to this whole driver fatality fatigue argument?

Mr Healy—To be fair, with respect to the TAC, our main role has been to provide education with respect to what are the key factors, how you can alleviate some of those factors, and VicRoads and other organisations are certainly privy to that information which we provide.

Mr McARTHUR—Yes but we would say from this committee's point of view and as citizens that you can have all the information and yet you cannot find a place to have a rest.

Mr Healy—I take your point.

Mr McARTHUR—What we are saying is that you are in an ideal position—you spent a lot of money, I make the observation. You might spend a bit of money on developing the roadside stop program: first, how the public know that they can have a roadside stop; second, it is a good thing; third, it is safe; and, four, it is a respectable thing to do.

Mr Healy—Well can I say that we are promoting the use of the roadside stops as such as they are available. But, in terms of responsibility for their placement and location and signage, that does not rest with us. although we have had discussions at a general level.

Mr McARTHUR—You are in charge of the public education program as we are in this committee to try and alert people to this fatigue argument, and you are close to the argument and we would be suggesting to you that you might use some of your public relations resources, as we might do, in suggesting these roadside stops. We are getting evidence from

America and here in Australia, with all the argument we have had, that there is no way physically to pull off on the side of the road, because the wayside stops just are not here.

Mr Healy—I take your point.

Mr Staindl—Your point is taken. Might I just add also that I think one of the interesting things that really came to light in researching the most recent campaign, the power nap campaign that David described earlier, was that rest sites on their own may only go part of the way to alleviating the problem—that for some people, by virtue of the lack of sleep they have experienced over the preceding hours before driving, the only cure is actually having some sleep. And I think the issues are a probably a little bit more complex than designing the sort of rest stops that we are talking about where people do actually feel secure to sleep, and whether or not that should be where we are directing people or whether we should be directing them to townships to do that. But it is more than just having them get up and have a cup of coffee and a Kit Kat. That is potentially part of the solution. and another part of the solution is definitely encouraging them to have some sleep.

Mr NEVILLE—Does your main roads organisation allow a caravan to stop overnight at the ones that have toilets and tanks?

Mr Staindl—I do not think so.

Mr Healy—I cannot be certain on that one, Senator.

Mr NEVILLE—They have quite a good rule in Queensland, such that if you are towing a caravan and you go to one of these particular spots, provided that they have toilets and tanks, the caravan can stay for 24 hours. That means if a caravan driver is just puffed out and had too much, they do not feel that they are breaking the law. But they are only allowed to stay the one night.

Mr Healy—Yes, I understand.

Mr Staindl—We certainly researched it prior to the campaign. The power nap campaign was only launched this year. We researched it with regard to private motorists just stopping on the side of the road for a nap or at a designated rest stop, and there are no restrictions in doing that on the basis that the position they have stopped in is safe and that there are not council by-laws. I think some of their coast-side councils actually have some laws to prevent people from setting up camp beside the beach. With regard to caravans, I could not answer that. It is quite possible that you would be allowed to do that in a designated rest stop, but I could not answer, I am afraid.

Mr NEVILLE—We have strayed a little from the core issue. I realise that, as government employees, you are somewhat constrained, but I would be interested to hear your view nevertheless. Is it your opinion that it is better to have fatigue management programs linked to occupational health and safety concerns, especially for commercial organisations—trucking companies, commercial travellers and the like? Or is it better to have fatigue management programs as a dimension of a company's or an organisation's quality assurance program?

If you put it under workplace health and safety or under occupational health and safety, you have got the problem that you have got to be somewhat prescriptive, and you have got to be in the mood to penalise for breaches. If you do it the other way, you are saying, 'If you do not have a proper, auditable fatigue management program, then we are not going to give you QA rating, therefore, you will not be able to do business with the government and a lot of big organisations.' Do you have any feeling for which is the better way to go?

Mr Healy—It is a good question. I cannot say I have got a definitive answer. I think that occupational health and safety, to the best of my knowledge, can have potentially a very significant impact on employers, simply because it has some teeth, and if the penalties are brought to bear they can be costly to the employer.

Mr NEVILLE—Our concern is that, if you make it prescriptive and it is another Big Brother stick to wag at people, certainly you will catch some of the offenders whereas, if you go the other way, you may create a culture of safety and get all the firms in.

Mr Healy—I take your point and I think that the latter is preferable in the sense that when I talked briefly about fleet management in our submission, fleet management goes beyond occupational health and safety. Fleet management is much more concerned with quality management: 'This is how we look after our employees. This is how we have concerns for their safety as a company, as an organisation.' It extends well beyond fatigue, to the choice of vehicle, so that it is a safer form of vehicle in the event of a crash, or to avoid a crash. It extends to, 'We expect you as an employee to adopt processes which we believe enhance your safety and the wellbeing of yourself and of the company as a whole.' In terms of a cultural change, I think that can be genuinely beneficial.

Mr NEVILLE—You provide in your organisation a compensation for third-party accidents: is that it? To the individual or to the vehicle as well?

Mr Staindl—No, just personal injury.

Mr NEVILLE—And you say it is on an ongoing basis?

Mr Staindl—Correct.

Mr NEVILLE—Does it have prescribed limits, or is it determined by courts?

Mr Staindl—One element is common law, and that does have prescribed limits. But then there are lifetime benefits for medical rehabilitation and for the very seriously injured: loss of earnings for life, which are no fault, and the loss of earnings are capped but the medical and rehabilitation benefits not capped.

Mr NEVILLE—That was very interesting evidence and we thank you for it. If you are talking to your colleagues within government, we would be interested to hear more from your Driver Reviver program.

Mr Staindl—I am certainly willing to do that. With the types of organisations you are talking about, the SES are the coordinators of the programs—

Mr NEVILLE—I understand the RTA and the main roads departments have some coordinating units within them. There is a reference point, I understand, in each state. I do not know what the reference point is in Victoria. I do not think it is Lions and SES. There is some facility within government.

Mr Healy—I suspect that it may well be SES in Victoria.

Mr NEVILLE—If you could pass that on, we would be most grateful.

Mr Staindl—Is the committee sitting in Melbourne again?

Mr NEVILLE—Possibly not. We might be meeting here for another matter on 1 November. If there is any spare time, we could possibly see one witness then, but it is a bit early to say yet. The other thing is that we would be interested in a bit of information on the policy of the government on roadside stop areas and surveys and so on. On that note, thank you for your evidence. You will receive a copy of the *Hansard* draft for today. Thank you again.

[3.38 p.m.]

WILLIAMS, Mr Mark Gilbert, Director, Sanmar Consulting Group

Mr NEVILLE—Welcome, Mr Williams. I just have to read a caution that I have to read to all witnesses. Although you are not required to give evidence under oath today, committee hearings have the same legal proceedings as those of the parliament and warrant the same respect as to the House itself. The giving of any false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of the parliament. I apologise for possibly not hearing your full evidence. Would you like to give us a five-minute overview of your evidence?

Mr Williams—Yes, I would like to, thank you. My background in the road transport industry covers 25 years. I have relevant experience in managing major freight forwarding organisations; and they include TNT and, of recent years, Kalari Transport. In addition, I have been a buyer of freight services, so I have sat on the other side of the desk on several occasions. Our current business is consulting to manufacturers and logistics providers, including transport costings, modelling and viability analysis. We are also conducting audits on a regular basis for the Australian Trucking Association with their TruckSafe program. We are in regular contact with operators at all level of the industry. I feel that we are well qualified to make a contribution to the inquiry.

There is no one single contributing cause to fatigue amongst transport drivers in the road transport industry. In our submission we identified eight probable contributing factors, which have been detailed in the submission. I am sure that there are more. We have identified a number of initiatives that have been undertaken in recent years by the industry associations, state and federally based, and by legislators. We have suggested a number of things that can be assessed to further assist the participants in the road transport industry.

While some leading companies have made an attempt to operate in a more responsible manner, the industry as a whole has to experience substantial cultural change if it is to meet its duty of care obligations to the community. Operators and drivers really have two choices: either manage their businesses themselves more responsibly and professionally or have change forced upon them through legislation and increased penalties for non-compliance with the rules.

The road transport industry traditionally works excessively long hours and has a high rate of bankruptcy and a high rate of divorce. Driver turnover rates are also very high—upwards of 25 per cent. Major health problems through substance abuse are evident, and death while earning a living on the road is not uncommon. The road transport industry in Australia is very tough and uncompromising but, for the long-term good of the industry and the community, it really has to change.

The various industry associations that exist are necessary to assist and educate this industry. However, not everybody belongs; and there is a degree of cynicism amongst many operators as to the long-term motives of some of the industry leaders running these organisations. The cynicism is probably unfounded, but nevertheless it is there.

In the past 10 years we have experienced many changes, particularly with weight carriage and vehicle sizing. B-doubles now carry up to 40-tonne payloads and have dominated on the east coast; and road trains have been allowed access in the non-traditional areas—for example, Regency Park in Adelaide. B-doubles have delivered up to 20 per cent net gains in operating costs, all of which, due to the competitive nature of the industry, have been returned to the customer base—all the gains: none of them have been kept; and you only have to look at the results to see that.

The smaller operator, either unable or unwilling to convert to B-doubles, traditionally transporting up to 26 tonnes on a single trailer, has had to reduce rates in many cases to compete with the larger, 40-tonne vehicles. They are often operating as subcontractors and usually finish up with the most difficult loadings. They are under extreme pressure to maintain viability and are constantly pushed to the limits, not necessarily by any particular person or organisation, but by one or several of the causes identified in our submission.

Some of the larger operators will argue it is the smaller operators who have pushed the rates down to unsustainable levels. My view is that they share equal blame. Until such time as they start to understand their costs and returns and their viability, the industry will continue to put extraordinary pressure on itself and its members. Change is necessary. I am pleased to answer any of your questions.

Mr NEVILLE—Can I start off with the last question I asked of the previous witness? We have had this dilemma of whether fatigue management should be made a dimension of occupational health and safety—which would require a certain amount of prescription and perhaps litigation or prosecution—or whether we should make a dimension of quality assurance, which would mean that, if someone wants government contracts or contracts from some of the major companies who demand quality assurance, and if you want to be in the loop you have to have a culture of fatigue management within your company. We have seen some good examples of this in this inquiry—Nolans from Queensland, for example. What is your view? Can it be done on a cultural basis, or has it got to be the big stick approach?

Mr Williams—In the road transport industry at this point in time, it is probably a question of both. Through the organisations there is an attempt to introduce quality assurance, either as a complete quality assurance unit, or as a truck safe type self-accreditation unit. Right now with the RTF or the ATA, there are only about 350-odd operators that are accredited that are not auditable. There are a lot more operators out in the marketplace who are not in associations, are not following quality assurance criteria in their companies and probably the only way to manage them is through the OH&S laws and regulations right now. It would be preferable to go the other way in the long term, the cultural change.

Mr NEVILLE—As a person who has had a lot to do with transport companies, we received evidence from Professor Dinges that America is 24,000 truck stops short. If we extrapolate that to Australia—and I realise the circumstances are not totally equal, but all other things being equal—that would mean we are probably 2,500 short in Australia. What is your view on that and what form should they take?

Mr Williams—Certainly there should be good quality road stops and plenty of them for drivers. The problem is probably a little bit deeper than that; the problem for drivers comes back to scheduling, it comes back to proper sleeping facilities on the road and by that I mean, better cab design, better sleeping design in their cabs. Where they actually pull up is probably not such a concern for the driver as having a decent place to sleep.

Mr NEVILLE—Shade would be important, would not it?

Mr Williams—Shade is important, particularly in the summer time.

Mr NEVILLE—Toilets and water?

Mr Williams—Certainly, they are no different to the rest of us on the road.

Mr NEVILLE—Some people have given evidence that where a road has been partially bypassed or has been re-aligned, the old road could be used as a stop, but it is frequently just used as a gravel dumping pit for the state road authority. Is that your experience?

Mr Williams—We do a lot of driving ourselves and there are some very good truck stops, or road stops, and some very poor ones. I think the main criterion for a trucking operator or driver is the ability to get off the road, away from the noise, away from the traffic and have a decent place to sleep.

CHAIR—The committee has heard a lot of evidence about large companies having the resources to develop comprehensive fatigue management plans. Obviously one of the major contributors to the problem is the smaller operators. What, in your opinion, can be done to assist them to develop some form of fatigue management plan?

Mr Williams—I will answer that question in a moment. In regard to the larger companies, I do not know who you have been talking to, but we do some auditing and look at what happening in some companies. Some of the larger companies have no programs at all and I would say do not intend to have any.

The smaller operators are driven by viability and by their perception of how much they can drive. But they are certainly driven by viability—they are in that situation of having to work the truckers as hard as they can to maintain the payments so that they do not jeopardise their asset base.

CHAIR—Do you have a background as an actual driver?

Mr Williams—No, I do not.

CHAIR—How effective is the TruckSafe initiative and what improvements could be made to that?

Mr Williams—TruckSafe is a very good initiative, not because we audit with it necessarily, but it is the only initiative that exists in the industry on a national basis that has

any chance of changing the culture. So we would support the initiative very much. They have additional modules coming in, one of which will be a fatigue management module.

CHAIR—And what about control systems, such as safetycam and things like that. Do you believe they are effective ways of dealing with the problem?

Mr Williams—Certainly all of those things help. Safetycam is a policing mechanism, but it is not on every highway. It is on the Hume Highway, but some of the driving issues probably are not so much on the Hume Highway, where it is a relatively short transit and can be done legally overnight—except where a driver has to unload and reload, then it becomes a bit difficult for him. But you are not monitoring loading and unloading to any degree, you are monitoring driving hours on the road.

Mr NEVILLE—We have heard evidence that a lot of companies are very good in the actual hours of driving. The more responsible companies are not pushing the envelope too hard. You have alluded to sloppy management, but sometimes things are out of the control of the company—having to wait around for two or three hours to get into a depot or a warehouse, and then, at the other end, having to wait for two or three hours to get a slot into the supermarket loading bay or whatever it might be. Is there work that needs to be done in that field do you think?

Mr Williams—Very much so, and I think the duty of care implications need to extend down to those people and they need a better understanding of what is involved.

Mr NEVILLE—They should be liable if there is an accident?

Mr Williams—I believe they should be roped into that—absolutely.

Mr McARTHUR—How would you get them into the chain of responsibility, the depot operators loading and unloading? What would be your suggestion of how you hit the main company, the driver and then the forklift depot—how would you hook them all in?

Mr Williams—I think it has to be driven from the directors of those companies who are responsible for those forklift operators and the systems that they are using. I think that is an education process. I do not think there is any other way. You cannot force them into it other than continually educating them about the ramifications of their duty of care if they do not do it.

Mr McARTHUR—Yes, but with the chain of responsibility argument, you could say that somebody had been held up for five hours in the depot—that is why they were late, that was why they sped and that was why they had the accident. Surely there is some relativity there?

Mr Williams—As I say it really is an education of those people in that chain of responsibility. The people running those companies, those divisions, need to be thoroughly educated on driving requirements for drivers and the level of risk that they are putting into the system by holding those people up.

Mr McARTHUR—Could I raise a number of other issues? Firstly, I congratulate you on the quality of your submission—I think it covers a great range of the issues that we are interested in and shows a depth of understanding of the road industry. I just want to raise the suggestion made by some of our witnesses about the point to point operations of interstate truck drivers through country towns and centres, driving the full distance to Melbourne or to Sydney, having to stop off at Wagga or Goulburn, that type of operation. I notice that you come from Stawell, and I wonder whether you could do that from Melbourne to Adelaide. Would you care to comment on that scenario and whether that will develop in the future?

Mr Williams—Yes, I think some of the leading companies are positioning their drivers strategically in regional areas so that they change them over and meet the driving hour criterion. In addition, those larger companies that are able to do that generally have depots in major metropolitan cities, so they can have the driver come out of the truck and have somebody else do the delivery or the pick up for them. Some of the smaller companies do not have the facility of a depot—they might have one in Melbourne but they do not have one in Sydney or Brisbane—so when the driver gets there he is on his own. He has to go and do the delivery, he has to do the pick up and has to come back. So the larger companies have a natural advantage in terms of being able to manage fatigue because they have the facilities in the depots and they have the regional bases where they can swap drivers over.

Mr McARTHUR—Do you think that will be more of a tendency on interstate runs—to get these regional depots where the family and the town and the safety factors are combining? It seems a logical extension.

Mr Williams—I think that as fatigue management in the road transport industry is better understood there will be a lot more of that.

Mr McARTHUR—In your submission you mention the credit availability to the smaller independent operators. What would be your recommendation in terms of trying to bring about a better, more responsible approach by those credit agencies to truckies?

Mr Williams—It is an issue of viability for these people. I think that the lending agencies should actually have to sit down and do a business plan with the operator, prior to lending the money. Quite often, the operators are able to buy the vehicle without a commitment from a customer or another operator that they may be working for, and those people are reluctant to give you contracts. But, at the very least, the credit agencies, I believe, should be made to sit down and do a viability analysis, not fob it off to some accountant to do it for them, but actually sit down with the people that they are selling the truck to in order to see whether they can actually be viable. They should make their decisions on that basis and draw them into the loop by doing that.

Mr McARTHUR—How would you incorporate this traffic accident fatigue/human life aspect to that commercial free market operation?

Mr Williams—You cannot stop the market, but you need to be responsible.

Mr McARTHUR—From our point of view as legislators, we have a responsibility to try to mitigate these horrific possibilities, and all the evidence leads to the fact that these smaller independent operators are pushed financially and they get into these fatigue-type problems.

Mr Williams—I think that, as legislators, you have helped create the situation in a way by making the playing field a little less level than what it should be. The larger operators can afford the bigger trucks—and I am not saying that they should not be allowed to have the bigger trucks, because that is good at the end of the day for everybody, hopefully—but the smaller operators have suffered because of that. They are not in a position to get a bigger truck and the net result is, as I said in the opening, that the rates get pushed down. The industry does not keep the benefits of that; the customer gets the benefit because the industry prostitutes itself very badly in that area. So the rate gets put down, and the smaller operator who wants to stay in the industry as a contractor needs to meet the going rate. If he is working for a prime contractor, he is going to work at a lesser rate than the prime rate because, obviously, the prime contractor wants to take a margin. If he is in the situation where he has got a smaller truck and the prime contractor has quoted the work for a B-double type scenario, then that rate can be considerably lower.

CHAIR—On one of our other visits to Melbourne, we had some quite radical evidence in relation to the use of stimulants in the industry, and this particular witness was advocating that some legislators should look at making some form of stimulants legal—like a caffeine based substance or something like that; we are not talking about barbiturates, but some form of mild stimulant—and available for the transport industry. How do you feel about that?

Mr Williams—I feel strongly that that should not happen. Through the auditing process, one of the modules that we audit on is driver health, and we do see some fairly sick drivers at a very young age. I feel very strongly that that should not happen. That is not addressing the cause of the problem.

CHAIR—There is another thing I would like to ask you: another witness today has pointed out the enormously competitive nature of the industry throughout Australia. There are a lot of players in the industry and that means that the bottom line is much lower for the smaller operators. That is a major contributing factor to the profitability of the industry, the smaller operators working on very, very low margins. Obviously, that must have a big impact on stress and, therefore, fatigue. Would that be a fair assessment do you think?

Mr Williams—Very much so, yes. Obviously, they do not have the overheads to accommodate what the larger operator might have. Nevertheless, if they miss too many loads, they have got to make them up, because they have got to pay for that truck, or their own personal take out of the job is significantly reduced.

CHAIR—How would you feel about a compulsory fitness test to be mandatory for, say, a long-distance driving task? Do you think that would be an asset? Would that work?

Mr Williams—I would support that wholeheartedly, yes.

Mr McARTHUR—What would you incorporate in the fitness test, a walk around the truck?

Mr Williams—Regular medicals with a doctor who had a set of criteria to go through.

Mr McARTHUR—Why couldn't we bring that into the trucking industry? Couldn't we have something similar to what they have in the aircraft industry?

Mr Williams—We have it now through the TruckSafe program, but there are only about 350 current accredited operators in that program.

Mr McARTHUR—Out of how many truck drivers?

Mr Williams—There are 350 operators.

Mr McARTHUR—How many operators would there be?

Mr Williams—I think there are about 3,500. It is a very low level at the moment.

Mr McARTHUR—Could I raise the issue of pay rates?

Mr Williams—Yes.

Mr McARTHUR—What is your view on the way drivers should be paid? Do you think it should be per kilometre or per hour or annualised?

Mr Williams—When I was at Kalari, we were paying per hour. The drivers, by virtue of that, were not really pushed to make a decent living—if I can put it that way. Nevertheless, the company was not going too well either, at that time—not simply because of the driver problems, there were other problems as well.

Through the enterprise bargaining agreement that we conducted with the TWU, it was agreed to go to a kilometre rate base for interstate driving. I do not really think it made a substantive change to the way that the fellows worked because we were also at that stage extremely responsible about the way they were working. In fact, I changed the methods of operation in the company quite significantly when I went there because of concerns I had about the way it was operating.

I do not really think there is a connection between the hourly rate and kilometre rate per se on fatigue. The question of paying people on an annual salary, I really have not examined that in any detail for that sort of work.

Mr McARTHUR—Which one are you recommending?

Mr Williams—I am not recommending either. I do not think either one really has a bearing on fatigue.

Mr McARTHUR—Do you think there is an impact on the fatigue safety factor if they are pressed to do more kilometres?

Mr Williams—It really is a lack of awareness by management—supervisors and sometimes owners—as to what is legal and what is reasonable, rather than what they are getting paid. Some companies are paying well under the listed kilometre rate and that may put on a bit of pressure, but that is really an issue for that company—the drivers and the unions involved.

Mr McARTHUR—Could I move to the cabin design argument you put in your submission. I note you are suggesting that the B-doubles and cabin design are a problem. I would personally concur with you that the emergence of B-doubles on Victorian roads is a major problem. It has come to my attention that there was a change in the regulations in relation to the movement of timber products—because of competition from the rail system. Could you comment on those two points? Would you expand on the point about the cabin design, which you raised in your submission? Would you also expand on the change in regulation so that longer timber products could be carried. Are you aware of that?

Mr Williams—I will talk about the cabin design first. The problem in Australia is that we are regulated by overall length. In America, they are regulated by the length of their trailing equipment. When you are regulated by overall length, this does not apply to all products because you have product in the industry which is either dead weight or cubic freight; one being heavy and one being light and there are some in between. On a B-double, you can fit on about 34 pallets each weighing 1.2 tonnes and you can be legal on the axle weights, but to do that and stay within the 25-metre length that applies to a B-double, you have to put a bullnosed cabin on that truck which restricts the size of the sleeping compartment because the operator—whether that be the subcontractor or the owner of the truck—is trying to maximise the length of that trailer so he can increase his payloads.

With heavier freight, such as quarry products, steel and things like that, it is not such a consideration. You can put a forward control truck in front of that trailer because the trailers do not have to be so long.

I would say that 30 per cent of the freight that is on the road travelling on B-doubles is really using a flat-nosed prime mover for the reasons I have just outlined. If we were to legislate for overall length of trailer rather than overall length of truck, then some of the trucks that were at the recent truck show could legally be put in front of the trailers. These trucks are beautiful; they look like they are straight out of America and they have cabs in them with refrigerated areas and big sleepers which are really what some of these long distance fellows need.

Mr McARTHUR—You would be recommending to this committee that we look at that?

Mr Williams—Absolutely.

Mr McARTHUR—And would you be doing it at a federal level? Would you want the federal government to try to standardise the regulations?

Mr Williams—I would.

Mr McARTHUR—What is the position now? Could you advise the committee, is this a state by state length position?

Mr Williams—No, it is federal.

Mr McARTHUR—So the federal government could make quite an impact by just adjusting that minor ruling?

Mr Williams—They could.

Mr McARTHUR—The rationale for total truck length is what—

Mr Williams—Sweep path.

Mr McARTHUR—Trying to cut it back a bit.

Mr Williams—The rationale of maximising the length you can go to is a sweep path consideration. There is some work going on at the moment and some presentations are going through to the regulators on increasing the length slightly. There is a recognition of it, that it does need to happen for the sake of safety on the road and fatigue. It will help those people.

Mr McARTHUR—Yes, my timber argument.

Mr Williams—Your timber argument—I do not know much about the timber industry.

Mr McARTHUR—I understand the regulation was changed just to suit the trucking industry which disadvantaged the rail industry and it was to do with the length of trailer. A minor change was made to allow the—you are not familiar with the debate?

Mr Williams—I do not think I am, to be honest.

Mr McARTHUR—Could I just pursue the log book argument. We have had a number of witnesses talking about log books being inadequate compared to some computerised technology to identify the time the truck is operating and the time the driver is on the road. Would you care to comment on those two arguments?

Mr Williams—Log books are well known as being cheat sheets, so they really do not hold up too well. If there is a major accident and it is investigated, the people investigating will look for evidence other than log books because they know that they are not really applied correctly. There is technology available. Companies in America are using global positioning systems in running their businesses. Obviously there are large companies running 3,500 to 5,000 trucks that are able to afford those systems and they can actually regulate the driving hours on a continuous basis through those global positioning systems. There are less sophisticated systems available, equipment that you can have in the cab of the truck and you can download that information. People like Fleetcom, a well known brand name, have several systems. Some of the manufacturers now, such as Cummins, actually have computer systems monitoring the engines so that you know when they are turned off, what revs they are running at and that sort of thing. There is quite a bit of technology available.

Mr McARTHUR—I refer to the health argument that we have observed at some of the depots: have you got a view on that? I notice that you mention in your submission the feeding arrangements for truck drivers?

Mr Williams—The feeding arrangements and their dietary habits.

CHAIR—Quality of the food.

Mr Williams—Yes. Even with the companies that are in the TruckSafe program, we see a number of long-term health problems. A part of our role is to audit those medicals. These are responsible companies that are in this program, so I would be concerned that the companies that are not in the program are not doing as well and probably not better.

We see a lot of diabetes. Truck drivers drink a lot of high sugar soft drinks, with caffeine in them. Then there are their eating habits in roadhouses: if you go to a roadhouse you eat a lot of fatty food. Drivers are generally overweight. In fact, obesity is a big problem with drivers. There is some work being done, again through the ATA and through their programs, on educating companies and drivers on how to eat more healthily. There is a long way to go in that area—the evidence is anecdotal, but I feel these factors would contribute to fatigue. The fitter a person is, the less fatigue they are likely to get.

Mr McARTHUR—Have you got a view on the age of the truck drivers—that is, on the entry into and exit from the industry? It has been suggested that the exit age of about 60 years is too old. We had some evidence that when bus drivers reach 55 to 60 they should be thinking about retiring, but the Commonwealth legislation on restriction by age was quite a problem. Would you care to comment on those two issues?

Mr Williams—Yes, I would. In my experience the current laws which are driven by the insurance companies on interstate drivers needing to be 25 and over is appropriate. You really do need people who have got experience on the road at handling trucks. As drivers get older, I do not think age is a consideration, I think it is a lifestyle consideration. Under the current TruckSafe program's medical criteria, if you are over 49, you need to have an annual medical. If you are under 49, you need to have one every three years. Those medicals pick up on any particular problems which are then required to be monitored by the operator. Some operators—

Mr McARTHUR—Do you think we should legislate for those medicals in this driver fatigue area? Should there be a legislative requirement for drivers to make some effort to keep themselves reasonably in trim?

Mr Williams—Yes.

Mr McARTHUR—What would be the reaction of the trucking industry to that?

Mr Williams—Not good.

Mr McARTHUR—Not good. But would you get away with it politically if you drew the comparison with the airline industry, and pointed out that they have to do it?

Mr Williams—You really have to look at it seriously. I think you would get away with it. People will accept that there is a point of entry to the industry that they have to abide by. However, you want to go down the track of accreditation as the point of entry or point of entry such as that, but I think you need to do something in that area—particularly with health.

Mr McARTHUR—What about the turnover of truck drivers? Professor Dinges was saying that in America there was a very big turnover and now the trucking companies were starting to look more carefully at the welfare of their drivers and their skills because of that turnover factor. Would you care to comment on what is happening in Australia?

Mr Williams—To make a general comment about the industry, there are some operators who are certainly looking after their people well. They are certainly concerned about training them, keeping them healthy and keeping them in the company. There are other operators who really do not give a darn. If they have a problem with a driver, they think that the best thing to do is to get rid of the problem, and that happens regularly.

Mr McARTHUR—Get rid of the—

Mr Williams—Get rid of the problem. Find another driver.

Mr McARTHUR—Find another driver?

Mr Williams—Yes.

Mr McARTHUR—What about the natural attrition of the drivers who leave for other reasons?

Mr Williams—There is a natural attrition as there is in any other business, but in truck driving it seems to be higher than the average.

Mr McARTHUR—On the hours of driving: what is your view on the 14-hour driving span with a number of breaks, if you are on the interstate run? Or should it be 12 hours? We have had varying debates as to what the prescriptive hours should be. What would your assessment be of that whole debate?

Mr Williams—My assessment of the 14-hour debate is that 14 hours is too long. My understanding of that is that there is insufficient control over working hours beyond the 14, such as loading and unloading. My personal view is that 12 hours is quite sufficient as a working time frame and includes loading and unloading.

Mr McARTHUR—How would you identify the 12 hours? If log books are no good, what would you recommend the regulators do to identify the 12-hour shift?

Mr Williams—You need to be able to audit what the driver has done before the actual driving and after the actual driving. So you need the operator to be able to show you what that driver has done. But the bit in between the actual driving is easy to calculate, because the truck can only travel at so many kilometres an hour and the distance is X, so you know

how long it is going to take to get from point A to point B. The problem within the trucking industry is what is happening to those people before that driving and after that driving. So you need the companies to be able to identify quite clearly by driver what they have been doing.

Mr McARTHUR—What they do before they step into the truck in the loading and unloading regime?

Mr Williams—In the loading and unloading regime. As I said earlier, larger companies tend to have depots in every state, so their drivers tend to become shuttle type of drivers rather than the old style truck driver as we used to know him who would do his own loading and unloading. There has been a lot of change because of companies developing substantive depots around Australia.

If you have somebody auditing—whether it be an auditor through an accreditation program as we are or whether it be an authority—needs to be able to know what that guy has been doing through the payment records or through some sort of work sheet records or job card records that may be in the company.

Mr McARTHUR—It leads on to the next question of the fitness to work—when the driver turns up at whatever time, for example, 8.00 a.m.—after his previous 12 hours. Do you have a comment on how we might help in that whole arena of both the build-up of fatigue of long interstate runs and the private fatigue related activities of individuals in their own home situation?

Mr Williams—It is of concern. Supervisors and owners of companies really cannot be responsible for what somebody does in their time off. You can impact on what time they start at the start of the week to make sure that they get to their first point of destination in a legal manner. I really think it is an education program. We have noted some success with companies talking to the families and the wives, and sending information through as to what may happen if the fellow is not getting proper rest and is not following proper habits when he is not actually working.

Mr McARTHUR—It would seem that the tourist bus companies are very strict on that particular aspect, likewise the airline industry are looking very carefully at the domestic rest period of those workers. Why could the truck industry not do the same?

Mr Williams—I think the truck industry can certainly make an attempt by educating people on how important it is. But I do not think you can legislate to tell somebody when they can sleep or how much they will drink on their day off.

Mr McARTHUR—Except it is part of the airline industry's charter—that people are requested not to participate in alcohol 12 hours before signing .

Mr Williams—The trucking industry is the same, in the main. But you cannot really live in their homes and make sure that they do not do it, and you do not breathalyse them before they get in the truck as a general rule. I am not suggesting that truck drivers all drink—it

would be wrong to suggest that. But I believe their personal habits when they are not working is more an education program.

Mr McARTHUR—Can I just raise the drug issue: what is your view on the whole participation by truck drivers in a range of drug taking?

Mr Williams—The drug issue is probably less prevalent than what it was. Nevertheless, I have employed drivers who have had substance problems myself and noted the change in their personal behaviour because of it. I think some of the current drivers that may not necessarily have to take drugs do have a habit and continue to take drugs anyway. I think there should be some programs in place that are assisting these people to get off their habits and educate them once again about the problems of substance abuse.

Mr McARTHUR—The modern truck design has been put to us by some of the experts as a factor inducing fatigue, that the truck's modern design is so smooth—the automatic steering and all the aids are a contributor to boredom and a greater fatigue possibility. Would you care to comment on that observation?

Mr Williams—The observation is only relevant if the fellow is fatigued. The object is to not have the operator in that position in the first place.

Mr McARTHUR—How would you get the operator in that position? If you were fully in charge of a trucking operation, what would be your optimum driving regime? I know that is very difficult because of the different conditions, but what would you like to see as the best way to run your fleet?

Mr Williams—As in any business the truck is a means to an end. It is an asset. The asset needs to be worked hard. You can work your asset very hard. You can work it 24 hours a day, seven days a week, but you have to have some of the things in place that you alluded to before, like driver changeover areas. You have to strategically position your business so you can achieve that, and you need to make sure that your work force is fit and fresh and able to do their job. That means not overworking them and also paying them a decent wage so that they do not feel that they have to—

Mr McARTHUR—You would pay them a decent wage. You would have back-up drivers so they would utilise that half a million dollar asset and you would try in normal business practice to keep it operating seven days a week?

Mr Williams—Keep it operating seven days a week, because 30 per cent of your costs of operating that asset are fixed and the more you operate that asset, the better result you are going to get and therefore you can afford to have these other things put in place.

Mr McARTHUR—Why would the companies not move to that sort of regime more and more?

Mr Williams—A number of the smarter and larger companies are doing that right now. The smaller operators who do not have back-up drivers and are on their own are not in a position to do it—other than driving long hours themselves.

CHAIR—Thanks very much, Mr Williams. That was very informative. I thank you for being available to give evidence to the committee. If the situation arises where we need some more information, I trust we can write to you and you can respond accordingly?

Mr Williams—Certainly.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. The secretariat will provide you with a proof of the *Hansard* recording of today and your particular evidence and of course it will be available on the parliament web site, probably by tomorrow. Again, thanks very much for coming. It was very informative. That concludes the day's hearings.

Resolved (on motion by **Mr McArthur**):

That this subcommittee authorises the broadcasting of this public hearing and the publication of the evidence given before it today.

Subcommittee adjourned at 4.23 p.m.

