COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATIONS, TRANSPORT AND THE ARTS

Reference: Managing fatigue in transport

FRIDAY, 23 JUNE 2000

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATIONS, TRANSPORT AND THE ARTS

Friday, 23 June 2000

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 McArthur, Mr Mossfield 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

Committee met at 10.29 a.m.

DAVIDSON, Mr Wayne Charles, Member, Steering Committee, Long Distance Owner Drivers

WALKER, Mr Rodger John (Private capacity)

ACTING CHAIR (Mr St Clair)—I declare open this public hearing of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications, Transport and the Arts in its inquiry into managing fatigue in transport. I welcome everyone to today's public hearing. In opening the proceedings, I should emphasise that in addressing the terms of reference the committee has not prejudged the issues, nor is there any element of a witch-hunt. Members want to hear a full range of views and consider initiatives which are being, or could be, developed to better manage fatigue in transport. Managing fatigue is a very important issue in the workplace and it has ramifications for all of us.

Under the terms of reference, the committee is asked to inquire into and report to parliament on managing fatigue in transport by focusing on four areas: the causes of and contributing factors to fatigue; the consequences of fatigue in air, sea, road and rail transport; initiatives in transport addressing the causes and effects; and ways of achieving greater responsibility by individuals, companies and governments to reduce the problems related to fatigue in transport.

The participants in today's program are owner-drivers of heavy road transport vehicles. These people regularly face the realities of driver fatigue and their views are directly relevant to this inquiry. I would like to thank all those who have generously given of their time to come and assist the committee with its inquiry today. It promises to be an interesting and informative day.

The committee welcomes Mr Wayne Davidson and Mr Rodger Walker. I thank you both for coming down from Newcastle because I know it is a day out of your work schedule. I would like to introduce to you my colleagues on this committee. I am a stand-in chairman because our chairman had to go up to his electorate because of the tragic deaths of the people at Childers. On my far left is my colleague Stewart McArthur, who is a Liberal Party member for Corangamite in south-western Victoria. My other colleague Colin Hollis is the Labor Party member for Throsby, based in Wollongong, so he is certainly aware of the steel issues. My colleague on my right, Mr Frank Mossfield, is the Labor Party member for Greenway, which is in Western Sydney—the Rydalmere-Parramatta area.

Before proceeding, I wish to advise all witnesses that although the committee does not require evidence to be given under oath, committee hearings are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House itself. However, the giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. Do either of you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear?

Mr Davidson—I am an owner-driver, representing the steering committee regarding the owner-drivers' dispute that is currently in place.

Mr Walker—I have been an owner-driver for 33 years. I reside in Newcastle. I am a member of the steering committee for the owner-drivers' dispute, in conjunction with the TWU.

ACTING CHAIR—We would like to thank you both for coming and I would certainly like to thank the committee for having you here because it was as a result of a telephone discussion that Wayne and I had that the committee felt it was necessary to get owner-drivers to appear before the committee so that we could get evidence on the issues affecting our inquiry into fatigue. Could I ask you to make some opening comments and then we might have some questions from my colleagues.

Mr Davidson—Fatigue cannot be managed just on a fatigue basis alone. The problem is that our industry is failing financially. Unless we address that, we cannot look after the fatigue problem. People now are doing more and more work for less money. They are working over their hours, driving faster and harder; there are drugs. It all comes into the one problem of rates versus safety.

Mr HOLLIS—On that issue, could you give us, for our information and for the record, a run-down on an average week or an average few days. Where are you based?

Mr Davidson—Newcastle.

Mr HOLLIS—Are you on a direct run, say, from Sydney or Brisbane?

Mr McARTHUR—Tell us what you do for seven days.

Mr HOLLIS—Just give us a breakdown.

Mr Davidson—Generally, I load in Newcastle, out of Com Steel, to go to Melbourne. When I get to Melbourne, I probably have—

Mr HOLLIS—You load on Monday, Tuesday?

Mr McARTHUR—Give us the detail: you load at what time, then which way do you go to Melbourne and where do you stop?

Mr Davidson—The time is whatever time they ring. If you load through the day, mid-afternoon, then you are in Melbourne on Tuesday morning, coming down through Sydney and down the Hume Highway.

Mr McARTHUR—You have not told us what time you leave. You load it mid-afternoon. You leave at what time?

Mr Davidson—You leave there at 3 o'clock in the afternoon.

Mr McARTHUR—And you get to Melbourne?

Mr Davidson—At 3 a.m.

Mr McARTHUR—So it is a 12-hour journey?

Mr Davidson—With your breaks, it is a bit over that. I generally sleep on the outskirts of Melbourne and I go in next morning and unload. That can take me anything up to four or five hours—it depends on how many drops I have got. If I get a load back out of Smorgon's at Laverton, I can go in there and then I can sit there for anything from one to 12 or 14 hours—there is no saying how long you are going to be in there. They take you in over the weighbridge and then you just sit and wait until they are ready to load you. It is the type of place where you do not get much sleep because they have got other vehicles moving through all the time, so you just sit there and wait. Once you load, if it is for Sydney you are expected to be there probably the next day.

ACTING CHAIR—When you go into Smorgon's, for example, are there any facilities for you to get away from noise or from yard work?

Mr Davidson—They have a canteen. You can sit in there.

ACTING CHAIR—What about sleep wise?

Mr Davidson—No, only in your truck. But, as I say, they have scrap trucks and other vehicles coming in and out, and there are speed humps all the way in there. There are no facilities. If it is hot, there are no shaded areas, so you are just in the cab of your truck.

Mr McARTHUR—So you have loaded at Smorgon's and you are back in Newcastle in another 12 hours. What happens then?

Mr Davidson—You unload back in Newcastle, or Sydney or wherever, and you ring up and book in for another load as soon as you can get another one on.

Mr McARTHUR—In the seven-day period we are up to three days now. What is happening in the next four days—a repeat performance?

Mr Davidson—Yes, if I can do another one, or I might get a load from Newcastle to Melbourne again and then load from Melbourne to Brisbane and then load from Brisbane back to Sydney.

Mr McARTHUR—Are you telling us you might do that over a seven-day period?

Mr Davidson—Yes.

Mr MOSSFIELD—What sorts of breaks do you have after you have had your actual shift? Do you take a certain number of days off?

Mr Davidson—By law, you have to have 24 hours off in seven days.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Each?

Mr Davidson—Yes. You are only supposed to work 72 hours a week. That is the law.

Mr McARTHUR—No, we are asking you what actually happens.

Mr Davidson—I own my truck and I actually do work into those—I generally go to bed of a night and have my six hours. You have to have a consistent six-hour break. I have that and then I go from there. A lot of blokes in positions where they are paying off trucks are not in that position—they just work consistently. We have blokes doing three a week to Melbourne and three a week to Brisbane. You cannot do it legally.

Mr Walker—That is common.

Mr Davidson—That is more common than the way I work.

Mr Walker—Absolutely. Wayne would be the exception, not the rule.

ACTING CHAIR—Can you tell us how they get around the regulations?

Mr McARTHUR—Can we get Mr Walker's program as well and then we have got a basis—

Mr Walker—I run a different operation to Wayne's. I run what is called a B-double, which is a two trailer application. My weight factor is much greater than Wayne's: I am a 65-tonne gross vehicle. I load only from two points, from BHP in Newcastle to a destination in Melbourne, and there are probably only three or four delivery spots that I go to. I do not do multiple deliveries. I normally go to one spot.

At some of those places that I go to you cannot take two trailers in the one street because it is against the law, so, because I have a B-double, I have to leave the trailer at a drop-off spot and then I have to go back out and pick up the other trailer, which all takes time. Some streets we are not allowed into until nine or 10 o'clock in the morning because it is residential beside heavy industry, from one side of the road to the other.

Mr McARTHUR—Is that in western Melbourne or eastern Melbourne?

Mr Walker—That is in western Melbourne, in the Laverton area. It is very difficult. You have to find somewhere to park. Hypothetically, if there are eight trucks going to the same destination—and those eight trucks would not necessarily have come from Newcastle, they could be coming from South Australia to the same company—we will wait until the 7 o'clock loading time so we all get there at seven and there is automatically a queue while we wait. Some trucks are on the road, they are parked where they should not be parked, but what do you do because there are the loading and unloading times.

The problem is that if I went to the BHP to load my truck and I have a 7 o'clock timeslot on Saturday night, it is possible to be there tomorrow morning at 7 o'clock and it is more the norm than the abnorm because of the production levels of the wire. You are in the lap of the gods in

the BHP. I live 16 kilometres from the BHP and I might not have been home for five days. I have had to go and load, it is 16 kilometres from home and then I am another seven, eight, nine hours in the BHP before I get a load on my truck. To load the truck takes no longer than 20 minutes—to physically load it with the machine—and it takes me another hour and a half to chain it up.

ACTING CHAIR—Why do they call you in when they are not ready? Do they call you in?

Mr Walker—Yes.

Mr Davidson—Yes, they do.

ACTING CHAIR—They instigate your coming to pick up a load? They say, 'There is a load ready. Could you come in and pick it up?'

Mr Walker—Absolutely, you are in a timeslot.

ACTING CHAIR—You go in there and sit there?

Mr Walker—You sit there. There are no eating facilities whatsoever—none. You have to take your own apples or fruit or whatever—I am a diabetic, so I have to be really careful; I have to take emergency rations, but I take that in the truck anyway. You just sit there. It depends where they direct you to be, but you can be right alongside the plant where the wire coils come off and that is a horrific noise that is going on all the time. Plus the fact that you move up in a queue, when they do start moving, so if you are getting any sleep at all it is all broken. You can be asleep for three-quarters of an hour and then bang, bang on the door and you move up again. By the time it comes your turn to load you have got a pretty short fuse, especially if you have just come home from a trip and it is a back-to-back leg—you have just unloaded in Sydney and you have raced up there for a timeslot.

Mr McARTHUR—We have had quite a lot of evidence on this loading and unloading. What reaction does the company have to your suggestion that they could do it better than just hopeless?

Mr Walker—I said to the superintendent of transport some years ago—I could supply the names—that surely BHP's intention is not to send our industry out to get tangled up with a car or caravan due to the excess work hours we are being kept in here and then expected to take a load to Melbourne. The time limit to get to Melbourne is two days, so that is not all that critical. But because the revenue is so low you have to go then because, otherwise, one day missed out in the week stops another return leg and it ends up throwing the whole system out and you end up with a problem. If, instead of doing two trips for the week or four legs—twice down and twice back—you say you will go home because you are tired and have had enough of the BHP or of whatever, that night off to go home can knock your revenue factor around critically.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Who sets the revenue rate?

Mr Walker—The revenue is set by Toll Transport. They are one of the prime contractors out of the BHP in Newcastle.

ACTING CHAIR—And you subcontract to Toll as an owner-driver?

Mr Walker—Yes, we subcontract to Toll.

Mr MOSSFIELD—If there was a better return economically, then you could afford to have more rest?

Mr Walker—Absolutely. After 33 years in this trade I can honestly say that I have never ever worked harder to try and make nothing. I had trucks that carted potatoes, produce, for many years. Because it was a seasonal product we did not make bad money, and it was hard work because we lumped all the spuds. But the system now is that we are forced to break the law through the rate structure because the industry at this very moment is not viable. That is a fact.

Mr McARTHUR—Do you own your truck?

Mr Walker—I own my truck but I have got one trailer that I do not own.

Mr McARTHUR—Mr Davidson, you own yours?

Mr Davidson—Yes.

Mr McARTHUR—What percentage of this big number of owner-drivers would you say has a very heavy debt load?

Mr Davidson—I would be on the smaller side of the equation that actually own their vehicles. I have not got figures that would tell you.

Mr McARTHUR—From talking to truckies at the truck stops, most of them are on a hire purchase arrangement.

Mr Davidson—I would say 85 per cent would still be paying off.

Mr Walker—That would be conservative.

Mr McARTHUR—There is a tremendous financial imperative to make the extra trip to pay the hire purchase company.

Mr Davidson—Yes. You are paying $4,500 to $5,500 a month on the repayment and another $1,200 or $1,400 to insure it. It goes on and on. Their income is in fact going down. Our rates in the last 10 years have gone backwards. My rates in the last 12 or 14 months have gone backwards worse. I never worked for a major company. I carted out of Com Steel in Newcastle. They sold out to the Smorgon group at Laverton. Their preferred carrier is K&S. They came in

and took over our work, cut our rates by $6 a tonne and put us back to what Toll are paying their subcontractors. Since then, I have not drawn a wage out of my vehicle. When you look at our costs for fuel and tyres alone, you are looking at about 94c a kilometre. We would average at the moment maybe $1.04 or $1.05 a kilometre.

Mr HOLLIS—Give us a thumbnail sketch of what would be required in both of your cases to make it a viable business—things like rates and loading time. Do you get paid for waiting time?

Mr Walker—Not at all.

ACTING CHAIR—Do you get a penalty if you are late?

Mr Walker—It depends on the company.

ACTING CHAIR—What would that be?

Mr Davidson—I have done a load for Concord Park. I only ever did one for them. On the con note, when you read it through, it is $100 an hour for being late.

ACTING CHAIR—If you turned up on time there is no criteria for them to unload you; so they can just sit you there?

Mr Davidson—When you get through to their customer at the other end, you have got to be on time, but you sit and wait until they are ready to unload you. Just because you are there, it does not mean you are going to get it straight off. But if you are not there, it is $100 an hour for being late.

Mr Walker—I have got in front of me rate structures from 10 years ago. This is our cost comparison from 1990 to 1995 and 1998 to the year 2000. Our cartage rates in 1990 compared with the year 2000 are something like $4 a tonne less now than they were 10 years ago.

Mr HOLLIS—How do you respond to this argument—and let me be a devil's advocate for a moment. We live in a free enterprise society. We are constantly told by the government, and I do not want to be political—

ACTING CHAIR—That would be unusual!

Mr HOLLIS—Every industry that you look at today is a competitive industry. We are told that competition is good because competition gives the best return to the customer, however it is defined. What happens if someone comes in and undercuts you? The government will say, 'We live in a free enterprise society. This is business at work. It might be the unacceptable face of capitalism; nevertheless, it is business at work and if these guys can't stand the heat, someone else will come in and do the business.'

Mr Davidson—That is where we are now.

Mr HOLLIS—Knock that argument down for me.

Mr Davidson—That is where we are now. If you did a poll on our industry, the majority would be insolvent.

Mr Walker—Absolutely.

Mr Davidson—If you did a drug test every month, on the Hume Highway or any major highway, you would find that the drug habit is worse than in any major city in this country.

ACTING CHAIR—Is that mainly amphetamines? What sort of drugs?

Mr Davidson—They are snorting cocaine. There are people who are injecting themselves.

Mr HOLLIS—To stay awake?

Mr Davidson—Yes.

Mr Walker—There are two cultures, I believe. There is a culture of people that use trucks as an excuse to take drugs and I believe there are people that drive trucks that use drugs as an enhancement to keep them awake.

ACTING CHAIR—What proportion?

Mr Walker—I believe that the younger generation is into the drug culture; the older generation need them as a stimulant to enhance their hours. In the percentages, drugs are more widely used by the younger generation—worse than I have ever seen. The social impacts of this will be down the track when those young people are our age—with kidney or liver failure and no spleen and with the social impacts of broken marriages, et cetera. The government of the day will then know what it is all about if they do not address it. I personally will be on record here as saying that I believe there should be mandatory drug testing every three months. I do not know about the implications of the law, but I know what is happening in our transport industry.

ACTING CHAIR—It is interesting that you say that because in one industry in my electorate, for example, they drug test for all new job applicants and 50 per cent are failing because of drug taking.

Mr McARTHUR—I wonder if we can get an answer to Mr Hollis's question.

Mr HOLLIS—About the free trade?

Mr McARTHUR—Yes.

Mr HOLLIS—You are in an industrial dispute at the moment.

Mr Davidson—Yes.

Mr HOLLIS—We are interested in what would make a viable industry or a viable job for you and the implications on society in the short or long term.

Mr Davidson—It comes back to our rate structures. We should be able to make a return out of our business. At the moment we are not.

Mr McARTHUR—But you are subcontracting to the major operators—

Mr Davidson—Yes, that is correct.

Mr McARTHUR—and you are putting a price in.

Mr Davidson—No, we do not get a choice. I have been to K&S with figures. I have sat down with Steve Minett and Graham Gooding at their office at Laverton and showed them the figures that I am working for. They tell me, 'Wayne, we owe you nothing. If you can't work on what we've got, you're quite welcome to go elsewhere.' I have no choice. They came and took over our work and I get no say in the rates.

Mr McARTHUR—In answer to Mr Hollis's question, what are they doing? Are they going broke as well?

Mr Davidson—I do not believe so. They are working on a rate structure. They take their percentage out—whatever they need to run their business—and then they leave what is left to us.

ACTING CHAIR—Can we just expand on that a bit? Do you get paid a per kilometre rate or a tonnage rate?

Mr Davidson—A tonnage rate.

ACTING CHAIR—Have you any idea what the difference is between what K&S, for example, were charging the prime supplier and what you get?

Mr Davidson—No, I am sorry.

ACTING CHAIR—So you would not know whether they get $1,000 a load and you get $600 a load?

Mr Walker—We are not driven to that. What the seven major players in Australia—the tall poppies of the transport industry—have done to make themselves more competitive against one another is that, instead of using their profit percentages up on the top end of the scale, they have used our percentages off our margins in dollars per tonne. They have milked the cow until it fell over; there is nothing left. So that made them competitive. They have sustained massive contracts out of it, but at our industry's cost.

Mr McARTHUR—Except that you are still there—you have not quite answered Mr Hollis's question—you are still driving the trucks and you are still on the road.

Mr Davidson—My truck is not. My truck is parked at home and will not work any more. I cannot afford to drive it at the moment because of the cost of things—our rates. I am better off to leave it parked at home. What will happen now is that, if I continue to work, something else has got to give—my maintenance has got to fall behind because I have not got the money to fix things such as tyres and brakes.

Mr McARTHUR—Are you going to leave the industry then?

Mr Davidson—No. I do not know anything else but this industry. I would be far better off if I parked my truck and got a job driving for somebody. If I worked for Linfox or someone like that, I would probably clear $1,000 a week with no worries at all. For the last 12 months, we have not pulled a wage out of our vehicle. K&S took our job, cut the rates and that is what we were left with.

Mr McARTHUR—But Mr Hollis is still posing this fundamental question: you are there, you are operating and if you do not operate someone else will come in behind you.

Mr Davidson—That is a fact.

Mr McARTHUR—As a committee, what observation do we make on that?

Mr Davidson—A lot of people, I believe, do not understand their costings in this industry. Anyone can go and buy a truck. If you can get the finance then—

Mr McARTHUR—Are you saying to us that there ought to be a better evaluation of the hire purchase arrangements, that they cannot buy a truck if—

Mr Walker—That is one.

Mr Davidson—All of those things, yes. That is why we are saying start out with licensing so that you can control the people who come into the industry. Anybody who gets a payout can just go straight in and buy a truck and they are on the road. They can go to Tolls, to any of the major companies, K&S, Linfox, and start work immediately without knowing the costings of their vehicle—

Mr Walker—And they just destabilise the industry once more.

Mr McARTHUR—Yes, but you have to answer the fundamental question. Mr Hollis, my good colleague here, is saying: here we are in a capitalist regime, you guys are out there having a go and you are telling us you are going broke, but you are still there. You have been in the game for your lifetime, it is pretty tough there now, and a whole lot of your other mates are there as well. So how can we change the regime? What can we do?

Mr Walker—Firstly, we have to have something that is sustainable. No government and no responsible person can ask anyone to work for nothing—those days are done. What we have to have is definitely some kind of a fixed rate structure across Australia, a minimum rate standard, and we are not calling the shots on that rate standard. Let us say that we know how much it costs for an average truck and what it costs for registration and all the rest of the running costs, but there still has to be a minimum standard.

I will give you an example. If I caught a taxicab from the Sydney Harbour Bridge to the inner city and I said, 'Wait out the front of the building, I will be back in 10 minutes,' and the taxi then took me back to exactly the place I had just come from, they would charge the same standard rate plus the waiting time. In our industry I can go from Newcastle to Brisbane and get $1,700, hypothetically, for a B-double, but when I come out of Brisbane back to Newcastle or to Sydney—the same thing—they want to pay half the rate. They deem that as a backload. You have been on the same road, used the same diesel, the same truck, the same shower facilities, everything.

Mr McARTHUR—But that is the commercial marketplace operating, isn't it?

Mr Walker—Yes. The rates are being set by people that do not understand the transport industry. It is the ignorance in the industry. The trouble with truck drivers is that most of them are better workers than they are economists. They have learnt since—

Mr McARTHUR—Now we are getting to the fundamental problem. Let us have a look at that. What this committee is interested in is if this commercial pressure is such that then we get into this whole fatigue, driving too long and drug argument. Let us establish how you are going to fix it. Take some trucks out of the system?

Mr HOLLIS—Yes, are there too many trucks on the road?

Mr Walker—No, I do not believe the industry is overtrucked. There are seven major transport players. I believe that with the acquisitions of new companies they have monopolised the marketplace so there is not a sustainable living left.

Mr HOLLIS—Yes, and they are squeezing the smaller operators out.

Mr Walker—Absolutely—that is exactly what has happened.

Mr HOLLIS—But that is capitalism at work, mate.

Mr Walker—I hear what you are saying.

Mr HOLLIS—Well, I should not say capitalism. It is a free enterprise system. The real difficulty we are going to have in this committee in dealing with your problem—and I know what you are talking about, my brother has a truck and I know what you are saying—

Mr Walker—A good log truck, too.

Mr McARTHUR—A good capitalist!

Mr HOLLIS—If we as a committee said, especially to this government, 'You are going to have to set freight rates,' they would laugh at us. The real pressure is not only on those seven major players, it is on people like Coles or BHP, the users of the product. Somehow pressure is going to have to be put on them to set realistic rates or not accept this cut-throat undercutting of the business. The long-term damage to the industry has to be pointed out. It is all very well—you see it all the time—people undercut and force people out and then five years down the track there will be only a few operators and they will have open slather, putting up prices wherever they want to put them up.

Mr Walker—I will tell you where we are at. They said the industry has got to get smarter, so we learnt by our computers and our numbers. We bought trucks that were more pollution efficient, more fuel efficient. We bought trucks that were safer. We have had more accreditations with ticks and crosses on the sleeves of our arms; we have been inducted into every company in Australia for safety. For what? At the end, you tell me what it has got, when you work a business with a nil return and this government can say, 'You're not working smart enough'? We have tried every avenue. We bought trucks that have saved $15,000 a year in fuel; it has saved the actual 12 months payments in fuel. At the end of the day, the fuel just kept going up and up so that the fuel efficient truck did not make any difference anymore.

ACTING CHAIR—Can we get back to finding some way of getting a regulation on the issue of fatigue to stop you having to sit at that place to load or unload for seven hours. Have you any thoughts as to how that could be done? We have taken evidence that, in the states, for example, when you pull up to unload somewhere, they will often give you a little bipper. You go away and park somewhere that is quiet, and you can go to bed. Then they will come and get you whenever it might be, rather than this continual moving up. Have you any thoughts, from a practical point of view, because obviously that is what we are trying to get, on what you feel is a way of getting over it?

Mr Davidson—We have thought of similar things. Everybody now has a mobile phone so they can ring you when they are ready to bring in to load. But these companies really are not interested in that at the moment; there is no reason they have got to be. If they sit me there for 10, 12, 14 hours, it is free; it does not cost them anything. There is really no need. If I complain about it, they tell me, 'Look, if you're not happy, go elsewhere.' That is the constant thing we are told. And we cannot go anywhere else, because the majors virtually have all the work now. There are a few people that have their own pockets of work, but they have only got those until the majors come in and take them over. When they see it, they want it and they move in. BHP do timeslot you, but then they do not stick to that themselves. The only way that we have looked at is that, if they had to pay demurrage, then they might lift their game and be more efficient with us. The man-hours that would be lost by owner-drivers a year would be staggering; in any other industry it would break it.

Mr McARTHUR—What about the majors; do they have the same trouble at timeslotting?

Mr Davidson—I can only speak for K&S. Wherever their trucks go, they go in ahead of everyone else. So if I am lined up here and I am next to go in, but a K&S truck comes through, he goes in ahead of me.

Mr McARTHUR—What is the rationale for that?

Mr Davidson—That is a company truck.

ACTING CHAIR—Does that happen the same on loading?

Mr Davidson—It depends. If I go down to Smorgon at Laverton, yes, their trucks have priority. Anywhere else, other small places that I go to, no, they just unload you as you get there. Generally they do not take the drops though, we do that sort of work for them. Their trucks just do one pick-up, one-drop loads.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Wayne, can I just cover another area because you have already raised it, and that is the fact that you could become an employee and work for one of the major companies. Would this be a better way to go? If you are getting a $1,000 a week, is that a bad wage? Would you have better control over your ongoing wages and fatigue issues? What is your understanding of how things are for the ordinary worker—the bloke who is just driving the truck?

Mr Davidson—For drivers like that, in companies, they are unionised and, yes, they work strictly to those conditions. I would not work for some of the small blokes around—small businesses that have four or five trucks just like myself—because they are paying their drivers next to nothing now. When I first started in the industry 26 years ago, drivers earned 20 per cent; today a lot are earning 18 per cent.

Mr MOSSFIELD—Of what—the gross?

Mr Davidson—What the truck grosses—so that is at the smaller end of the scale. For blokes with four, or five, or six trucks, 18 per cent is common. They are earning less now than they were years ago as well, and they are going harder and faster trying to get more in to earn more money.

Mr MOSSFIELD—So the problem is across the board?

Mr Davidson—Yes.

Mr MOSSFIELD—What about the taking of drugs? In your view is that as bad for the worker, the ordinary employee, as it is for people in your section of the industry?

Mr Davidson—I do not think so in that the likes of the major companies, the Linfox blokes and all of those, are pretty well—

Mr MOSSFIELD—Regulated—

Mr Davidson—And their runs are set. A lot of the major companies are set that they do their changeovers so they are on only a 10 or 12-hour shift, and that is it. People who are in the truck all the time are mainly line haul drivers—they do that sort of work. When I get to Melbourne I could spend up to half the day unloading and the other half reloading. Then I have got to drive back. And, like I say, in my position I go to bed at night because it does not really matter that much to me. A lot of the blokes have got to keep going and they will do that and then drive all night. Every night they virtually do a leg—and a leg is Melbourne to Sydney, or whatever. So on Sunday night they will leave Newcastle; on Monday morning they will be in Melbourne; they will work all day and get an hour or a couple of hours, and on Tuesday morning they will be back in Sydney or Newcastle. And that is how the majority of it works.

Mr HOLLIS—How do they get round those scanner things?

Mr Davidson—Most of those cameras have roads around them.

Mr HOLLIS—Yes, but they are tightening up on those. I was recently at a conference down in Shepparton, and I think on the highway they are okay. We heard all sorts of horrendous stories about guys coming up and turning their lights off, crossing on the wrong side of the road—

Mr Davidson—Correct. That is one.

Mr HOLLIS—Turn the lights off and cross the road—there were a lot of things they gave us. But I got the impression there that it was only likely on the not-so-well used roads. It would be difficult coming down the Hume Highway, say, with that one just outside of Picton, crossing to the wrong side of the road because—

Mr Walker—You would not do that but I will tell you how it works. Say I leave from Newcastle to go to Melbourne: my truck will not speed to get through the cameras. The cameras will pick up the speed factor from one point to the next fixed point where the camera is so, if you break the speed limit between those points, you are gone. But you can go through that camera 20 times with the one truck. It does not relate it to the driver—the driver only carries a logbook. It only takes a numberplate but it does not check the numberplate.

Mr HOLLIS—There is no link between the driver and the numberplate. It could be a whole lot of different drivers.

Mr Walker—That is exactly right, and that is how the system is beaten. You can have the same truck drive through there and unless there was something physical—you hold your logbook out the window or something—that same truck can go through there provided it has not broken the law from point A to point B to the next set of cameras.

Mr HOLLIS—So it is the actual driver that has got to rest, not the truck.

Mr Walker—Exactly.

ACTING CHAIR—What would happen if they brought in a strict regime of drug testing? Would that get people out of the industry?

Mr Walker—I think it would get a lot of people out that should not be in the industry.

ACTING CHAIR—So that gets the sheer volume of number of people off. But what is the practicality of having some system? It is a bit like—

Mr Walker—This industry has changed in that there is 'just in time' delivery now. The industry has really been taken over by this just in time because logistics now advise companies not to carry such massive stock levels, so they do not. So they use road transport to get it there with this JIT system.

Mr MOSSFIELD—It is all in storerooms.

Mr Walker—Now the industry is wound up at 100 mile an hour every which way for this just in time delivery and, consequently, it is a wound up pace, a big spring, and it gets quicker. It just gets quicker until the industry is wound up and gets itself mixed up in its own web until we get to a safety factor and rate structure that is just ridiculous. Why are the rates like they are or why is the industry wound up: because there is not enough money there. They have to do another load to try to make a revenue base at the end of the week, and it is just a catch-22.

Mr McARTHUR—Mr Hollis's question was: the revenue is not there because there are too many players, there is supply and demand, and surely you have got a lot of independent operators out there competing for the work, so the big seven, as you call them, just play one off against the other, don't they?

Mr Walker—No. A lot of people do not understand this. We will use the Toll Group as an example. Toll transport have got something like 5,300 subcontractors while their base level of trucks is absolutely minimal. Every time you see a Toll truck on the road it is not necessarily a Tolls truck; it is a subcontractor working at the rate they are telling him he has to work. The public's perception of Tolls being the really big picture is wrong—not like Linfox, where if you see their truck it is generally theirs most of the time. It is a different picture again. Do you understand that?

Mr McARTHUR—I am happy with that.

Mr Walker—I understand what you are saying. I had an argument many years ago with Bob Brown when he was the federal land transport minister. He said, 'Roger, to fix or stabilise any rates structure upsets the free enterprise system.' It does until the free enterprise system is not workable. There has to be something sustainable in any business. You cannot ask a person in a corner shop to work less than they need to to make up the capital value of their equipment. There must be some kind of return.

Mr McARTHUR—We are happy to go to the industry, but you have agreed that some of them are coming into the industry with a pay-out for an injury or long service leave. They get a few bob, and hire purchase is such that you can buy your $400,000 truck and away you go, with

no evaluation of the business plan or anything. You just say, 'I have driven trucks for five years and there seems to be a quid in it' and away you go.

Mr Walker—That is using an example of how easy it is to get into the industry. That is not the norm. Most people have not got enough money to spend $400,000 or $500,000 on a truck and buy a business, especially when they are not au fait with it. It is a hard industry—

Mr McARTHUR—But how do you start? This is how it starts. Everyone tells us that they borrow the money, dip into the hire purchase, then they have to work hard and then they have this fatigue problem that we are looking at.

Mr Davidson—It just comes back to the viability of our business. It is not there now.

Mr McARTHUR—Well, you leave.

Mr Walker—Righto, but if we all leave, what happens?

Mr HOLLIS—Cross the table and pretend you are us. Pretend you are members of parliament and the minister has given you this reference to come up with fixing the fatigue problem. We thought it was just people going to sleep but we are finding out about all these other things like freight rates, pressure on the industry and drug taking. You are us. You tell us what we are going to tell the minister. Do it from your point of view.

Mr Walker—We have to reverse roles?

Mr HOLLIS—Yes, you are in our position. You are writing the report to the minister.

Mr Walker—I would say, 'These chaps said to me, Minister, that the industry is not sustainable. Someone has to say, "Stop the fight and protect that industry." We know that the government of the day is not into legislating anything. They want enterprise bargaining, EBAs, et cetera, but it is a unique industry. It is a very complex industry. Our history shows that the industry used to change in 11 years from major players back to owner operators or small fleet owners. That has not happened. Now the big fleet operators are in there and they control the market. In the area of safety, if there were a policeman on every second corner it would not worry my business. The moment they slow the industry down, two things will happen: freight will never get there in just-in-time deliveries; so big springs are wound up and people will get decent rest; once the industry slows down, the freight rates will have to go up because they just cannot earn that extra trip.

Mr McARTHUR—What is your recommendation to Minister Hollis?

Mr Davidson—We have got to address the viability in order to address the safety issue.

ACTING CHAIR—We are trying to get it a little further now because you are on the track—

Mr Davidson—We are fighting at the moment to try to get a standardised rate system throughout this country, so that the major companies cannot go under that, and so that our

people can earn a reasonable income out of their business, with a return on their investment. Once you do that, if you can set that up, you control the safety problems because people would not have to work the way they are now.

Mr Walker—Sustainability is what it is about: a sustainable rate structure versus safety.

Mr HOLLIS—You would say that somewhere in the report we will be writing—and we are going to deal with a whole lot of fatigue factors—we should put something like: to adequately deal with fatigue in road transport; the road transport industry must have a guarantee of viability, which could be brought about by pressure or, if necessary, by legislation, to fix adequate freight rates. The argument will be: what are adequate freight rates?

Mr Walker—A sustainable rate in the industry. We are not talking about a freight rate. We are saying: don't define the freight as apples, oranges or whatever. Let us define it as a per kilometre rate. If it is a viable rate from GPO Sydney to GPO Melbourne, there is no less than a minimum rate structure, a minimum kilometre rate, whether it be $1.47, $1.58 or whatever. The economists have the numbers. We have the numbers to tell you what it costs you to stay out there. We have those figures.

Mr MOSSFIELD—What are they? Can you tell us?

Mr HOLLIS—Just before you answer that, the difficulty then would be that the minister would say, 'I'm part of the government that has brought in free enterprise.' We have then got to go one step further. We have to construct an economic argument for the long term—say, four or five years. At the moment it is all very well having 1,000 blossoms bloom and all of this hard-line competitive thing, but in the long term, it is going to mean a greater cost, not just to the industry but to the country, unless we deal with this problem, whether it is the rates or whatever.

Mr Walker—I say that we need a sustainable rate structure across the nation, whatever it is—$1.58 or $1.60 a kilometre. The government of the day does not realise that if we lose 30 per cent of our industry, a moderately priced truck costs $240,000 or $250,000; every fourth truck costs $1 million. Thirty per cent of trucks across our nation represents a massive sum of money in capital expenditure alone. With respect to the social impacts of the older generation getting out, there are no training programs for them. They have been in transport all their lives. There are the social impacts through long-term unemployment and marriage break-ups. There is the loss of housing—the mother-in-law's house or the family home that they have borrowed against, hoping against hope. The government of the day does not really grasp the impact of this.

Mr McARTHUR—To be fair, though, that is happening in a whole lot of industries, be it the steel industry or the dairy industry, which I am involved in. There is a lot of restructure going on.

Mr HOLLIS—I think it happens on both sides of the fence, too.

Mr Walker—I hear what you are saying. You see 130 people or 300 people laid off at the textile mill. That is nothing. If you open up the White Pages and point to any page, I will

guarantee you that somewhere our industry will touch it. The impacts are that the restaurants, the truck stops on the side of the road, where they employ 120 people a week to do the round-the-shift rotations, will be cutting back dramatically. The tyre companies that I use will cut back dramatically because they cannot rely on my $20,000 a year account that is all of a sudden not there. It just goes down the scale.

Mr McARTHUR—You are really not going to win that argument because you are out in a competitive environment. It is a very competitive business and people will come in, set up their truck and have a go. Our concern is that the impact of this competitive set of arrangements is endangering the lives of your drivers and the lives of innocent bystanders. That is our position.

Mr Walker—Exactly, and I hear that very clearly.

Mr McARTHUR—What we want to know is how we can improve that fatigue safety position.

Mr Walker—I hear you say that people come and go from industries. But with the mass numbers that will leave this industry right now there will be a void, and this government would have no idea of the magnitude of it. The safety of the industry is absolutely imperative, but there will be no industry for there to be safety in, as far as owner drivers are concerned, if this keeps going. This is not dramatic stuff; this is factual.

ACTING CHAIR—If I can be a devil's advocate, if you have a fixed kilometre rate you are also going to have a number of drivers out there that are going to drive just as long because they are picking up extra money, so we are not necessarily going to address the issue of pushing them on fatigue. I want to get back to something Rodger touched on when he started to talk about a policeman on every corner—and I am not suggesting that we go down that track—and to what we were trying to get to in testing when people are fit for work, which we have had evidence on.

Your comments are the responsible comments that are made by owner drivers that have been around a long time—that is, 'I don't mind my truck over the shaker, I don't mind being pulled up by the RTA, I don't mind the policemen'—because you are doing the right thing. But there are a lot of people out there who are not, so I want to get back to the regulatory controls of the traffic authority people as to testing for drugs and more controls over logbooks. Do they go to electronic logbooks? Do you have a system in the trucks now that you plug in? That is easy—you just have two or three names in the truck when you put your thing in and that fixes that problem. Where do we go from that view because we do not want you pulled up every half a block either?

Mr Davidson—It does not matter where you go with things, there is always going to be someone who will break the law.

Mr HOLLIS—We accept that.

Mr Davidson—They brought out speed-limited trucks. There is always someone smarter who designs a thing that they can plug in which overrides the speed limiter. For the majority, if

they can make their business pay they will work safer. There will always be those few who want to overload, who want to drive fast. We have got people now who talk about doing 130 or 140 kilometres per hour in B-doubles of 64 tonnes. They think that is quite acceptable. I do not know how you will ever change that mentality, I really do not. I cannot answer that. I just know that the majority of us want to get this industry turned around and we need help to do that because it is so far behind now that it is beyond us doing it ourselves. It still comes back to viability. If we can earn a reasonable amount of money, the majority do not have to speed, they do not have to do an extra trip to try and make the money. You can make a comfortable income doing two or three legs a week and doing it quite legally and safely.

Mr McARTHUR—If we could change tack a bit to the truck stops and the feeding regime, could you give us some personal assessments of the importance of the truck stop and what is available, such as showering, and the dietary regime of the independent drivers?

ACTING CHAIR—And go to rest areas as well.

Mr Davidson—One of the main problems we have is rest areas. Because of the size of the trucks today—and about 3,500 a night travel the Hume—

Mr Walker—That is through Marulan.

Mr Davidson—with B-doubles with the extra length, you can come onto a parking bay where you intend to pull up and have a sleep and there is no room, so then you have to go to the next one. You might be up on your hours on your logbook by the time you get to that one, but you have got to go on for another half an hour or hour down the road, and you might even be that tired you cannot do it. Where do you park? You have to go and find the next one down the road and if it is full, if you have hit peak hour and the parking bays are full—

Mr McARTHUR—What is your recommendation to Minister Hollis?

Mr Davidson—That you have better facilities. In New South Wales most of our parking bays are just gravel areas on the side of the road.

Mr HOLLIS—Tell us about it.

Mr Davidson—What we need are larger areas back off the roads, preferably with some shaded areas—trees—so people who have to sleep through the day can pull in under a tree. Don't forget, when you pull up in a truck your cab temperature can go up to probably 45 degrees or 50 degrees, once it starts to sit and the heat comes back up into the cab. With all that, and no shaded areas, it makes it very hard to sleep. We need those. We need buffer zones to make it quieter back from the road.

Mr McARTHUR—Who do you think should pay for that?

Mr Walker—It has only got to be rows of trees. It hasn't necessarily got to be a structure. It can be—

Mr McARTHUR—What about the feeding regime? You have given us a view on drugs; would you like to give us a view on how the truck drivers are maintaining their health?

Mr Davidson—Probably fairly poorly—the majority.

Mr Walker—Yes, they are.

Mr McARTHUR—Give us an idea.

Mr Davidson—Most blokes would go in and order steak, eggs and chips. That is probably a lot of people's staple diet.

Mr McARTHUR—What is your judgment on that? What happens after that regime for 10 years?

Mr Davidson—Well, you look at most truck drivers and you can see.

Mr HOLLIS—Roger, if you are diabetic you cannot do that.

Mr Walker—No.

Mr HOLLIS—So do you take your own food or—

Mr Walker—I have got adequate sleeping facilities—very. I have my own refrigerator, the same as Wayne, for my insulin et cetera. Say I have run out of log book, or I am tired and I have to sleep in the next parking bay—and there is certainly not a shop there—then I have facilities to have breakfast in my truck out of the refrigerator with fresh milk et cetera. But what happens is that the RTA, in all their wisdom, put a parking bay over the top of a large hill. If you are coming north from Wagga, you pull up a really large, steep hill and straight over the other side is a parking bay. It is a fairly large parking bay, as such, but it is that steep that you literally roll out of your bunk. There is a lot of thought put into that! Here is a truck that has just gone up the hill—

Mr Davidson—As you come out of Wagga, back up on to the Hume, and you come up over the hill—it is Wagga Hill—

Mr Walker—Wagga Hill is what they call it.

Mr HOLLIS—We cannot say what is going to be in the report because we do not know yet, but I think you will find that the Acting Chair has taken a particular interest in—

ACTING CHAIR—I did not mention it this time.

Mr HOLLIS—No, okay. When Adam and I went down to Victoria we had a look at a couple of the stops there and we were really impressed. They have exactly everything you were talking about.

Mr Davidson—Yes, they have been levelled so that when you get into bed you have not got your feet up in the air or have to hang on so you don't slide out of the bunk.

Mr HOLLIS—They are off the road; they have got buffer zones.

Mr Davidson—They have toilets and facilities.

Mr Walker—Not only that, but I think that you cannot have trucks drive straight in there off the main road at 100 miles per hour and kill people, because ours are designed that way. In that particular Wagga parking bay, which is a recognised parking bay and RTA stop, they have a couple of garbage bins; there are no toilet facilities whatsoever. The point that I make is that on a hot day, when you pull up there in that truck, the generated heat for you to get in the bunk is an impossibility. Even though the truck is fully airconditioned, the heat that rises from the truck is just horrific.

If you pull up in any of the other parking bays, the ones that are not bitumen coated—it does not matter whether they are off the road or not—with just the wind turbulence off the truck, if you leave your doors and windows open, when you wake up you look like sooty because of the dust. These blokes have got expensive trucks. They have got leather upholstery and good quality blankets and they dress as proper people—they have a uniform. I can tell you, when you wake up and the inside of your truck looks like that, there is hours and hours—because you live in the things—to clean the bloody things. It is just the dust generation alone and no water.

Mr McARTHUR—Can we go back to the feeding regime of the independent drivers, because that does impact on fatigue in some of the evidence we have had. Could you give us some more comment on personal experience?

Mr Davidson—A lot of the roadhouses now are really lifting their act as far as food quality—

Mr McARTHUR—Where is the driver for that? Where is the push to get better quality?

Mr Davidson—It just comes from people. If they do not use the place, they have to lift their act. It comes from us telling them whether it is good or bad. Some places now have a report card that you can fill out and leave there on what you think of their service, their food, the food quality, how it was served—

Mr McARTHUR—Do you think the feeding regime has an impact on fatigue—that they drink so many sugar drinks and eat so much steak and eggs and what have you?

Mr Davidson—Of course.

Mr McARTHUR—What would you be suggesting on this feeding regime?

Mr Davidson—Like I say, most people eat absolute junk.

Mr McARTHUR—And what is the impact of that, in your experience?

Mr Davidson—Their health deteriorates. They have probably got hardened arteries, they are severely overweight—

Mr McARTHUR—Yes, but from a truck driving point of view.

Mr Davidson—It does not help when you are eating food like that. You would probably want to lie down and go to sleep after a feed of steak, eggs and chips—

Mr HOLLIS—But you cannot pass legislation on that. That is an individual education role—

Mr Davidson—That is correct.

Mr HOLLIS—And I really do think society is becoming more and more aware of fat in the diet and too much sugar and, as you say, junk food—but it has not stopped McDonald's springing up everywhere.

Mr Davidson—No.

ACTING CHAIR—Gentlemen, we are just about out of time. Is there anything else any of you would like to raise at the end?

Mr HOLLIS—I would be more interested in a final word from you guys about what you would say if you were in our position of writing the report. Is there anything that you particularly feel should be in the report, taking on board the wider parameter of looking at fatigue in general?

Mr Davidson—Going back a few years, we had more checking stations. Out of Sydney you had Berowra, you went through that and they checked your logbook. That has closed. Now we have Mount White, but that is only for northbound traffic. So you can come from Brisbane right through to Marulan and not be checked. And then at Marulan, when you drive across those mobile pads and they check weigh you, they can just flick you straight through—they give you an arrow and you go straight through. So you can go from Brisbane to—

Mr HOLLIS—But they know about you when they give you that—

Mr Davidson—Yes, but you can go right through without having your logbook checked. They do not know who is in that truck. They only know where that truck has come from. The cameras are only in New South Wales so someone might, in theory, have driven from Cairns all the way down. Willow Tree only opens spasmodically now. It used to work full time. The checking stations are virtually non-existent. You have two permanent ones now in New South Wales. Marulan is open nearly 24 hours a day seven days a week, and Mount White does close occasionally, but it only runs one way. So anyone going south can be overloaded and they can work over their hours.

Mr McARTHUR—Could you just give us some ideas on this logbook argument versus a more flexible regime of driving? Rather than saying you can drive for 12 hours precisely, what if you had a regime where you took into account this loading problem of the Smorgons and

BHP and your fitness to come to work? The evidence we have heard is that it is not actually the hours on the road—the 12 hours—the problem often is the four or five hours in the yard at the start and the four or five hours in the yard at the finish. Logbooks are not working. What are you suggesting to us as a better regime?

Mr Davidson—What we do in those logbooks is mark that down as off duty time because, if you marked it down as driving hours, it would take you an extra day to do the trip.

Mr McARTHUR—Forget what the law says, I am asking what in reality we should do.

Mr Davidson—If I leave home at three o'clock this afternoon, 12 hours plus an hour's break puts me in Melbourne at four a.m. I have six hours sleep. That takes me to 10 a.m. I cannot start again until 3.00 p.m., so I have got to sit from 10 until four and do nothing. That is the way the logbook works now.

Mr McARTHUR—What would you do to change that? What would you do differently?

Mr Walker—We are saying it does not work because you are not asleep you are just walking around the yard, and that is half the problem.

Mr Davidson—Regardless of the rates or whatever, the only way you can get the effective safety of people is to police the drivers of those trucks—regardless. That is, there is only one answer and that is police presence. There must be some kind of an e-tag system that they have to hold up, or that can be clipped on the windscreen of a truck as they drive under, which relates to that man's licence. You do it on the freeways and that way—

Mr McARTHUR—What you are really saying is that we should identify the driver?

Mr Walker—Absolutely.

Mr McARTHUR—That has not been put to us before.

Mr Walker—That is the only way you will beat the system and slow the industry down. The drug taking will go into a slower phase because the drivers will not be able to break those hours. And once the industry slows down—I do not care whether it be Linfox's trucks or my trucks or Wayne's trucks—I believe the rates will have to come up because they will not be able to do as many trips.

Mr McARTHUR—That is a very interesting recommendation. Just spend another two minutes on that.

Mr Walker—As I said, I am not a law-breaker and I believe that if we police this industry—I do not care whether there is an officer of some kind on every single corner to slow this industry down in the guise of safety—the industry will tidy itself up in a major respect. Whether it will make any money is another thing. But the safety aspect of it must be imperative. It does not matter where that e-tag is—they can put a little holder on the truck if it has got 10 drivers in it. All I do is go up and I snap that in—that is it. As soon as I drive under that camera it tells me

that Rodger Walker, licence number so and so, is driving that vehicle. It is a magnetic thing off an infra-red light.

Mr McARTHUR—We have not had that before.

Mr Walker—It is a foolproof system. The only other way is—

Mr McARTHUR—Have you got any more evidence on that apart from just your view on it? Have other people expressed that view?

Mr Walker—No, never.

Mr McARTHUR—You have not put that view to us before?

Mr Walker—No, never. That is my idea and my idea is: if you can identify the driver of that truck—and I do not care whose truck it is—and he is identified through that infra-red system, instantly it tells you on a computer.

Mr McARTHUR—Why is identifying the driver so critical? Say, in your truck, why is it helpful that we have got you identified?

Mr Walker—Because I can drive my truck backwards and forwards to Melbourne on six legs a week—in other words, go from Newcastle to Melbourne every night of the week. Theoretically, I can get through every weighbridge that there is and not even be checked for a logbook, because the system does not work.

Mr McARTHUR—But you are fixing up the logbook?

Mr Walker—Not only that—

Mr Davidson—The trucks are checked but not the drivers.

Mr Walker—That is right. It is only the trucks that are detected through the weighbridge. Unless you walked in there and you looked—

Mr McARTHUR—So you say that with new technology we could do away with the weighbridge and the logbooks and say, 'You tack your e-tag on every point, or identify yourself, get rid of the logbook and then—

Mr Walker—You can link that through any computer. They know now at the weighbridges where that truck was last, particularly if it comes through the cameras. They can say. 'This truck came through the cameras at 7.30 this morning and you are here now. How come you are still driving the truck?'

Mr McARTHUR—What do you say to that?

Mr Davidson—You can say it was another driver. If you can get another driver to fill out their logbook for you, that is it, nothing happens.

Mr Walker—Exactly. But if it is an e-tag system this particular driver in my truck has clipped the e-tag system—I am using that as a for instance—onto the windscreen, and it is only stuck on double-sided tape, no matter which one he goes through, if he wants to keep breaking his times he can keep going through these things and then he will automatically get a fine through the post and will be put off the road, or the industry says, 'You are a danger to the public.'

Mr McARTHUR—How could you beat the e-tag system?

Mr Walker—You could not.

ACTING CHAIR—I have to draw it to a close. I think what has come out of it is brilliant this morning—this e-tag system—because you can start to have it issued and the only way you can get your loads is to have it issued.

Mr Walker—Do not worry about this computerised logbook because it is not shown until you are pulled up. You can have any logbook.

ACTING CHAIR—I need to draw this to a conclusion. I do thank you both in particular for coming down because I think it has been worth while. It has been quiet on your own here and we have been able to get some things on the record that, through the whole of this public inquiry, we have not had, and that is the issue that you have raised. We do thank you very much.

I had a call earlier with apologies from our normal chairman, Paul Neville. As I mentioned earlier, he has a disaster and a tragedy in his electorate with 16 young people dead—young people from seven different countries. He is about to go up there with our foreign minister. There are New Zealanders and people from all sorts of other places. It is a tragedy. He does apologise to you both because he did want to be here, but he wanted me to pass that on.

If the committee has any further questions to ask they will be provided to you in writing. The committee asks that you provide written replies if you can and, obviously, we will continue to talk. The secretariat will send you a proof copy of your evidence as soon as it is available and it will be available to everyone on the parliamentary web site. I thank Wayne and Rodger, who have taken the effort to come down from Newcastle to attend this public hearing today. I do believe we have made a great advancement, so I thank you both very much.

Resolved (on motion by **Mr Hollis**, seconded by **Mr McArthur)**

That, pursuant to the power conferred by section 2(2) of the Parliamentary Papers Act 1908, this committee authorises publication of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

Committee adjourned at 11.35 a.m.