



**The Parliament of the
Commonwealth of Australia**

**House of Representatives
Standing Committee on
Communications, Transport
and the Arts**

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Media Release

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**Awake to the danger
Managing Fatigue in Transport**

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications, Transport and the Arts is conducting an inquiry into managing fatigue in transport.

Mr Paul Neville MP, Chair, in **calling for submissions**, said:

Human error is recognised as a cause of many accidents in transport, whether minor or catastrophic. We already know a great deal about the contribution of alcohol and speed to accidents involving human error. What is not fully understood or appreciated is the role of fatigue in human error.

It is now known that moderate levels of fatigue produce high levels of impairment comparable to alcohol intoxication. Tests by leading Australian researchers indicate that 17 hours of sustained wakefulness leads to a decrease in performance equivalent to a blood alcohol level of 0.05%. Staying awake for 24 hours is equivalent to a blood alcohol level of 0.10%.

A crucial point is that fatigue is more than lack of sleep or the result of long working hours. Many factors need to be considered, such as the quality of sleep, if sleep or work is in split shifts and which hours in a 24 hour day are worked. You have a much greater chance of an accident due to fatigue in the early hours of the morning.

***This is a wake up call** to governments, companies, employees and the wider community. We are becoming increasingly aware of fatigue as an issue in road and rail transport. This inquiry will go beyond road and rail and include marine and air transport, which to date have not received the same level of community attention. The consequences of a fatigue related maritime accident on the Great Barrier Reef or an air accident over a major city would be catastrophic in human, environmental and economic terms.*

It is clear that the issue of fatigue has wide ranging legal, social and economic

ramifications. It is estimated that fatigue in the Australian workplace costs up to \$1.7 billion in accidents and injuries, not to mention the impact on the individuals and families involved. The committee believes that industry and community awareness of this issue has the potential to contribute to changes in behaviour similar to that achieved with alcohol and speed in relation to accidents in transport.

*This issue is important to any industry that involves shift work, such as mining, hospitals, emergency services, and even hospitality. As an occupational health and safety issue it has implications for both employers and employees that need to be addressed. Committee members would like to gather evidence from as many sources as possible. In this way we **hope to bring the issue of fatigue out from the shadows** so that it can be tackled effectively and comprehensively.*

The committee invites interested people and organisations to lodge written submissions with the committee secretary as soon as possible, but no later than **Thursday 17 June 1999**.

Submissions should address the inquiry's terms of reference which are listed below. Advice on how to make a submission is available on the committee web site or can be provided on request from the secretariat.

Terms of Reference

In relation to managing fatigue in transport, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications, Transport and the Arts is to inquire into, and report on the following.

- 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 of achieving greater responsibility by individuals, companies, and governments to reduce the problems related to fatigue in transport.

For further information

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Background	Meg Crooks, committee secretary	02 6277 4601
Web site	http://www.apf.gov.au/house/committee/cta/index.htm	