



**PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATIONS,
TRANSPORT AND THE ARTS**

Fatigue is probably the biggest safety issue facing the transport industry. Australian research indicates that fatigue is four times more likely to contribute to workplace impairment than drugs or alcohol.

In April last year the House Transport Committee tabled its report on fatigue in the transport industry.

The title of the report, *Beyond the Midnight Oil*, reflects the fact that many of us are already burning the midnight oil by regularly working long hours. In the transport industry many workers are working way beyond even what would be considered unreasonable and unsafe hours of work— often with tragic results.

Between 20 and 30 per cent of road accidents involve driver fatigue. In the marine pilotage industry its estimated that 10 to 25 per cent of accidents in the Great Barrier Reef are fatigue related. In aviation, around 7 per cent of accidents are fatigue related. Experts agree that these are conservative estimates. It may be much higher!

Fatigue in transport costs us dearly. Based on figures from the Bureau of Transport Economics, fatigue related road accidents alone could be costing the community up to \$3 billion per year, with heavy vehicle fatigue related accidents costing around \$300 million annually. This says nothing of the enormous human and emotional cost of fatigue related accidents.

In this report we looked at the current developments in fatigue management. Regulators such as CASA and the NRTC are developing more flexible 'outcome' oriented regulations which recognise the need

to properly manage fatigue, while in rail and marine pilotage national codes of practice are being developed.

The rail industry is to be commended for its approach to fatigue management. In 1995 a consortium of rail operators, rail unions and regulators commissioned the Adelaide Centre for Sleep research, headed by Professor Drew Dawson, to conduct a study into the effects of shiftwork and fatigue on rail employees, particularly operational train crews.

There are indications that some organisations are adopting a 'whole of industry' approach to fatigue. BHP example

However, improvements can always be made and we have put forward a significant number of recommendations aimed at improving these approaches and strategies.

The NRTC needs to take more attention of 'time of day' effects, ensure for broad participation in fatigue management programs, and allow for an increase in the minimum required rest periods.

CASA needs to focus on the aircraft maintenance sector, particularly as a fatigued LAME is just as dangerous as a fatigued pilot, ensure that the current regime for regulating flight and duty hours for aircrew is tightened up pending the introduction of new regulations, and dramatically improve its auditing and surveillance functions.

Similarly, regulators in the rail and marine pilotage sectors need to incorporate clear and more sophisticated fatigue management provisions in the proposed national codes of practice for their respective industries.

Various non-regulatory fatigue management initiatives have also been introduced around the country, including companies incorporating fatigue management plans in their operations and industry based voluntary safety accreditation programs. Improvements required in

this area include the need for more and better quality heavy vehicle rest areas on our national highways.

We are particularly interested in the potential of technology to help support broader fatigue management initiatives such as: computer-based fatigue modelling systems for testing work schedules and rosters, Safe-T-Cam, fatigue testing devices—particularly those which might be used at the road-side and workplace—and car cabin gas monitors and driver vigilance systems. Government and industry must focus on further developing and refining these technologies.

We were particularly interested in how carry forward fatigue management in the transport industry.

While is little doubt that increased competition in the Australian transport industry has resulted in lower transport costs for consumers, we are fast approaching the point where best practice in efficiency is jeopardising best practice in safety. It is clear that operators struggling to remain commercially viable are exposed to the greatest risks. In this regard, companies, customers and freight-forwarders have a collective responsibility to address key concerns such as freight and payment rates, as they have imposed unrealistic delivery and price expectations while enjoying the benefits of reduced freight rates. The Productivity Commission should also incorporate fatigue and fatigue management as key criteria when looking into transport industry issues.

Governments should support the industry by assisting in developing transport operator business education programs and establishing a training development fund for owner-operators.

While a great deal of valuable work is being done to improve current regulatory regimes in all sectors, more and clearer guidance must be provided to the transport industry on what constitutes a safe system of work through a range of complementary measures, such as national OH&S standards and codes of practice on fatigue, industry

codes of practice on safe working and fatigue management, and more comprehensive use of quality assurance accreditation.

The road transport sector should also catch-up with the rail and aviation sectors and establish requirements that must be met for entry into and continued operation within the industry by introducing a system of mandatory operator accreditation.

The scheme should cover the entire road transport industry—drivers, companies, and customers—and require the demonstration of fatigue and fatigue management knowledge, strategies and business management skills. This would also provide a mechanism for removing from the industry those who continually breach the regulations and who pose a threat to public safety and themselves.

A fundamental problem is that operating a vehicle while fatigued is not an offence and as such, it is difficult to deter people from working while fatigued. Legislators and the general public have, in the past, made tough decisions in regard to other critical road safety issues such as drink driving, speeding and seatbelts, often against strong opposition but which resulted in appreciable improvements in road safety. These measures are now widely accepted as being necessary. The issue of driver fatigue requires a similar approach. In light of advances in our understanding of fatigue and the technology to accurately detect and measure fatigue, we believe that driving while fatigued should be made an offence, with both the driver and the owner of a vehicle being culpable for a fatigue related offence.

The use of drugs in the transport industry, particularly in road transport, is a serious problem. It is unconscionable that drivers are taking drugs in order to do their job. We have proposed that road transport companies adopt a drug free policy and implement a mandatory drug testing regime, and that a nationally consistent and broad ranging drug education and counselling program is required for both employees and managers in all transport sectors.

Fundamentally, all in the transport industry share responsibility for fatigue. Individuals have a responsibility to manage their fatigue and use rest periods so that they are fit for work. Companies have a responsibility to manage the transport task properly to mitigate the effects of fatigue. Customers have a responsibility to recognise their role in fighting fatigue and ensure that their demands and expectations are realistic. This requires the development of basic, nationally consistent fatigue awareness and education programs that can be used as the foundation for modal-specific education programs for all those in the transport industry. Government has a responsibility to provide a framework that assists and encourages the transport industry to properly manage fatigue. I think we have progressed towards achieving that goal with this report.

The subject of fatigue is now well understood. We have the capacity to accurately measure and monitor fatigue. And we have increasingly sophisticated methods and systems to manage fatigue. A 20-30 per cent drop in accidents in land transport alone could be achieved through proper fatigue management. It would be a sin of monumental proportions not to do so.

Finally, I would like to thank my colleagues for their hard work and commitment. This inquiry attracted a great deal of attention and support from the transport industry and I thank all those who made a contribution. We also appreciate the valuable input we received from Australian and overseas experts, particularly Professor Drew Dawson of the Adelaide Centre for Sleep Research, Professor Woltec Wlodarski of RMIT, Professor David Dinges, from the University of Pennsylvania, and Mr Sesto Vespa from Transport Canada. I would also like to thank the current secretary of the House Transport committee Mr Grant Harrison, the former secretary Meg Crooks and in particular the inquiry secretary Adam Cunningham for outstanding dedication to the task at hand.