

Mr Manthorpe—That is right; we do not spend enough time up here! We would be happy to take some soundings from DEST and DOTARS in particular about issues of COAG led harmonisation as they relate to the transport industry and provide some further advice to you in the next several weeks if that would be useful, perhaps by way of some sort of supplementary submission or a letter to the committee—something of that kind that simply seeks to clarify where those matters are up to, what issues are being considered and that sort of thing.

CHAIR—Thank you, that would be very useful, Mr Manthorpe.

Mr Manthorpe—I will see what I can do.

Answer:

The Department has obtained the following information from the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) and the Department of Transport and Regional Services (DOTARS).

DEST has advised that work they are leading follows a COAG decision of 10 February 2006 which sought to achieve full and effective mutual recognition of occupational licences across all vocationally trained occupations by 31 December 2008. This work started early last year with six trade-based occupations being considered. The majority of this work for these occupations was completed by February 2007 when a ministerial declaration was signed by all States and Territories. The declaration established equivalency between licences in different jurisdictions based on mapping that had been conducted by occupation-specific Action Groups in 2006. A website was also established so that licence-holders, regulators and other interested persons could have easy access to this information on equivalence licences (see www.licencerecognition.gov.au). DEST has now commenced similar work on the remaining vocationally-trained occupations, including road transport. DEST has advised that it is only considering more effective mutual recognition of occupational licences held by individuals; issues connected with goods or standards, such as load, speed etc, will not form part of their work. Generally speaking, DEST is also not seeking to undertake any work on harmonising eligibility requirements for individuals to obtain licences.

Although the COAG Skills Recognition Steering Committee has agreed to some additional exploration of greater harmonisation for occupational licences in one or two occupations, this is the exception rather than the rule and the Steering Committee will only consider this where a ministerial declaration is already in place.

DEST has also advised there has only been one meeting on land transport licences to date but that they are aiming to complete the mutual recognition work by the end of this year. It is also highly unlikely that they will undertake any harmonisation work in this area.

Further information on the work being undertaken by DEST is available from Julie Yeend, Assistant Secretary, COAG Skills Recognition Taskforce (ph: 02 6240 8674 Fax 02 6123 6824).

The advice below has been provided by The Department of Transport and Regional Services (DOTARS) on their involvement in COAG transport regulatory reform.

COAG Transport Regulatory Reform Issues

There is a long history of measures to improve road regulatory consistency across jurisdictions. Road transport regulatory differences between states led to a series of three Premiers' Conferences in 1990 and 1991 and the establishment of the National Road Transport Commission (NRTC) to drive regulatory reform and generate template road transport legislation as a model for all jurisdictions. This has helped to deliver broad consistency in legislation. Where differences remain these can relate to issues such as the legacy of different historic infrastructure investment decisions, such as road construction standards, resulting in some variation in mass limits between jurisdictions to protect weaker roads (though more uniform mass limits have been introduced on the major interstate freight routes).

The National Transport Commission (NTC) replaced the NRTC in 2004 with the scope expanding beyond road transport to include regulatory and operational reform in rail and inter-modal transport. The NTC role is to develop, monitor and maintain uniform or nationally consistent regulatory and operational reforms relating to road, rail and inter-modal transport and to provide a mechanism for making model legislation/regulations agreed by the Australian Transport Council (ATC).

Differences in rail safety and signalling infrastructure on different parts of the network requiring different safety systems mean that rail is less advanced in regulatory uniformity.

At its 17th meeting, held on 10 February 2006, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) outlined a significant new National Reform Agenda (NRA) for Australia that encompassed many sectors of the Australian economy, including the transport sector. The transport reforms are intended to generate a new round of road and rail efficiency gains.

At its 13 April 2007 meeting, COAG reaffirmed its commitment to the NRA and agreed to a number of reform proposals on transport pricing, urban congestion and rail safety, as well as new measures relating to fuel efficiency as part of its climate change agreements.

The range of actions agreed by COAG to enhance road productivity include higher mass limits enhancements, Performance Based Standards (PBS) for licensing innovative vehicles that do less road damage, the consideration of a B-Triple network and increased use of quad axle groups in heavy vehicle combinations. Other initiatives include road pricing reforms and a new heavy vehicle driver fatigue policy.

Further details on current major reforms being progressed by the NTC, including PBS, heavy vehicle driver fatigue and concessional mass limits can be found via the respective links down the left hand side of the NTC website at <http://www.ntc.gov.au/>.

On rail, COAG agreed to the full implementation of model national rail safety legislation and regulations in all mainland jurisdictions in 2007, plus additional measures that will assist in establishing a nationally consistent rail safety framework, including rail regulator training, standardised rail safety data collection and

harmonised national accreditation and approval processes for interstate rail operators. The NTC website also contains details on progress with respect to rail safety issues.

Further details on COAG decisions relating to transport reforms are contained in the February 2006 and April 2007 communiqués, which can be found at <http://www.coag.gov.au/meetings/100206/index.htm> and <http://www.coag.gov.au/meetings/130407/index.htm> respectively.

Further details and a good description of the scope of the COAG transport reform commitments are set out from page 11 in *COAG NRA Competition Reforms*, (http://www.coag.gov.au/meetings/130407/docs/coag_nra_competition_reforms.pdf). Further details on COAG's commitments on rail safety are contained in the *COAG Regulatory Reform Plan* (http://www.coag.gov.au/meetings/130407/docs/coag_nra_regulatory_reform.pdf).

COAG referred the implementation of its road and rail reform agenda to the Australian Transport Council. The ATC is required to report back to COAG on progress following each of its meetings. Further details on the ATC's consideration and progression of the COAG initiatives can be found in its communiqués dated 2 June 2006, 13 October 2006 and 4 May 2007 at (<http://www.atcouncil.gov.au/communique/index.aspx>).

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