# Select Committee on Productivity in Australia

## Inquiry into Productivity in Australia

### Response to Question on Notice

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| **Question:** | Senator McKenzie - Transparency and Consistency in Access Decisions |
| **Organisation:** | Australian Livestock and Rural Transporters Association (ALRTA) |
| **Witness:** | Mr Anthony Boyle |
| **Hearing Date:** | 23 April 2026 |

## Hansard Reference

During the hearing, Senator McKenzie noted:

> *"...there's no consistency, there's no transparency..."*

and requested:

> *"...if you haven't put a recommendation to us on that, on notice, I'd like that unpacked a bit."*

## Direct Response and Recommendation

ALRTA recommends that heavy vehicle access reform move from a fragmented, application-by-application system to a nationally consistent, network-based access framework for proven high productivity vehicle configurations.

This does not mean automatic access in all circumstances. It means that where safety, infrastructure and compliance requirements can be met, equivalent vehicles and equivalent freight tasks should be treated consistently, with clear reasons provided where access is refused or restricted.

A transparent and consistent framework should include published assessment criteria, clear reasons for access refusals or restrictions, consistent treatment of equivalent vehicle configurations, network-level approvals for proven freight tasks, a practical first and last mile extension process, and digital publication of approved networks and access conditions.

The current framework lacks transparency and consistency. An operator may invest in a high productivity vehicle and be approved on one route, but be refused access on a comparable route elsewhere, or be unable to access the first or final kilometres needed to complete the freight task. These decisions are often made without clear published reasoning and are not applied consistently across jurisdictions or road managers.

## Why This Limits Productivity

The problem is not simply that access decisions are sometimes refused. The problem is that operators frequently cannot see, understand or predict the basis on which decisions are made. Variation between jurisdictions and road managers, including differences in how infrastructure such as bridges is assessed, can produce different outcomes for the same or similar vehicles operating under comparable conditions.

The current system can produce:

- approval for a vehicle on one route, but refusal on a comparable route elsewhere;
- different mass or access conditions that create a lowest common denominator effect across the freight task;
- changes to permit conditions or timeframes without clear explanation; and
- limited visibility of decision-making criteria, precedent or reasons for refusal.

From an operator perspective, the issue is not the capability of proven high productivity vehicle configurations; it is whether the access system allows those vehicles to operate consistently where safety and infrastructure requirements can be met.

This uncertainty directly affects productivity and capital deepening. Operators are investing in high productivity vehicles - often at a cost that can exceed $1.5 million per unit - to improve freight efficiency, reduce trips per freight task and lower fuel use and emissions per unit of freight. Where access is

uncertain or fragmented, those assets can be underutilised, additional equipment or trips may be required, and the productivity benefits of investment are not fully realised.

## A Practical Model: Victorian HPLV Network

The Victorian High Productivity Livestock Vehicle (HPLV) scheme provides a practical example of a more transparent and consistent access model. Under the usual framework, access is typically applied for by individual operators, assessed case-by-case and subject to variation across jurisdictions and road managers. The HPLV scheme operates on a different principle: the accreditation scheme is the applicant, not each individual operator.

This means access is assessed at the scheme and network level and, once approved, applies to accredited participants operating under the scheme. Consistency is achieved through a single, clearly defined network outcome rather than repeated individual decisions. Transparency is improved because access rules, networks and participation requirements are visible and consistently applied. The model also links expanded access to accreditation, compliance and accountable operation, supporting productivity while maintaining safety and public confidence. It would complement, not replace, existing high productivity networks such as established road train routes.

## First and Last Mile Access

A key limitation in the current framework is first and last mile access. In many cases, a vehicle may be approved across most of its journey but be unable to access the final kilometres to farms, feedlots, saleyards or processing facilities. This can require additional approvals, secondary equipment, transfers, delays or additional trips.

Under a network-based model, first and last mile access can be treated as part of network design rather than as a recurring barrier to productivity. Network extensions can be assessed against commodity and regional need and, once approved, apply to all accredited operators under the scheme. Further gains are available if farm gate access and other first mile connections are more consistently integrated into network planning.

## Conclusion

The current access framework is limiting the productivity gains that high productivity vehicles are capable of delivering. The constraint is not simply vehicle technology or operator willingness to invest; it is the inconsistency and lack of transparency in the access system itself.

The reform pathway is to scale and adapt network-based models that already deliver transparency, consistency and productivity outcomes, while maintaining safety, protecting existing high productivity networks and improving first and last mile access across the freight task.