

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates February 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question: MLT 01

Division: Maritime and Land Transport

Topic: Shipping Containers

Hansard Page: 37 (19/02/08)

Senator Hutchins asked:

Senator HUTCHINS—Regarding that, the transport industry are complaining about containers going out of northern New South Wales into Brisbane because of the distribution, I understand, of the axle weights. I do not know if you are aware of this at all. People are complaining up there that they have got to take it down to Brisbane. Are you aware of this, Mr Wilson?

Mr Wilson—There are differences between jurisdictions with regard to the permitted axle weights that individual State Governments will or will not allow on particular sections of roads. There is a base level of weight with which general access vehicles can access the road network across Australia, but then as you get heavier loads there are differentials between the jurisdictions. So, there may very well be cases where loads are going—

Senator HUTCHINS—Following on Senator Nash's question, do you deal with that sort of anomaly? Are the NTC able to deal with that?

Mr Wilson—The National Transport Commission is charged on a national basis with pursuing those regulatory disjuncts. From a Commonwealth point of view, my area is charged with assisting the National Transport Commission but also pushing forward in terms of national policy.

Senator HUTCHINS—I would be interested if there are any inquiries underway or reports that have dealt with that, if you could highlight that to us.

Additional information was provided by Senator Hutchins's office as follows:

In simple terms, shipping containers in NSW cannot be loaded to their full capacity as road vehicle limits are restrictive, generally 42.5 tonnes for a six axle semi-trailer combination allowing for 22.5 tonnes containers.

In NSW only a very limited network of roads allows more efficient container loading where gross container weights may reach 25 tonnes.

Queensland has widely available freight routes with higher mass limits that allow more efficient loading of containers to 25 tonnes. Queensland also goes further and allows some specific commodities on specific routes to achieve maximum container capacity (for export frozen meat this is 27 tonnes.)

Answer:

There is work underway addressing the issue raised in the question. In particular, the issue relates to NSW having a more limited network of roads on which higher mass

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limit vehicles can operate. Individual States and Territories are responsible for nominating roads in their jurisdictions for higher mass limit access (the HML network). In deciding on which roads to make part of the HML network, jurisdictions will consider the damage to the road and the ability of the existing infrastructure to take the heavier loads (for example, older bridges were not designed or built for the heavier loads that can be carried today).

Under the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Reform Agenda, there are a number of current projects that seek to allow for higher mass vehicles to access a wider road network. These projects include full implementation of higher mass limits (HML) for vehicles with road-friendly suspensions, the introduction of Intelligent Access Project (IAP)¹, Performance-Based Standards (PBS)², and expanding the B-triple network.

The Australian Transport Council (ATC) is charged with the responsibility of taking these projects forward. The National Transport Commission (NTC) undertakes research and consultation on behalf of the ATC to develop new regulations to meet COAG and ATC requirements. The NTC is an independent statutory authority responsible for developing heavy vehicle regulatory reforms for implementation by the States and Territories on a nationally-consistent basis. The NTC is currently working with the jurisdictions to increase the B-triple network and on the Performance-Based Standards project.

In regards to extending the HML network, ATC agreed at its May 2007 meeting to set up a working group to examine extending the HML network to link key distribution points to the AusLink network. The NSW-led cross jurisdictional working group commenced in September 2007 and will deliver a further progress report to ATC in mid-2008. A project has been recently commissioned by the working group to undertake research into key distribution points, to identify where the HML network can be expanded and what may be blocking expansion.

COAG has also tasked Transport Ministers with reviewing the impact and feasibility of incremental pricing schemes for higher mass and other innovative vehicles. Such schemes could potentially allow road access for higher mass vehicles, in return for additional operator payment to reflect the higher costs imposed on infrastructure. It is expected that a number of jurisdictions, including NSW, will establish voluntary trials of this nature in the second half of 2008.

¹ The IAP is a voluntary program which will provide the operators of heavy vehicles, access, or improved access, to parts of the road network in return for the monitoring of their compliance with specific access conditions by vehicle telematics solutions. Currently, NSW and Queensland are committed to use of the IAP for network access expansion purposes.

² There are agreed standards to apply to applications for permits for exemptions from general access rules for mass, dimension and loading.

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Question: MLT 02

Division: Maritime and Land Transport

Topic: Coastal Shipping Review

Hansard Pages: 38-40 (19/02/08)

Senator Abetz asked:

Senator ABETZ—I think it was on page 23 of the *Australian Financial Review* yesterday that I was reading about an 80 per cent target in relation to cabotage. Are you aware of that article?

Mr Wilson—I am aware of the article.

Senator ABETZ—Possibly I should ask the Minister. Does that represent Government policy?

Mr Wilson—I am unaware of Government policy that indicates an 80 per cent target.

Senator ABETZ—I should not be asking you about policy and that is why I was asking Minister Conroy whether that represents any Government policy.

Senator Conroy—I will take it on notice.

Senator ABETZ—You will take that on notice as well. It is like talking to a wall, with glasses. But let me keep trying. So, you will have to take on notice what the Government's policy is in relation to a plan to review, or do we know that there is a definite plan to review?

Mr Wilson—If I can answer that question, the Government made a commitment prior to the election to undertake a review of shipping policy, including the coastal permit system. As far as I am aware, the Government intends to implement that review.

Senator ABETZ—Do we know by whom that review is going to be undertaken?

Mr Wilson—No, as yet there has been no announcement with regard to the scope.

Senator Conroy—Steve Bracks is busy.

Senator ABETZ—Can you take on notice what the potential terms of reference might be, when the Government intends to publicly announce this review, when submissions are going to be called for etcetera?

Ms Page—I think it is a bit awkward to take that on notice if no announcement has been made, as Mr Wilson has indicated. When and if a review is announced, it will be publicly announced and that information will be made available.

Senator ABETZ—Yes, but we might have a situation where a promise was made and then we come to estimates time and time again and everything is taken on notice, like the roads policy earlier this morning, which is singularly unhelpful. What I am trying to get from the Government is: by when might we expect that such a review is going to be announced?

Senator Conroy—We will take that on notice.

Senator ABETZ—Can you tell us if that review is going take place in 2008 or 2009?

Senator Conroy—We will take that on notice.

Senator ABETZ—Will this review take into account the competitive disadvantages, one way or the other, and the inflationary pressures that a tightening up of the permit system might impose on the Australian economy?

Senator Conroy—Questions about the terms of reference we will take on notice.

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Answer:

On 12 March 2008, the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government announced that the House of Representative's Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government has been asked to conduct a review of Australia's coastal shipping industry. The Committee has been asked to report by October 2008 and has called for public submissions by 11 April 2008. The Minister's media release and the Terms of Reference for the review are at **attachments A and B**.

[MLT 02 attachments A & B]

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Question: MLT 03

Division: Maritime and Land Transport

Topic: Seat Belts on School Buses

Hansard Page: 41 (19/02/08)

Senator McGauran asked:

Senator McGAURAN—Is it predominantly Queensland and New South Wales?

Mr Robertson—I will have to go into the details of the routes. I might take that one on notice. As far as I am aware, there is no particular pattern. Off the top of these amounts there are seven Victoria, three Tasmania, three Queensland, four South Australia, 10 NSW and one bus service in Western Australia.

Answer:

The table below sets out the number of operators and the number of buses approved in the first round of funding, which closed 1 November 2007:

Victoria	7 Operators	10 Buses
Tasmania	3 Operators	3 Buses
Queensland	3 Operators	3 Buses
South Australia	4 Operators	9 Buses
NSW	10 Operators	19 Buses
Western Australia	1 Operator	9 Buses
Total	28 Operators	53 Buses

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Question: MLT 04

Division: Maritime and Land Transport

Topic: National Maritime Safety

Hansard Page: 49 (19/02/08)

Senator Scullion asked:

Senator SCULLION—Wherever those options were provided, I would like a copy of them.

Mr Prosser—The two options are having a single maritime jurisdiction to cover things like certificates of competency etcetera—and there are a number of iterations on what might come out of that—and, alternatively, setting up a model State legislation arrangement where one State would legislate for NSCV-type standards and then the other States would then point to that State's legislation and try to get uniformity that way.

Mr Peachey—Can I interrupt for one moment. Can we take that request on notice? I am not sure what of the protocols governing the release of those working papers.

Senator SCULLION—I was about to say that I can assure you there is no mischief in this question. Whilst today we are enjoying having everything taken on notice, I am quite sure the Committee would always extend that privilege.

Mr Wilson—The current process with regard to the consideration of the issue is that a paper has been generated out of officials working in the maritime areas through jurisdictions. That paper will be considered by the Standing Committee on Transport, which is the CEOs of the transport jurisdictions at Commonwealth and State level, on 13 March. If it is okay we will take on notice the question on providing you with the detail of what those two options are. I will check with the Secretary of the Department and the Minister with regard to what we can and cannot provide in terms of the options.

Senator SCULLION—I appreciate that, Mr Wilson.

Answer:

The Australian Maritime Group, an inter-jurisdictional group of maritime officers, is undertaking a review of options for a new national approach to maritime legislation including commercial vessel survey, certification, crew competencies and operational practices. Two broad legislative frameworks are being considered:

- regulation under the Commonwealth Navigation Act; and
- model national legislation and a cooperative laws approach.