

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

Question No. ISTP 01

Division/Agency: Infrastructure and Surface Transport Policy

Topic: Tasmanian Freight Equalisation Scheme

Hansard Pages: 45-46 (21/10/08)

Senator Colbeck asked:

CHAIR—We now move to infrastructure and surface transport policy.

Senator COLBECK—Mr Sutton, it is good to see you here. I last saw you in Tassie, when you were doing your regional consultations. Can you provide an update of where things are at? We have heard from BITRE that you have a draft report from them. Can you give an update on where you are at with the Tasmanian Freight Equalisation Scheme parameter review?

Mr Wilson—Senator, if I may, I will start in terms of the overall process and then Mr Sutton can provide any additional information that you may require. As you are well aware, we undertook consultations with the community with regard to the findings of the Productivity Commission and how those would play out in administering the Tasmanian Freight Equalisation Scheme through March of this year. We have also received a report from the Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics with regard to the parameters that underpin those schemes. We have provided advice to the government on the findings of the consultation process and the findings of the BITRE review, and the government is considering the next steps in terms of the process for implementing any changes that may occur out of those consultations, out of the PC review and out of the BITRE parameter adjustment work.

Senator COLBECK—We learned before that it is a draft report from BITRE. What further interaction are you proposing with BITRE on the draft report?

Mr Wilson—The issue associated with the next steps in terms of the overall work for the scheme is currently being considered by the government.

Senator COLBECK—Is there any proposition to go back to the major users of the scheme?

Senator Conroy—The issues are being considered by the government. I mentioned that in your last line of questioning, so this—

Senator COLBECK—All right, Senator Conroy; this is not political and this is completely bipartisan.

Senator Conroy—No, this just goes to advice to government. You are actually into the advice to government area. The report is being passed up to us for us to consider.

Senator COLBECK—If you want to shut it down, that is fine.

Senator Conroy—I am not shutting it down.

Senator COLBECK—I just want to find out where it is at, and the users want to know—

Senator Conroy—You are well aware that you are not allowed to ask departmental officials about the content of advice to governments and what they are considering—

Senator COLBECK—Well, I will ask you, Senator Conroy, because the Tasmanian Labor government would like to know as well. In fact, there is a forum in Tasmania today for which the operations of the Tasmanian Freight Equalisation Scheme is one of the major issues, because they want to know what is happening as well. The

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Tasmanian government wants to know what is going on as well. So, can you tell me: is there any plan for the government to go back to the stakeholders in consultation with respect to where this is at?

Senator Conroy—The governments are considering a range of matters, and when we have made a decision we will announce it.

Senator COLBECK—The Tasmanian government made a submission to the review process but, because of the information and the process, it has reserved the right to make another submission. Is it going to get the opportunity to do that?

Senator Conroy—I will take that on notice and come back to you with any relevant information.

Senator COLBECK—Likewise, two of the major users of the scheme and major employers in northern and southern Tasmania have held back from making proposals because of the concerns that we talked about earlier. Will they get the opportunity to undertake consultations with government?

Senator Conroy—As I said, the government is considering a number of matters at the moment. If we have anything further to announce, we will keep you informed.

Senator COLBECK—I am just telling you that you are making decisions without the full data, because industry is not comfortable in providing it at this stage. I am only trying to help. Are you interested in that information?

Senator Conroy—We are always interested—

Senator COLBECK—I am not trying to be difficult.

Senator Conroy—We are always interested in relevant information. We are considering a range of matters at the moment. I have taken on notice the question around consultation and will come back to you.

Answer:

The Government announced on 6 November 2008 that the Scheme would continue and that there will be a review of the programme in 2011-2012.

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Question No. ISTP 02

Division/Agency: Infrastructure and Surface Transport Policy

Topic: Tasmanian Freight Equalisation Scheme

Hansard Page: 46 (21/10/08)

Senator Colbeck asked:

Senator COLBECK—Has a report been provided to the minister?

Mr Wilson—We have provided advice to the minister, as I indicated before, with regard to the outcomes of the consultation, the findings of the Productivity Commission review and the work that was undertaken by BITRE.

Senator COLBECK—When was that submission made to the minister?

Mr Wilson—I would have to take that on notice. I do not have that information with me.

Answer:

The advice was provided to the Minister in the first half of 2008.

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Question No. ISTP 03

Division/Agency: Infrastructure and Surface Transport Policy

Topic: Maritime Training

Hansard Pages: 49-50 (21/10/08)

Senator Macdonald asked:

Senator IAN MACDONALD—It is interesting what a group of politicians have said in the House of Representatives but I am really asking if the government or your department has any plans to deal with what is a critical shortage of training for people in the maritime industry.

Mr Wilson—I do not know that I can add anything extra to Mr Sutton's answer other than the fact that we will be working with the government in terms of developing a government response that will go across the breadth of the maritime industry.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—I take it from that that the answer to my question is, no, you are not doing anything now, the government has no plans, but you will look at it following this House of Representatives report.

CHAIR—It is one o'clock, so could you answer that, Mr Wilson.

Mr Wilson—I will not comment on the government having no plans but we will be looking at it in terms of—

Senator IAN MACDONALD—It is not a trick question. If you have, all I am doing is seeking information about it.

Mr Wilson—But, in terms of the specifics in regards to the training of maritime officers, maritime crew, we will be looking at it in terms of the review.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—That is excellent. Thank you for that. As I say, it is not a trick question; the answer may be yes and it may be no, but whatever it is, could you just say if the government has any plans or strategies for this at the present time?

CHAIR—You may want to take that on notice and come back after the lunch break.

Mr Wilson—In terms of the specifics of the question, I will give you an answer after lunch.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Okay, that is fine.

Answer:

On 12 March 2008 the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government requested the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government to inquire into the Australian coastal shipping industry. The Committee's terms of reference included assessing strategies for developing an adequate skilled maritime workforce.

In October 2008 the Committee released a report of its inquiry and a number of recommendations. The latter included some options for enhancing maritime training in Australia. The Minister has announced that the Government will now consider the report's recommendations in detail and respond to each of them during 2009.

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Questions about vocational and higher education in the industry ought to be addressed to the Deputy Prime Minister, the Hon Julia Gillard MP, Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, and Minister for Social Inclusion.

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Question No. ISTP 04

Division/Agency: Infrastructure and Surface Transport Policy

Topic: Variations in the Implementation of the New Fatigue Laws

Hansard Pages: 50-51 (21/10/08)

Senator Adams asked:

Senator ADAMS—The heavy vehicle driver fatigue reform rollout commenced on 29 September this year. Given that the reforms were based on a national template, are you aware of any state based differences in the implementation of these changes?

Mr Wilson—There are differences between the ways in which a number of the jurisdictions are rolling out the heavy vehicle fatigue laws. At this stage I believe New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria and South Australia have brought the new laws into effect on 29 September. The Northern Territory and Tasmania are expected to implement their laws at a later date. The Western Australian government indicated—at least prior to the change in government—that it would continue to regulate fatigue management under its occupational health and safety laws. The ACT has indicated it will retain its existing regulations. There are differences between the jurisdictions in regard to it, but I do not have the specifics in terms of precise differences between the jurisdictions. There are some differences in regard to the higher levels of fatigue management arrangements, as far as I am aware.

Senator Conroy—We are happy to take specific questions because they are complex—

Senator ADAMS—I know they are complex. I am fully aware of that, because as soon as one goes across a border you have all these different problems and logbooks. We do not have logbooks in WA but you have logbooks in South Australia. If you do not know that you have to get one, where do you go? There are all these sorts of complications.

Senator Conroy—We are happy to take specific questions on those and we will get you the information.

Senator Adams — I would like to be kept up to date with the differences. If they are going to cause problems, what is going to be done about them?

Mr Wilson – We will provide you with an answer on notice in terms of the major differences between what the jurisdictions have implemented. In terms of what is to be done about them, as I indicated, we are pursuing the establishment of a single jurisdiction which would, over time, eliminate many of the differences between the jurisdictions if it were to be implemented.

Answer:

Details about new fatigue laws implemented by the States can be found at the National Transport Commission website at www.ntc.gov.au.

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Question No. ISTP 05

Division/Agency: Infrastructure and Surface Transport Policy

Topic: Implementation Progress of Higher Mass Limits since 1999

Hansard Page/s: Written Question

Senator ADAMS asked:

Senator ADAMS—What progress is being made to implement the decision by COAG in 1999, to develop common higher mass limits for trucks with road friendly suspension?

Answer:

- Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia, the Northern Territory and the Commonwealth implemented higher mass limits by 1 July 1999 or earlier. New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania followed within the next 18 months.

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Question No. ISTP 06

Division/Agency: Infrastructure and Surface Transport Policy

Topic: Implementation Progress of Higher Mass Limits since 1999

Hansard Page/s: Written Question

Senator ADAMS asked:

Senator ADAMS—What progress has been made to roll out an approved national higher mass limit (HML) network for trucks with road friendly suspension?

Answer:

The NT has 100 per cent HML access to routes, subject to seasonal restrictions. Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia also offer extensive HML networks.

In February 2006, COAG called for a commitment from jurisdictions by the end of 2008 to examine and, if necessary, upgrade the HML network to link key distribution points (KDPs) to the AusLink network.

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Question No. ISTP 07

Division/Agency: Infrastructure and Surface Transport Policy
Topic: Progress in the Establishment of a B-triple Network
Hansard Page/s: Written Question

Senator ADAMS asked:

Senator ADAMS—What progress is being made to implement the 2006 COAG decision to establish a national B-triple network?

Answer:

A national B-Triple network was agreed in May 2007 and published in July 2007.

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Question No. ISTP 08

Division/Agency: Infrastructure and Surface Transport Policy

Topic: Harmonisation of Heavy Vehicle Truck Mass and Dimension Regulations

Hansard Page/s: Written Question

Senator ADAMS asked:

Senator ADAMS—1. Are you aware that states have failed to implement harmonised treatment of heavy truck regulations with regard to weights, height and width of loads?
2. Can you give examples?

Answer:

The Road Transport Reform Mass and Loading, Oversize and Overmass and Restricted Access Vehicle Model Regulations 1995 were developed to achieve national consistency and many of the model Regulations are consistently applied.

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Question No. ISTP 09

Division/Agency: Infrastructure and Surface Transport Policy

Topic: Inconsistent Heavy Vehicle Truck Dimension Regulations across Jurisdictions

Hansard Page/s: Written Question

Senator ADAMS asked:

Senator ADAMS—1. Is it true that in New South Wales, rigid, semi-trailers and B-doubles may be loaded to a width of 2.83 metres only, but in Victoria, these trucks can be loaded to three metres?

2. Where does this leave a truckie in Victoria who loads up a truck with, for example, hay, as wide as legally possible, and then drives to NSW?

3. Are you aware of similar inconsistencies with regard to the height of loads?

4. What is your department doing about these bizarre and counter-intuitive regulations that impede the development of a national road freight system?

Answer:

All heavy vehicles come under a national maximum operating width limit of 2.5 metres. This was achieved through the national reform process and the development of the model *Road Transport Reform Mass and Loading Regulations 1995*. Heavy vehicles operating over this width are classified as permitted vehicles and permits are issued by the state with consideration of dimensions of the freight and suitability of the route. While national model regulations (*Road Transport Reform (oversize and over mass vehicles) Regulations 1995*) are in place for over dimensional vehicles for adoption by states and territories, jurisdictions may vary their permit/operating requirements in light of the freight dimensions and route.

In July 2008 the Australian Transport Council agreed to a framework for a national approach to heavy vehicle regulation, registration and licensing that would be supported by:

- a. the establishment of a single heavy vehicle regulation entity;
- b. implementation of a national heavy vehicle registration scheme;
- c. adoption of a consistent approach to heavy vehicle driver competency and testing standards and heavy vehicle driver training school recognition;
- d. delivery of a single physical national heavy vehicle driver licence; and
- e. a body of national heavy vehicle laws that would encompass current heavy vehicle regulation, including registration, licensing, mass and loading, fatigue, safety and associated compliance activities.

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Question No. ISTP 10

Division/Agency: Infrastructure and Surface Transport Policy
Topic: A Single National System of Heavy Vehicle Regulation
Hansard Page/s: Written Question

Senator Williams asked:

Senator Williams—At the moment, the heavy vehicle fatigue law in Western Australia is markedly different to the fatigue laws now implemented in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia. How will the Government ensure that any national law does not unfairly penalise Western Australian road transport businesses?

Answer:

The Government is currently working with state and territory governments on the development of a framework for a national approach to heavy vehicle regulation, registration and licensing that would be supported by:

- a. the establishment of a single heavy vehicle regulation entity;
- b. implementation of a national heavy vehicle registration scheme;
- c. adoption of a consistent approach to heavy vehicle driver competency and testing standards and heavy vehicle driver training school recognition;
- d. delivery of a single physical national heavy vehicle driver licence; and
- e. a body of national heavy vehicle laws that would encompass current heavy vehicle regulation, including registration, licensing, mass and loading, fatigue, safety and associated compliance activities.

Transport Ministers agreed that the national laws will make provision for variations which enhance local productivity.