

**Submission
No 19**

**INQUIRY INTO PRESSURES ON HEAVY VEHICLE
DRIVERS AND THEIR IMPACT IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

Organisation: Transport Industries Skills Centre

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Submission to the Inquiry into the pressures on heavy vehicle drivers and their impact in New South Wales.

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Summary:

Driver Training IS a road safety issue! No matter how much technology is at hand, no matter how the regulations are written, and no matter how safe the road is designed – an inexperienced and unskilled operator is a risky road user.

Introduction

Australia's road network is a dangerous place to work and truck driving is a difficult and demanding occupation. It is a high-pressure occupation by nature. Road trauma and serious injury are daily workplace challenges. In addition, transport businesses are struggling to find skilled drivers, both men and women, to meet a growing freight/supply chain task. Maintaining trust is important as successful operation of the national road freight task is not optional, it's an essential industry. However it is widely accepted that stress is a *cost of doing business* in this high-risk workplace.

**At Sutton Road Training Centre we believe that *road safety starts at the steering wheel.*
Human error has been shown to be the main cause for heavy vehicle-related incidents
and injury so *better driver trainers will go a long way towards driving positive change.***

A recent heavy vehicle transport industry report (*National Transport Insurance NTI*) shows that the proportion of serious crashes attributed to human-factor related causes continued a trend of increasing year-on-year to reach 63.5% of all losses. Driver-assist technologies, improvements to

infrastructure, awareness programs and tighter enforcement help increase road safety across Australia, but it seems incidents due to driver error are becoming more common, not less.

The recently released *National Road Safety Action Plan (2023–2025)* states that ***vehicle-related incidents are still the leading cause of workplace fatalities***, accounting for 38 percent of total workplace fatalities in 2022. Therefore any ongoing reductions in transport workplace pressures and job-related stress through knowledge, skill development and improvements in natural driving behaviours and dynamic skills will turn that trend around.

Research findings coming out of the Monash University 3-year Driving Health study, *Driving Health* project, identified major areas of concern in regard to Australian truck driver health and welfare. Results show that ***drivers who had higher levels of OHS and advanced driver training were more likely to have a higher work ability and lower levels of stress and thus were more likely to stay with the industry providing safer, healthier drivers for longer.***

Education and training cost reduction and efficiency gains through increased productivity in truck driver training will become an obvious emergent benefit which will be leveraged for years to come. Lessons learnt through the implementation of heavy vehicle road safety programs will allow us to enhance future programs with the obvious intention to expand across all sectors and heavily influence new driver training programs across Australia.

Driver Training is a Road Safety Issue

At Sutton Road Training Centre (SRTC) our mission is to help lift minimum driver training and licencing standards. We will take every opportunity to promote consistency across jurisdictions and industry sectors through the development and delivery of new and improved road safety programs. Our belief is that all driver training facilities should incorporate a *Safe Systems Approach* to compliment all aspects of the *Heavy Vehicle National Law* into all our training and assessments.

SRTC has considered recommendations in the final report from the recent Senate Committee Inquiry: *The importance of a viable, safe, sustainable and efficient road transport industry*. The inquiry looked closely at Australia's heavy vehicle industry with particular reference to (among other topics): *sustainable standards and the training and career pathways to support, develop and sustain the road transport industry*.

The final report is entitled: *Without Trucks Australia Stops: the development of a viable, safe, sustainable and efficient road transport industry, (August 2021, © Commonwealth of Australia 2021)*. It outlines the importance of consistent training for truck drivers. *Recommendation 4, Section 8.48 states: The committee acknowledges the challenges facing the road transport industry arising from a failure to provide universal licensing and training credentials and to support pathways for underrepresented transport workers.*

Sutton Road Training Centre endorses the Committee's recommendation that *"the government works with state and territory governments (in consultation with relevant registered organisations of employers and workers) to: introduce a standardised, universal and compulsory safety induction unit for the road transport sector; and introduce an industry skills passport."*

SRTC has a clear Charter: **"Safer Roads, Safer Drivers."** We are a transport industry training centre committed to providing the highest standard of road safety training for new entrants, professionals and heavy vehicle operators looking to increase capacity and fulfil compliance requirements across the transport sector. We believe very firmly that ***driver training is a road safety issue.***

In short, Sutton Road Training Centre wants to help the governments, other RTOs, Councils and the Transport Industry Sector more broadly provide certified professional heavy vehicle driver trainers who are up demonstrably to the task, providing a flow-on effect for small, medium and large transport sector interests in any jurisdiction across Australia.

The result will be better compliance and more productive licencing processes that are fit-for-purpose and an associated reduction in stress and pressure for new entrants. Training and assessment programs which are in line with the recommendations outlined in the *National Heavy Vehicle Driver Competency Framework*. We could incorporate information and data coming out of the *Consultation Regulatory Impact Statement* well into the future.

Response to the Terms of Reference (as per item):

Portfolio Committee No. 6 – Transport and the Arts inquire into and report on the pressures on heavy vehicle drivers and the impact of these pressures on driver practice and observance of regulatory obligations in New South Wales, and in particular:

(a) the characteristics of the heavy vehicle industry in New South Wales that shape driver practice

SRTC Comment/Recommendation:

We have a critical driver shortage, truck drivers are mostly old folks and they're not getting any younger and truck driving is the most dangerous occupation in the country. In addition, Australia's freight task is only going to grow into the future, putting even more pressure on an already stretched workforce.

Truck combinations are getting larger, requiring even more specific skills. There is downward pressure on wages and upward pressures on the cost of living. Road safety is not only about rest stops, technology, public awareness or fatigue policy and regulations. Road safety is not just about the machinery or the infrastructure. The human factor is a big part of the business of road safety.

Attitude, competence and experience are relevant and subjective.

A number of government representatives and trucking groups have been advocating for some time for licencing reform, enhanced driver training and creating clear career pathways for young drivers. **It makes road safety sense to provide novice truckies the skills to survive in a fast-moving and unpredictable environment** and any money spent on driver training helps save lives. It is great policy and wise investment in the future of the industry.

Governments at all levels, peak transport industry bodies, regulators, public transport businesses and freight companies are all working hard to address road trauma and serious injury in line with the vision of **Towards Zero**. And they all agree on the underlying need: *We need to stop road users dying and suffering serious injuries*. Peer-reviewed research has shown that improvements in how truck driver trainers are educated, and the level to which they are exposed to industry-based training, have resulted in sustained and real road safety outcomes and better worker retention rates.

The NSW Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety (*Report No. 4/54 – September 2010, Chair: Geoff Corrigan, MP*) – Chapter Five – Policy Coordination and Integration, states, “*Staysafe endorses moves towards **national training standards and uniformity in the regulation of workforce capacity within the trucking industry as a means to ensure safer drivers and increased productivity.** Chain of responsibility requirements, safe driving plans and standardisation of driving hours across jurisdictions are essential elements in achieving safer driver outcomes.... positive steps towards meeting overarching road safety goals.*”

In Recommendation 3 it states: “*In view of recognised and anticipated growth in the heavy vehicle transport industry and a shortage of trained drivers, the Committee recommends that the RTA conduct discussions with TAFE NSW, other vocational training institutions and the heavy vehicle transport industry to **provide increased funding and support for the expansion of driving simulator training in NSW.***”

In Recommendation 5 it states: “*In order to ensure the continuing competency of the existing driver skills base, the Committee further recommends that the RTA investigate the feasibility of mandating **refresher simulator or other appropriate training for heavy vehicle drivers every three years, as is required in European jurisdictions.***”

(c) the impact, effectiveness and enforcement of current mechanisms to address current and future pressures and their impacts on heavy vehicle drivers in New South Wales, in particular:

(i) training requirements for heavy vehicle drivers

SRTC Comment/Recommendation:

The idea of incorporating heavy vehicle defensive driver training into a healthy and progressive licencing system for novice truck drivers is not a new one, it’s just difficult.

Better driver training will make better drivers which in turn will provide for safer roads and helps reduce injury and the associated road toll. However it seems that we are going the other way:

“New drivers are being churned out of driving schools in as little as half a day... a group of three applicants in 5 hours.... for the lot. (Applicants) that aren’t equipped to be put onto the road.”
(Without Trucks Australia Stops: the development of a viable, safe, sustainable and efficient road transport industry, August 2021, Australian Driver Trainers Association, Submission 73).

A high-tech vehicle on a smooth road at a sensible speed is about as safe as you can make it. But as a mechanic friend once told me, *“the most important piece of equipment is the nut behind the wheel.”* Hopefully a well-educated nut..

The Transport for NSW 2026 Road Safety Action Plan, *Toward Zero trauma on NSW roads* states that education is vital for equipping people to **“make safe decisions on the road.”** Road safety is a shared responsibility. Achieving our goal of zero trauma on NSW roads will require ongoing whole of government collaboration and support from stakeholders and every member of the NSW community.

The Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Senate Committee: Importance of a viable, safe, sustainable and efficient road transport industry recently released a Report: *Without Trucks Australia Stops: the development of a viable, safe, sustainable and efficient road transport industry*, (August 2021, © Commonwealth of Australia 2021). The Committee discovered major safety and productivity issues within Australia’s heavy vehicle driver training and licencing sectors:

- 5.2 The committee received evidence that the industry lacks confidence in the skills of new drivers and that many transport operators struggle to deliver the shortfall in skills training.
- 5.13 The review found that heavy vehicle licensing varied between jurisdictions and the standard of training and assessment was 'often inadequate with offerings of less than a day to obtain a heavy vehicle licence'.
- 5.21 The market-based approach which does not mandate minimum training and practical experience durations is resulting in a "race to the bottom" in the current environment¹.
- 5.2 The industry has a high regard for practical, high-quality on-the-job training which would give new drivers the time and experience to allow skills to develop. However, the committee received evidence that the industry lacks confidence in the skills of new drivers and that many transport operators struggle to deliver the shortfall in skills training.

The committee was told that *“despite the work over many years to develop national competency requirements for heavy vehicle drivers, new drivers are still being 'churned' out of driving schools'. Furthermore, driver shortages and poor progress in securing a younger and more diverse driver base was a threat to the sustainability of the industry.”*

It found that there was inconsistency among state and territory jurisdictions in their application of the framework and in the qualifications and practical experience requirements for instructors and assessors. *“The standard required to pass heavy vehicle driving assessments was also found to be low and insufficiently focused on safety.”*

Despite it being one of the most dangerous professions in Australia, industry-wide compulsory safety induction credentials do not exist for the road transport industry. The committee agreed that more proactive measures need to be taken to ensure that road transport workers have a safe and healthy workplace, *“mandatory safety induction training would assist in reducing workplace injury and death.”* The committee also supported the establishment of national standards aimed at ensuring the financial and organisational capacity of operators to manage workplace safety.

(ii) training and education requirements for companies employing heavy vehicle drivers

SRTC Comment/Recommendation:

Associate Professor Ross Iles, Health Systems Services & Policy at Monash University stated, *“just under 40% of drivers surveyed said that they had formal training in defensive driving or advanced driving skills.”* This outlines an obvious transport industry safety gap.

The heavy vehicle driver training sector could work effectively with governments, project partners and industry stakeholders to build productive partnerships for shared outcomes, but the challenge is great. In 2021, 163 people died in heavy vehicle-related incidents (*BITRE Data*).

More than 80% of serious crashes involving a heavy vehicle were found to be the fault of the other vehicle. While trucks crash less often than other vehicles they are more likely to result in road trauma and serious injury (*National Road Safety Strategy*). Expert heavy vehicle driver trainers who understand road safety will help reduce those numbers – but candidates are very hard to find. We

could work closely with governments and industry partners to identify and fill skills gaps in the driver training industry.

(d) the capability for new and emerging technologies to assist in reducing pressures for heavy vehicle drivers and effect driver practice and observance of regulatory obligations, such as through training, implementing safety measures and fatigue management

SRTC Comment/Recommendation:

The ongoing development and dissemination of heavy vehicle road safety training programs across Australia's transport industries into the future is a wise investment in road safety, attends to skills shortages in many related operations, increases access for women into the sector and is obviously great value for money. It is expected that we will see a decrease in staff turnover and a corresponding increase in retention rates. Training models being developed through this process will be relatable and adaptable to out-of-truck procedures and ancillary services.

We are very keen to help integrate new technology outcomes from future road safety training programs into Australia's heavy vehicle driver training sector reforms nationally and ultimately influence the development of nationally-consistent competency-based training standards.

Last year the Transport Workers' Union, the Australian Road Transport Industry Organisation and the National Road Freighters Association called on the rest of the transport industry to participate constructively in new trucking reform to help "*set universal, binding standards to make Australia's deadliest industry safer, fairer and more viable.*" (TWU website news, 2022)

Future planning for integrating modern technologies into heavy vehicle road safety programs should include: new propulsion systems, advanced fuel management and fuel types, driver assist technologies, simulator training, online flexible learning and autonomous vehicles. Development of modern driver training technologies will provide many opportunities to integrate research and learning outcomes into future versions of our systems as proven train-the-trainer training products.

(e) any other related matters.

SRTC Comment/Recommendation:

In the heavy vehicle driver training sector there are multiple needs in regard to public safety:

- A need for more road user awareness about sharing the road with heavy vehicles (***community education***),
- A need for more road safety skills in the cohort, both men and women, of heavy vehicle driver trainers (***increased competency and depth of understanding of issues***), and
- A need for more appropriate, and nationally-consistent, heavy vehicle driver licencing and operating procedures (***nationally-consistent compliance and regulations***).

About Sutton Road Training Centre

The Sutton Road Training Centre (SRTC) is a purpose-built driver training and education facility located at 441 Sutton Road Majura in the ACT. SRTC encompasses 61 hectares of land with a purpose-built training track, skid pan, modern truck fleet of every class and all relevant training classroom facilities.

Our professional staff of highly-trained men and women are highly respected road safety educators in the industry. SRTC has been operating for a number of decades with the specific aim of delivering first class training to the transport and distribution industries in the ACT and surrounding regional areas of NSW.

The Council is controlled by a volunteer Board of Directors who represent a cross section of the transport and distribution industries across Australia. SRTC is also home to Transport Industries Skills Centre Inc (Registered Training Centre RTO0201). TISC is not for profit and it delivers a range of accredited and non-accredited training in the heavy vehicle and light vehicle industries including the newly released Certificate IV in Motor Vehicle Driver Training TLI41222.

At Sutton Road Training Centre we believe that ***road safety starts at the steering wheel***. Human error has been shown to be the main cause for heavy vehicle-related incidents and injury so better

driver trainers will go a long way towards lifting minimum training standards and driving positive change.

Our Mission is *'Safer Roads Safer Drivers – to develop safer drivers and road users within the Australian and international communities and to promote sustainable safe driving practices and attitudes.'*

SRTC is developing a comprehensive road safety program entitled *Training for Road Safety (TRS)*. *Training for Road Safety* is an industry-focused practical pilot training program designed to endorse qualified graduates, both men and women, as professional truck driver trainers. The flow-on effect will be greater capacity in road safety education, increased confidence in Australia's driver training sector and ultimately a larger cohort of safer truck drivers. Safer drivers and safer roads – reducing avoidable death, injury and the huge associated health costs on our roads.

TRS builds upon proven heavy vehicle driver training systems and will be open to suitable Candidates from transport industry businesses, government, councils, public transport companies and other RTOs from across Australia. We will be able to measure outcomes to compare trends over time to deliver accountability against agreed deliverables throughout implementation of the program. Through *Training for Road Safety*, SRTC will work with other RTOs across the country to produce instructors who understand the specific road safety challenges faced by drivers on a daily basis.

The *Training for Road Safety* Program aligns closely with the NSW Government's road safety initiatives because that is exactly what SRTC does, and it is what the TRS Program is designed to produce. To deliver expert heavy vehicle driver trainers who can ultimately educate a suite of safer, more job-ready transport industry driver recruits.