



Speech by

Andrew Cripps

MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK

Hansard Wednesday, 14 March 2007

MOTION: DISALLOWANCE OF STATUTORY INSTRUMENT

Mr CRIPPS (Hinchinbrook—NPA) (8.01 pm): I rise to speak in support of the motion to disallow the Transport and Other Legislation Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2006, which was moved by the member for Gregory. I am particularly concerned about the effects that this regulation will have on industries in the electorate of Hinchinbrook, which depend greatly on heavy vehicle transport to move their produce to southern markets. I recognise that the principal concerns about this regulation pertain to the cattle industry. North Queensland and far-north Queensland have a well-established and growing cattle industry. They face significant difficulties if the provisions of this regulation are not reconsidered in recognition of the serious difficulties they will cause for the road transport industry and the industries that depend on it.

It would appear that the regulation includes demerit points and fines which, taken together, exceed the latest recommendations from the National Transport Commission report of November 2006. There is a firm view among road transport industry operators and the primary industries that they service that this regulation will increase transport costs and, as a consequence, the cost of the products that these heavy vehicles are carrying.

There are several arguments to be advanced in support of treating the transportation of live animals differently from the transportation of other products owing to animal welfare considerations. If a driver has completed their allowable driving hours and then is required to stop to rest until they are allowed to drive again, the animals that the driver is transporting standing in the trailers will remain standing if there are no appropriate unloading and holding facilities available. From time to time during the transport of live animals responsible drivers stop to check their load. If this regulation puts pressure on drivers to make destinations within shorter time frames, the regularity and diligence of drivers with respect to these animal welfare considerations may be compromised. Similarly, even if the trucks are not carrying live animals, from time to time responsible drivers stop to check their rig while hauling loads. But if drivers are pushed by imposing overly restrictive logbook requirements they may not be able to monitor their loads as frequently to meet delivery timetables. This has the potential to affect road safety.

The banana industry in my electorate depends on heavy vehicle transport to deliver bananas grown in north Queensland to the southern markets in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth. Every week about 290 semitrailers carrying bananas travel from north Queensland to those southern markets. The main concern of the banana industry is that the transport operators serving that industry will lose demerit points for noncompliance with aspects of the regulation as a result of trivial offences, such as spelling mistakes in logbooks.

There is already a shortage of heavy vehicle licence holders available to meet the growing demand for road transport. Industry groups in north Queensland are concerned about the changes to the regulation that will extend delivery times to the furthest destinations, such as Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth, from two to three days. This will certainly increase the costs of produce and goods hauled out of north Queensland.

Mr Lucas: Only for people who break the law, and they've been breaking it at the moment.

Mr CRIPPS: In addition to the banana industry and the cattle industry, other industries in north Queensland that depend on heavy vehicle transport to deliver their products to southern markets include the mango, lychee and pineapple industries and a range of other horticultural industries.

Mr Lucas: You're slurring all the industries by saying this.

Mr CRIPPS: I am surprised that the minister is taking exception to my comments about north Queensland. Recently he was in north Queensland and drove along the highway between Cairns and Townsville where he would have seen the large number of heavy vehicles on the road.

Industry groups and transport operators have reported some instances of overbearing inspectors who have been known to go back over 12 months of entries during their logbook inspections to pick up spelling mistakes and fine drivers for these types of trivial infringements. Others have reported that inspectors are sitting outside the gates of wholesale markets and pulling up drivers as they drive out heading towards the service station roadhouses up the road to have a break where they complete their logbooks. But because the drivers have not made the entries to their logbooks on site at the market they are fined and as a result they lose points.

In considering the proposed changes to this regulation, the lack of rest bays available to heavy vehicles on heavy vehicle transport routes is a major concern. This means that drivers have to time their stops and probably have to pull up short of their allocated driving times, because they know that there is not a rest bay or a roadhouse for another two hours or so. There needs to be more bays and these bays ought to have sufficient space to take a number of trucks. There ought to be appropriate facilities provided at these rest bays.

If the minister is not inclined to support the opposition's disallowance motion tonight, he ought to give serious consideration to placing a moratorium on the enforcement of this regulation for 18 months or so in order to give him and his department an opportunity to build those extra bays and appropriate facilities before his government imposes these new conditions. I think that is a reasonable compromise. It would give the government an opportunity to demonstrate that it was serious about improving road safety beyond the other changes that were made recently without insisting on unnecessarily punitive restrictions on the heavy vehicle road transport industry.