

Agreement in Principle

Mr DAVID BORGER (Granville—Minister for Housing, Minister for Western Sydney, and Minister Assisting the Minister for Transport) [4.26 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now agreed to in principle.

The purpose of the Road Transport (Vehicle Registration) Amendment (Heavy Vehicle Registration Charges) Bill 2009 is to provide a more administratively efficient mechanism by which the New South Wales Government can give practical effect to ongoing national commitments for heavy vehicle registration charges. The bill will align the heavy vehicle legislation in New South Wales with parallel legislative drafting in other jurisdictions, and will reduce the risk of New South Wales potentially facing a comparative financial disadvantage. It is important that New South Wales is not disadvantaged by other States and pricing decisions in relation to heavy vehicles.

The Act currently requires a Cabinet decision and legislative amendment each time a national decision is implemented or new, more productive heavy vehicles are introduced. Placing the descriptions of heavy vehicles and the annually adjusted charges in the regulation will improve the agility of New South Wales in responding to rapid technological and intergovernmental change. The bill will also facilitate the timely introduction of newer, safer and more productive heavy vehicle configurations, providing New South Wales the opportunity to better address significant challenges including climate change, safety, efficiency and congestion. The amendments in the bill will ensure that New South Wales continues to fulfil its commitment to national consistency in administering heavy vehicle registration charges.

This bill is a result of extensive consultation by the National Transport Commission between all States, Territories and relevant industry groups. In addition, the New South Wales Government has undertaken extensive consultation with the road transport sector in New South Wales. New South Wales must fund improvements in road infrastructure to support the valuable contribution of the heavy road freight and passenger transport industries to the people of New South Wales. The National Transport Commission heavy vehicle charges determinations aim to ensure that expenditure on road maintenance and improvement is proportionate to their use by heavy vehicles.

This bill acknowledges that the current rate of innovative technological change means more productive heavy vehicle combinations must be recognised by the determinations at regular intervals. It is sensible that New South Wales is able to respond swiftly to these changes. The bill facilitates transparency in the charging regime by strengthening the prohibition on any regulatory amendment attempted without reference to an Australian Transport Council or intergovernmental agreement.

Essentially, this bill allows New South Wales to align with other States so that we have a nationally consistent system when charging heavy vehicle users for their impact on and damage to our roads and so that no State is disadvantaged in relation to the national road freight industry. The bill also brings forward part of the planned consolidation of road transport Acts into a single Act, which was scheduled to be undertaken in late 2010. Consistent with the Better Regulation Principles, the consolidation will simplify application and interpretation of road transport law for legal practitioners, administrators and all New South Wales road users. The State Government is determined to ensure that the national reform program causes minimal disruption to freight operators at a time when the global financial crisis means many are already doing it tough.

Following consultation with the road transport sector, including the New South Wales Road Freight Advisory Council, the Government agreed to defer the introduction of the reforms for six months until 1 January 2010. The former Minister for Roads, Michael Daley, did a very good job in negotiating an acceptable outcome with the industry. The industry supported the decision and congratulated the Government on giving customers a fair go. Mr Ron Finemore, a member of the Road Freight Advisory Council and a leading industry figure, said at the time, "These are difficult economic times for all and the Government's initiative shows that they are on top of the issues involved." The measures within this bill enhance the ability of New South Wales to give practical effect to ongoing national reform commitments. Stakeholders who operate nationally will benefit from the amendments, as they will be able to more readily interpret their rights and responsibilities.

The New South Wales Government, through the State Plan, is committed to cutting red tape by the simplification, repeal, reform or consolidation of existing regulation. This bill contributes to that commitment. The proposed changes also will facilitate the introduction of newer, safer and more productive heavy vehicle configurations, providing New South Wales the opportunity to better address significant challenges, including climate change, safety, efficiency and congestion. I commend the bill to the House.