

Agreement in Principle

Mr DAVID HARRIS (Wyong—Parliamentary Secretary) [11.01 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now agreed to in principle.

The purpose of the Road Transport Legislation Amendment (Unauthorised Vehicle Use) Bill 2010 is to support previous reforms to the vehicle registration system that have simplified registration requirements, reduced red tape and saved New South Wales motorists both time and money. The previous reforms to simplify registration requirements need to be balanced by more effective enforcement systems to ensure that motorists continue to meet their obligation to renew the registration of their vehicles on time and do not drive vehicles that are unregistered and uninsured. This bill will provide the legislative basis for better detection of unregistered and uninsured vehicles by allowing images from enforcement cameras, including red light, speed, bus lane, transit way and tollway cameras, to be used to detect these offences. The bill will also make it clear that only a single registered operator is allowed for each vehicle and will remove any ambiguity in the legislation and strengthen the regulatory framework.

In May 2008 the New South Wales Government introduced broad reforms to the registration system to: extend the exemption for vehicle safety inspections from three to five years; make it easier for people to renew registration over the internet or phone by requiring pink slips to be transmitted electronically to the Roads and Traffic Authority; allow only a single registered operator for a vehicle; allow motorists to register their vehicles for shorter periods of six months if they renew the registration of their vehicle online; and provide fleet operators with the option of registering their vehicles for two or three years. The amendments in this bill complement these reforms and demonstrate the Government's commitment to simplifying the registration system and reducing red tape.

Substantial consultation on the reforms introduced in May 2008 was undertaken with the Motor Traders Association, the Motor Accidents Authority and compulsory third party [CTP] insurers. Extensive consultations on the current reform have taken place with the New South Wales Police Force, the Attorney General's Department and the State Debt Recovery Office, and these agencies support the reform. One of the major amendments in the bill, which allows the use of enforcement cameras to detect unauthorised driving, stems from a recommendation by the New South Wales Audit Office report "Dealing with Unlicensed and Unregistered Driving". The Audit Office recommended that red light and speed cameras be used to detect unregistered vehicles. This bill will ensure that recommendation is implemented. Images from red light, speed, bus lane, transit way and tollway cameras will be used to detect unregistered and uninsured vehicles.

The Roads and Traffic Authority estimates that about 1.2 per cent of vehicles are unregistered—that is, 65,000 unregistered vehicles are being driven on New South Wales roads at any one time. Accidents involving unregistered vehicles impose substantial costs on all motorists through increased insurance premiums and personal injury claims caused by uninsured vehicles. In 2007 approximately 8,400 penalty notices were issued for using an unregistered vehicle and 6,500 penalty notices for using an uninsured vehicle were issued through roadside enforcement. However, this enforcement activity represented less than 13 per cent of all unregistered vehicles. In the year to June 2008, 658,701 vehicles were detected as committing a camera-related offence. Of those vehicles 1 per cent were unregistered at the time of the offence—that is, 6,898 vehicles.

Traditionally the police have relied on a visual examination of the number plate and registration label to detect unregistered vehicles. This approach has been limited in its effectiveness as vehicles continue to display a number plate and registration label even when registration has expired or has been suspended or cancelled. In December 2005 the New South Wales Police Force introduced the use of automatic number plate recognition [ANPR] technology to detect unregistered vehicles. Police use of ANPR cameras has identified improvements in the detection of unregistered vehicles and unlicensed driving during roadside operations. Vehicle registration status may change through the year. Detection systems need to be able to check the Roads and Traffic Authority database to determine if a vehicle is registered at a particular point in time.

Comparing information captured by cameras with the Roads and Traffic Authority's registration database is a cost-effective means of detecting large volumes of unregistered and uninsured vehicles. New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory are the only Australian jurisdictions not using camera technology to detect and prosecute the use of unregistered vehicles. This bill will provide for penalty notices to be issued for other offences identified as a result of an initial camera-detected offence. For example, where the registered operator receives a penalty notice for a camera-recorded speeding offence and a check of the Roads and Traffic Authority database indicates the vehicle is unregistered the registered operator will also receive a penalty notice for the offence of "use unregistered motor vehicle". These measures will provide a strong incentive for motorists to ensure that the registration of their vehicle is renewed prior to the registration expiry date.

It has never been easier for large numbers of motorists to renew registration online. Motorists now have the

choice to register their vehicles for six months online if they cannot afford to renew for a year at a time. The Roads and Traffic Authority, however, will continue to send registration renewal notices by mail. I further wish to assure the House that the key objective of this bill is to ensure that all vehicles are registered and insured. This benefits the entire community. It protects registration revenue, which funds infrastructure construction and maintenance, and reduces the costs of CTP insurance premiums. Before camera detection of unauthorised driving is introduced the Roads and Traffic Authority will implement a communication campaign to remind customers of the importance of renewing their registration on time.

Another feature of this bill is to make it clear that only one registered operator, either a person or a corporation, is allowed for each vehicle. The registration Act currently allows for the regulation to provide for one or more registered operators. However, in May 2008 the Road Transport (Vehicle Registration) Regulation 2007 was amended to allow only one person to be recorded as the registered operator of a vehicle. This amendment will simply remove any ambiguity and ensure consistency between the regulation and the Act. Since May 2008 any unregistered vehicle presented for registration or transferred to a new operator has been registered in a single name only. This change has not been compulsorily imposed on any vehicle currently registered in more than one name.

Many people are unaware that, under the registration Act, registration is not evidence of vehicle ownership or property rights to a vehicle. Registration records the name of the person responsible for ensuring a vehicle is registered, roadworthy and used responsibly on the road network. Recording only a single operator will assist law enforcement agencies in identifying the person or corporation responsible for the vehicle and simplify the registration process. In conclusion, the amendments in this bill will support reforms to the vehicle registration system that simplify registration requirements, reduce red tape and save New South Wales motorists time and money. In addition, these reforms will provide a legislative basis for a more effective enforcement system to ensure that motorists continue to meet their obligation to renew the registration of their vehicles on time and ensure that vehicles are roadworthy and insured. I commend the bill to the House.