



## Road Transport Efficiency Bill.

### Second Reading

**Mr TORBAY** (Northern Tablelands) [10.39 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I have enormous pleasure in introducing the Road Transport Efficiency Bill, which has been developed after careful consultation with my constituents, the country community, and my fellow Independents, who I am pleased to say are in the Chamber. The bill is driven by an underlying vision that we in this Parliament have an overriding obligation to do the best we can to make New South Wales a great place in which to live and work. The Road Transport Efficiency Bill is about trying to contribute to that goal. It provides a mechanism for the Minister for Roads, after consultation with councils where appropriate, to ensure that New South Wales joins almost every other State in Australia in providing a grain harvest truck loading scheme, livestock loading, and higher productivity trucks.

Importantly, the bill provides that approvals for all these operations can take place on designated routes and in designated areas. Every State in Australia, except New South Wales, has some form of grain harvest truck loading arrangement and livestock loading. Every State in Australia, except New South Wales, has a way of allowing higher productivity trucks to operate within the State, except for one or two exceptions negotiated by my colleague the honourable member for Dubbo. There must be a reason why New South Wales is the only State that cannot see its way clear in this area.

As a Parliament we owe it to our constituency and to the people of this State to look seriously at those questions and to work together to find a way forward. Of course, there are impediments, some of which are real, some are imaginary, and some, unfortunately, are seized upon to be used as negotiating currency. I will address those impediments in a moment. First, this bill has been introduced after receiving widespread support from people in country New South Wales. The rural trucking industry initiated a series of consultations known as country trucking caucuses. Indeed, many members would have attended those caucuses prior to the election. Country people involved in and around the trucking industry and its customers were all involved.

Two caucuses were held in my electorate, one in Armidale and one in Inverell, and I was very impressed. I met people who are genuinely grappling with these significant issues. The proposals in this bill were endorsed in those caucuses and in 20 other caucuses around the State. That is significant consultation. I am happy to point out that the New South Wales Farmers Association issued a media release after I presented it with a copy of the bill. I am happy to quote the media release.

**Mr Morris:** Excellent!

**Mr TORBAY:** I note that the honourable member for Charlestown is keen to hear this media release. The news release issued on Thursday 11 September stated:

The State Government is being urged to support changes to the regulations for moving grain and livestock, which the NSW Farmers' Association believes will improve efficiency.

The Transport Efficiency Bill introduced by State Independent, Richard Torbay, would allow for the introduction of livestock loading and grain harvest loading in NSW.

Chair of the Association's Business, Economics and Trade Committee, Charles Armstrong, says that the move would bring NSW into line with other states.

It is not an unreasonable quest to bring New South Wales into line with other States. I think it is fairly reasonable. I congratulate the New South Wales Farmers Association on its leadership. The Government has been keen to quote the New South Wales Farmers Association when it brings forward measures that support farmers. I hope it sees the association as an objective player in this regard because it is supportive of this bill.

**Mr Cansdell:** Good National Party policy.

**Mr TORBAY:** The honourable member for Clarence says, "Good National Party policy". I tell him that yesterday the honourable member for Lismore raised a matter of public importance about this matter. I took the point of order that I would be introducing this bill today, and I asked whether the National Party would support it. The honourable member for Lismore did not know about the legislation, though it has been on the notice paper for a month. Indeed, the legislation was unveiled during a country trucking caucus meeting held in Parliament House, to which all members of

Parliament were invited. I take the interjection of the honourable member for Clarence as a commitment that the National Party will support this bill. Indeed, I congratulate him on giving that undertaking on behalf of the Opposition. The industry has been grappling with these issues for 30 years. Successive governments have been saying plenty but doing very little to bring New South Wales into line—

**Mr Gibson:** With other States.

**Mr TORBAY:** —with other States. The honourable member for Blacktown is right to support that move, but I will not pursue interjections any further. I also give credit to the Shires Association of New South Wales because when these proposals were raised previously there was constant speculation as to whether local government would support them. A range of questions relating to infrastructure were constantly asked: Are the bridges able to cope? Where will the money come from to support these issues? At its annual conference this year, the Shires Association passed motion 80, which stated:

That the Shires Association supports the introduction of Mass Limit Management guidelines for the transport of livestock and containerised export commodities within NSW.

Clearly the Shires Association supports this bill. I believe there is a lot of goodwill. If local government, the Farmers Association, the communities involved and the Government can work together, there are ways forward to pursue the reasonable objective of having a set of guidelines that is consistent across the States. I think Henry Parkes, a former member for Tenterfield—

**Mr Cansdell:** Your predecessor.

**Mr TORBAY:** The honourable member for Clarence is right. I now represent that area. I support the concept of coming together as a nation. During the famous speech that Sir Henry Parkes made at the School of Arts building in Tenterfield he talked about ensuring that State boundaries do not get in the way of a good outcome for this country. That is exactly what has happened on this matter. I am sure Sir Henry would have supported this bill. The proposals put forward in this bill need more than just a debating response. Every other State in Australia has been proactive in ensuring that amendments are made to continue supporting what is a good outcome for everybody concerned.

Every other State in Australia has seen its way clear to improve the quality of life of people by negotiating good outcomes with all the players involved. And that is our responsibility in this place. I introduce this bill as the member representing an area that obviously has a strong interest in this matter. This bill is supported by my colleagues the honourable member for Port Macquarie, the honourable member for Tamworth, and the honourable member for Dubbo, who has already negotiated an outcome. Other members are keen to jump on board, and I hope that that momentum continues.

I have introduced this bill forward in an entirely non-partisan way. It is appropriate that we seek the support of both the Government and the Opposition—indeed, I was pleased to get that support from the Opposition earlier in the debate. The crossbenchers in this House have indicated their support. We seek a genuine examination of this bill on its merits. That is all we are seeking. I welcome the opportunity to consider amendments or suggestions to progress the bill. We need to remain focused on the issue, not the politics of the issue, which I think have plagued any good outcomes for more than three decades.

**Mr Morris:** No politics here!

**Mr TORBAY:** The honourable member for Charlestown points out that there are no politics here, and I agree that there should not be. The common features in all these proposals are that we allow trucks to carry a greater payload, subject to the installation of road-friendly suspension, a form of accreditation, and operating on the right roads in the right areas. It is conditional, and there are obligations on the industry which are appropriate. But we are seeking a way forward. We are not seeking to throw up our hands and say, "Yes, it is different in other States but we cannot do anything about it." The bill is also subject to approval by the relevant council where appropriate.

That is pretty conditional. The proposals outlined in this legislation introduce the need to consult, seek approvals, and upgrade infrastructure appropriately. We cannot be fairer than that. The proposals will reduce transport costs, thereby bringing truck and road transport into line with other transport alternatives and making them more productive. They will also reduce road-wear costs by providing for road-friendly suspension in vehicles. They will not compromise any of the infrastructure assets in New South Wales, especially bridges, as truck transport will be limited to appropriate weight-bearing bridges. We can solve many problems by listening to differing views and examining the issues on their merits. The stakeholders have told me they want real debate, not political stunts. That issue was referred to yesterday during consideration of the matter of public importance.

This legislation will improve safety because there will be fewer trucks on the road. It will improve relations between the trucking industry, regulators and the broader community and deliver a more efficient, safer industry that will operate within an accreditation framework, ensuring that the highest standards of road safety are achieved. Every other State in Australia has enacted similar road transport legislation in order to achieve those laudable aims. The bill's proposals have the potential to save New South Wales some \$380 million a year, every year. They will attract industry and jobs back to inland and regional New South Wales—a concept that successive State governments have claimed to support

over many years. The bill makes constructive proposals that are designed not to inflame political debate but to improve road transport substantially and bring it into line with other transport areas.

Bindaree Beef in Inverell in my electorate operates an abattoir in Queensland because transport costs in that State are significantly lower than in New South Wales. The company also operates a substantial business in Inverell—in fact, it is the most significant employer in the local area and very important to the social and economic fabric of the community. We must continue to support and reward large employers who are prepared to invest in regional and rural New South Wales, particularly in inland areas, where population drift has been a point of discussion for many years. By supporting this bill we will be supporting those industries and helping them to continue—subject to the conditions I have outlined—in rural and regional areas.

There are plenty of examples in every electorate of how lower costs and improved job opportunities would flow from lower transport costs. Net returns to primary producers are broadly equivalent to transport costs beyond the farm gate. A 10 per cent improvement in some transport costs would increase returns by about the same proportion. What more could this Parliament do for farmers than increase returns across the board by 10 per cent? Parliament has an obligation to the people of New South Wales to provide safe and efficient road transport as a platform for jobs and better lifestyles.

What are the arguments against this legislation? It would require the expenditure of \$870 million on roads and bridges. The Federal Government will not come forward with such funding. However, this bill will require no additional funds because the use of road-friendly suspension systems will cause significantly less wear on New South Wales roads. We ask the Government to consider these proposals genuinely on their merit. Bridges throughout New South Wales have been, and are being, assessed to ascertain whether they can handle heavier trucks. I remind honourable members of the many conditions in the legislation that must be met in order to reflect community concerns. Most trucks meet the standard for vehicles in New South Wales, which permits access to roads at the common weight of 50 tonnes for a truck-and-trailer combination. My proposals would not change this requirement.

There are too many simple things that we seem unable to do for the road transport industry in this State. Let us begin with this bill, which would enable the Minister for Roads, and Minister for Housing to implement changes in New South Wales similar to those already in force in almost every other State of Australia—I think Tasmania is the exception. I strongly commend the bill to the House and I urge honourable members to join my Independent colleagues in supporting it.

We are seeking a genuine examination of the bill on its merits. I am keen to speak with Government and Opposition members to hear what they have to say about the substantial issues involved. The Minister has indicated that he is prepared to discuss the bill with me, and I am keen to accept his offer as I believe we can move forward, using the relevant information that I have presented to the House. The Minister has been a frequent visitor to the electorate of Northern Tablelands, where his funding announcements have been most welcome. Let us do something for road transport in New South Wales and bring it into line with the industry in other States. We must consider productivity issues and the massive flow-on effects for the people of New South Wales. The country trucking caucuses that I mentioned sought to involve every member of the House in their consultations. I am aware that local members have been approached and asked whether they will support the bill. We must ensure that industry does not relocate from New South Wales to other States and that our regional areas are not disadvantaged.

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