

PC 6 – Inquiry into the Pressures on Heavy Vehicle Drivers – 05 October 2023

TEACHO Ltd. Response to Supplementary Questions

1. Raising Better Mental Health Mental Awareness and Fostering Mental Health Skills

All heavy vehicle drivers should participate in Mental Health awareness training.

Mental health training in the workplace is a proactive approach to mitigating psychosocial risk and building awareness, resilience, and capacity. By promoting good mental health and workplace wellbeing, all people in the industry can feel safe both physically and mentally.

When organisations implement mental health training programs this works to:

- Reduce stigma
- Normalise mental health
- Increase help seeking behaviours
- Increase the capacity of people in the industry to maintain their own mental health
- Increase the capacity of people in industry to recognise signs and support others
- Support early intervention.

All companies should participate in Mental Health training including, how to develop a Mental Health Plan, policies, and procedures as well as training to build skills and capacity within the company, of individuals, to support employees.

Training programs empower people to both manage their own mental health and support the mental health of others that they work with/supervise and/or manage. Training programs are a proactive approach to supporting early intervention and the framework of prevention, protection, and support.

Targeted training programs (specifically tailored to the heavy vehicle industry), support the development of workplace cultures where mental health and wellbeing are prioritised, normalised and workers feel safe and develop the skills to voice their concerns and seek help. When the need for help is voiced by an individual, companies need to know how to respond and appropriately support their employees.

The extension of the training to those in these ‘support’ roles is essential to ensuring that there are multiple touch points across the logistics chain that are educated and have the skills to recognise signs and symptoms, support drivers and assist to connect them to resources and/or professional support. These roles may include schedulers, operations managers, safety managers, forklift drivers, warehouse supervisors, frontline, and operations roles. Also essential is the training of staff at Heavy Vehicle Rest Areas (Roadhouses etc).

2. Other Comments

a. Pressures on heavy vehicle drivers in NSW

Various enquiries and bodies of research provide an evidence base for the generally accepted and anecdotal reports on the pressures faced by heavy vehicle drivers.

A 2021 Senate inquiry found that conditions faced by road transport drivers often include “long hours of work, sedentary work environments, poor nutrition, social isolation, shift work, time pressures and fatigue”. As a result, “road transport drivers are more likely to experience chronically poor physical and mental health and the sector experiences higher rates of suicide than the general population.”

Statistically, in the 5 years from 2017 – 2021, there were 292 fatalities from heavy truck crashes, averaging 58 deaths per year. In 2020 the Transport Postal and Warehouse industry (as classified by Safework Australia), ranked the second highest in industry fatality rates, which is higher than the construction industry.

A 2016 Macquarie University study commissioned by TEACHO stated that the “Road Freight Transport Industry has the highest fatality and serious injury rates of any industry in Australia”. It also concluded that “existing models of regulation and enforcement are complex and overlapping and present an overwhelming regulatory burden for truck drivers”.

A University of Technology Sydney study commissioned by TEACHO in 2019 which reviewed existing academic literature on the Transport Sector, Safety, and Supply Chains, supported the “link between economic pressures and poorer work health and safety outcomes for drivers. Non-compliance with work safety regulations, which is often a result of work pressures and scheduling of shifts, contributes to drivers’ experience of fatigue and increased risk of road accidents.” It also found the “absence of standardised training requirements in most jurisdictions reflects the lack of consensus within the road transport industry regarding the required content and duration of mandatory training programs, when in a driver’s career this training is most effective, and how training should be delivered.”

b. Over height incidents

TEACHO notes that the Federal Award system regulates the employment terms and conditions of many transport employees, especially drivers, through the Road Transport & Distribution Award 2020 (Award). It is of interest to observe that this Award provides for the payment of allowances, in addition to the base rate, in specified circumstances. For example, allowances are payable if:

- There is a mounted crane;
- The vehicle exceeds the length limit prescribed in Commonwealth or State law;
- The vehicle is wider than 3.5m in width or the load exceeds that width.

These allowances would provide an incentive for the driver to be specifically aware of the length/width of the vehicle and therefore be cognisant of issues around the movement of such vehicle on public roads.

There is no ‘height or over-height’ allowance contained in the Award. The inclusion of such an allowance would assist the driver in being aware of the vehicle height and therefore ensure that accidents involving trucks in tunnels or under bridges would be reduced, thereby saving on repair costs to damaged infrastructure and avoiding unnecessary traffic jams or congestion by having trucks stuck in places where they should not attempt to travel.

In relation to driver licencing, education and training, it is evident that there is a lack of training, generally, and specifically a lack of focus on the issues related to over height vehicles. Introduction of a mandatory short course for drivers of applicable vehicles would contribute to greater knowledge, a reduction of incidents and improved safety of all road users. Refresher training should be included as part of the licence renewal process.

c. Heavy Vehicle Rest Area Location, Suitability and Maintenance

Considerations around suitability and safety of heavy vehicle rest areas must include psychological safety and the reduction of psychosocial risks and hazards. For example, supporting drivers to stay connected to colleagues, family, and friends during the course of their work and rest, accessing healthy food (good food improves mood), exercising regularly, and accessing mental health resources and support.

Industry should acknowledge and consider:

- Importance of rest areas in ensuring mental health & wellness;
- Need to ensure that female drivers feel safe in rest areas and appropriate facilities are provided for these drivers;
- Clean toilets & showers, where provided
 - need to engage cleaners, either council employees or contractors;
- Separation of trucks & cars
- Need to cater for caravans to ensure that they do not take up truck spaces;
- Green reflectors indicating a 'stop or break point' as distinct from a rest area;
- There are no rest areas in metro areas
 - Mandate new distribution estates include a rest area;
- Power & water accessibility in specified rest areas;
- Ability to access internet etc
- Developing a national database of all rest areas
 - Create a system of rating rest areas, say 3 levels dependent upon the level of facilities available;
 - Accessible via internet providers and containing enough detail to enable drivers to understand the facilities available at each area;
- Washout facilities for livestock transport;
- Use of old weighbridges or other existing, suitable, unused infrastructure.