

INQUIRY INTO NSW TAXI INDUSTRY

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people with disability

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NGO in Special Consultative Status with the
Economic and Social Council of the United Nations

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The Director
Select Committee on the NSW Taxi Industry
Legislative Council
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Director

Re: Inquiry into the NSW taxi industry

People with Disability Australia Incorporated (PWD) is a national peak disability rights and advocacy organisation. Its primary membership is made up of people with disability and organisations primarily constituted by people with disability. PWD also has a large associate membership of other individuals and organisations committed to the disability rights movement. PWD was founded in 1981, the International Year of Disabled Persons, to provide people with disability with a voice of our own. We have a cross-disability focus - we represent the interests of people with all kinds of disability.

PWD welcomes the current inquiry into the NSW taxi industry, and supports its process and terms of reference. The timeframe for the enquiry, however, is limited and we are not in a position to provide a full submission, given competing priorities at this time of year and the difficulty in consulting widely with our membership who have other commitments. I will address some longstanding issues and concerns that PWD has about the NSW taxi industry in the remainder of this letter.

In 2008 Australia ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which requires governments to ensure that people with disability are afforded the conditions and opportunities that enable them to participate equally in all aspects of social and community life. The ability to live independently and access one's own community is a fundamental human right that is addressed within the CRPD. For many people with disability taxi transportation is the safest and most accessible form of transport. However, taxi transportation is not without its problems. As public transport remains largely inaccessible to many people with disability they must therefore rely on taxi services for transport to get to work, socialise with family and friends, to shop, and to attend medical and other appointments. The cost of taxi transport is

significantly greater than the cost of public transport. This results in the social isolation and impoverishment of people with disability.

Although the Taxi Subsidy Scheme is available to some people, many others who desperately require access to it are excluded by its unreasonably restrictive eligibility criteria. Accordingly PWD supports the easing of the eligibility requirements for the TTSS. We also support an increase in the amount of subsidy payable in NSW from 50% to 75%, as has been in place in other states. PWD also calls on the Government to increase the \$60 cap. PWD argues that this increase should be at the same rate as taxi fares have increased since the \$60 was set, and for this to happen automatically in the future.

PWD also calls on the NSW Government to move towards a universally designed taxi fleet. The limited availability of suitably designed taxis within the current NSW taxi fleet is an issue for many people with disability. The Wheelchair Accessible Taxi (WAT) fleet size means that the time spent waiting for an appropriate WAT can be prohibitive. Recently WAT waiting times have fallen when looking broadly, and this is a welcome improvement. People with disability who require a larger WAT, however, and not a 'flash cab' style WAT, report many problems. PWD believes that the NSW community would benefit from a timely conversion to universal designed fleet, such as the London Black Cab – made by London Taxis International, or similar to that of the Lime Taxi fleet. PWD believes that the entire NSW fleet of taxis should be universally designed, and that this is the best way to ensure compliance with the recently ratified Convention

As mentioned above, due to the timeline of this inquiry, PWD is unable to produce a detailed submission to this inquiry. As such PWD recommends that the Select Committee on the NSW Taxi Industry hold an open roundtable discussion, inviting people with disability who use taxis to share their stories directly with the Committee. This would be in addition to any hearings where the Committee hears from organisations and individuals who have made submissions. Such a roundtable would be a more accessible process for some people with disability than writing a formal submission.

For more information on this topic please contact Dean Price, Advocacy Projects Manager, on 9370 3100, via deanp@pwd.org.au or by any of the details above.

Yours sincerely

Michael Bleasdale
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