

**Submission  
No 9**

**INQUIRY INTO PRESSURES ON HEAVY VEHICLE  
DRIVERS AND THEIR IMPACT IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

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# **Submission to the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry in to issues affecting truck drivers and their safety.**

I am an employed truck driver, have done six million kilometres and travelled more often on the Newell Highway, but also on most roads in NSW over the last 30 years, along with most parts of Australia. I offer the following in genuine intent to see road safety improved not just for truck drivers, but for all road users. These are my personal views and I believe the NRFA will be making a separate submission.

Much of this is aimed at Transport for NSW as the regulatory body responsible for many of these issues. I have tried to be respectful, have emailed and rang and dealt with these and other state bodies for many years, mostly to be ignored, hence my frustration which you will recognise in this submission.

I welcome the new overtaking lanes on many roads and specifically the Newell Highway. However there are many issues with this work. First I have raised the concern that many of the large signs are incorrectly aligned and are blinding to traffic on highbeam. I asked for confirmation that such road signs are to be set at a minimum of 5 degrees away from oncoming traffic, yet many of the new signs for the overtaking lanes are directly at traffic. I was told yes the signs were wrongly aligned and all new ones would be compliant and the early ones fixed, but I don't believe this has been done or followed up. Can you please confirm?

Then there is the loss of truck parking bays and sites where new overtaking lanes have been installed. Transport for NSW has asked where we need them and recognise they are now (after years of us begging) important, yet we are going backwards, you are actually removing sites. I have seen more consultation recently, but the trend is too little too late.

Starting at Trewilga, south of Peak Hill, when this work was first started, more than once, before, during and then after, I rang and requested that it be confirmed we would not lose the large northbound informal bay. I was told it would be considered, I was told again at the end, after suggesting 8 possible separate sites that could have been used as truck bays at little or no cost, were all bulldozed or ignored, that consideration would be given to looking at replacing the lost site. This is still not done 5 years on!

Then the same at Guanna Hill on the Mitchell Highway, loss of sites on both sides of the road, called and asked, before during and after we will look at it, nothing done.

Now the Newell. The section south of Boggabilla had about a minimum of 25 truck spaces, again when work started, I asked would they be retained or at least the same number left. Yes we will look at it. Work done, money spent on the informal bay at Wallen Creek which actually destroyed a good spot. Previously we could get well off the road and under the shade of a tree. You made it smaller, it is off camber, too close to the road and too small. The money you spent was completely wasted and made it worse. Then when the work was finished, you tore up 40 kilometers of free truck bays, we went from 25 to 6, FAIL!!!!

Back Creek, north of West Wyalong, again, asked at start of work will bays be kept, "we will look into it" geez that sounds familiar and what happened, we completely lost the southbound site and you left the northbound site with guideposts front and rear that brought it back from 6 or more b-double spaces to two!!! Why must many of these supposed road safety improvements, come at the cost of removing yet another truck bay?

Each time I raise this someone says, "yes but there is another one down the road" and there is, but you have finally agreed there is not enough now, yet you are taking them away!!! You personally don't have to find somewhere to sleep on the side of the road, nor do you get fines for going ten minutes further on to find somewhere you can get good sleep, but we do! If you have a frig van or stockcrate or heaven forbid an Icepack and want to consider other drivers not so lucky and to allow them sleep, you look for a small spot, then no one else can wake you or you won't disturb them. IT IS NOT SIMPLY HAVING A PLACE TO STOP, IT IS HAVING SOMEWHERE TO GET GOOD QUALITY SLEEP TO MANAGE YOUR FATIGUE AND BE COMPLIANT AS WELL!

The top of Tap Hill north of Gilgandra had a replacement site put in, but only after I again contacted your staff and explained it was not just a parking spot, but a real serious issue with trucks overheating and or breaking down and needing to pull up. Yes, I was told we would also gain the site used for works which I was asking for years to have it modified for use, thank you, yet again it has not been signed promised but now has green reflectors fitted.

I have also raised the issue of Wide load pull off sites which you use during roadworks for all new overtaking lanes, be considered for slightly more work and then to be possible green reflector bays. To my knowledge, this has only happened in one place and I had to mark it. Again, I came to you raising the idea, was told it would be considered, yet it has again, been completely ignored.

You have sometime ago, finally agreed there was not enough industry consultation with the placement of the overtaking lanes, I specifically asked for one at the dipper, the one steep hill in the Pilliga section south of Narrabri and was told yes, we will add one. I asked, can I meet someone to ensure it is in the right place and now you are building it in the wrong place, not only taking away yet another truck bay, but then leaving a serious issue on a steep hill where you could have improved road safety and are now wasting money and still leaving a problem. I was told when I first complained, "It is hard to pick a hill in a car" and that is why I offered to meet and be sure. Then I was told we have to save money and have them together and I agree, but the one southbound must be on the steep incline past Cusacks Creek, so just at the other end of the northbound one, which would not see us lose another truck bay which I use regularly.

Yet again, when I followed up, I was initially accused of marking this site with green reflectors. When I explained it had been officially signed as a Truck Bay, I was then told it was not compliant and that you were looking for a replacement site. I could give you five in 5 minutes, yet the work has removed the bay, there has been no further consultation and you will finish and drive away and we will have lost another valuable site!!!! Six months on from the last call, nothing further, no consultation or suggested sites and I was forced to drive on tired a month ago due to this bay being removed.

More rest areas have been closed for use in works, the one just north of Forbes, another which you added and is marked with green reflectors near the telescope is nearly full of road materials, another southbound into Dubbo, again where I rang and spoke with people explaining the loss of another valuable site was told, yes we will look at that, then told, sorry no we can't as the works have changed the road.

The site north of Bellata, where a driver could move to after a shower and meal has been completely closed during current works and I had seen surveyors there months ago and believed the current work would include realignment for the Bellata rail overpass, but now seeing the work seems to finish before the rail crossing, is that part of the currently unfunded section 4? Surely it would have been more cost effective to do the bridge at the same time or is it not being done at all? When a request was put out for comment on a Newell Highway Corridor Strategy some years ago, the rail crossing was

not even included and many of the issues I raise here were included in my submission, again, no feedback and no action!

Why was the industry not consulted, why have we lost sites simply because they were not considered important to drivers and why was there not simply recognition of the fact, we can't take away any spots when there is not enough to start with?

With little effort and money and even a small recognition of our needs and the fact there are not enough truck bays, there was no need to take any of the sites as above. When you or a council or someone closes one site for whatever reason, they think it is not important. So then we park on highway off ramps and you don't like that, so put up "NO STANDING" signs. So I raised this with a woman from RMS and she said, "It is not safe to park there" end of story. I tried again and explained yes, I could agree parking on the shoulder of an off ramp might be an issue, but not on the on ramp, for example at Thurgoona Drive Albury and she said she would look into it. I am still waiting for that reply 2 years on. This goes on and on and you are not risking your life and then telling us not to risk ours, but keep taking places away and not even thinking about our issues, let alone truly consulting with us.

Then there is the failures of so many of the works at each site and the one south of Peak Hill now into its fourth repair. The dips in the new work 20k south of Goondiwindi are ridiculous. I have raised these for over 18 months now, there are more getting worse near Marshall Ponds Creek and others. Failures in new work, no wonder we can't get potholes correctly repaired.

So now the Golden Highway. For over 20 years I have rang, spoken, emailed and begged for more rest areas. Yes you went and built four, but two nearly within site of one another, no shade, no consultation. The bridge at Cainbil Creek, not that far from the current work has had Rough Surface signs for months, has us dropping onto the bridge and probably doubling the impact into it, let alone the savage impacts into the truck and driver, yes I have rang and explained how bad it is, yet nothing has been done, again and again.

There are currently more green reflector bays on the highway between Dubbo and Sydney than parking bays. Considering this was the road that started the then "Blue reflector marking of informal truck bays" over 20 years ago!!!!!!!!!! And I am still asking you to support and use this cheap safe and highly effective road safety initiative, nor will anyone help me gain accreditation to do it. Whilst ever I have truck drivers telling me I have saved their lives when they were tired and the now green reflectors have showed them a place to stop safely, I will keep pushing to have this national. I had hoped when I started that in ten years we would not need this, but not only it is endorsed and included now in the Guidelines for Heavy Vehicle rest area guidelines, it works and yet here I am 22 years on, still putting them up.

I note some media saying you have provided gym equipment at Clybucca for drivers, that is nice but it is ten years or more since I started asking for a changeover site on the Pacific Highway, like the one it only took 20 years to get at Tarcutta (and what a bad piece of work that is) or the one at Nhill and yet with millions spent on the highway, no such facility has been provided and that has cost the life of at least one driver. What we want and need is not hard to provide. You want us to be fit, awake and compliant, but we can't do that without suitable facilities. Many drivers think we are treated like dogs, there has been some improvement and NSW is not the only state at fault or way behind helping us to be safe, but you have asked and I have replied.

There is also the issue that you have spent substantial money on inspection sites, but when completed, many, which had been previously available as truck parking bays, are now closed off, starting with Half

Way Creek on the Pacific when already undersupplied, Coolac on the Hume, Southbound Moree and both side Daroolbalgie on the Newell and others. As a complete opposite, Vicroads have not only left their sites open to use, they leave their weighbridges turned on (as do Qld at some sites) allowing us to check weigh and therefore be more compliant. When we do not have enough areas, why must you take more away?

Then there are sites closed due to so called perceived (and no consultation or discussion with truck drivers) safety issues. Colovale Hill coming out of Sydney on the Hume had more money spent on it installing armco to keep us out, than would have been spent filling the potholes so we did not have to crawl in and out to reduce damage. The site at the intersection of the Hume and Olympic Way is yet another that was there, but is now nearly useless and yet its' loss was never recognised or anything done to improve or replace it.

Then there is Dubbo, as the half way point between Brisbane and Melbourne as well as the crossroads of NSW, it is ridiculous that there is not a truckstop, changeover site or anything with decent facilities. The only place you can get a shower or use a toilet with anything to eat is the BP which has no on site parking at all and there is really only one place to park without restricting on site or other business traffic. Yes I recognise it is also a problem that you deal with councils and local government, but how can such facilities be allowed to be built on major highways without any consideration of trucks. Yes we buy diesel and food etc, but we need to be able to park to eat and use a shower. Other states do have some such facilities, they are few and far between in NSW.

The current River Street Bridge project will do little to alleviate traffic in Dubbo, will not provide a flood proof route through Dubbo, but had the start been made on a bypass that will eventually become a ring road to cater for both north south and east west traffic, hopefully like Orange, we would have seen development of suitable truck facilities. Even in Orange, where there is parking on the bypass at the Woolworths supermarket, I have spoken with council and not only will they not fill the potholes, they won't guarantee that parking will be left there. We need access to supermarkets and shops for food on the road and yet this is rarely considered with any developments in mind. Narromine is not truck friendly, let alone as a Dubbo bypass, it would cost millions to bring it up to standard and yet, Tomingley, a town of few people, will soon have three truckstops and Dubbo not one to match.

I have been asking for over ten years for a toilet block for truckies in Dubbo. I have also asked for trees to be planted at the pads at Brocklehurst, it would give shade to officers working on the sites and then for truckies as well. Even with the tree planting day, where I nominated the site, they could not go ahead because RMS at the time had control. I have approached Dubbo Council who say yes we agree, but it has to be done by again, RMS/Transport for NSW and nothing has been done in all that time. Yet another failure to a reasonable and many would say, basic human requirement to be able to go to the toilet.

So I require both an answer from government and Transport for NSW and if not why not replies, to why these things are still not rectified.

1. Will you please fix the angle and alignment of the overtaking lane signs?
2. Will you please consider marking the length of the overtaking lanes. It is now done in WA, only 19 years since I put it forward at the National Road Safety Summit in Canberra?
3. Will you guarantee no more truck bays of any type will be lost unless there is the same or increased capacity made available in the same area with any works on any road?
4. When will you actually listen and act on anything I put forward? I have been trying for years and yet here we are, you taking away more sites.

5. I recognise there has been change and thank you for asking drivers to participate and contribute. It took me nearly 12 months and lots of calls and emails to finally have someone send me details of the "improvements" proposed for the Tycannah Creek Rest Areas. That work would have cut down the trees that provide needed shade in the only bay like it on the Newell Highway, no one else cared and it should not take so much effort to be heard and or listened to.
6. Will you help me gain accreditation to fit the green reflectors to sites and pay me for it? I am no fool, I will not stand in the middle of the road and have put forward a procedure for consideration.
7. Drivers tell me regularly I have saved their lives, when they were tired and needed a place to stop and or sleep. You are taking such sites off us. Can you please tell me why?
8. Will you replace the sites you have taken from us?
9. Will you provide a site for changeover drivers at or near Clybucca?

I do not raise these issues lightly and I request you take this as seriously as I do. It is our lives on the road at risk, not yours and you are increasing that risk, instead of helping to lessen it. I will be providing this list to industry media, both to show I have made the effort to contribute and to see real action, not yet again, we will look into it and nothing is done for years. I do not ring and report road failures and issues for fun, I want the roads safer for all, not just truckies or myself and you have the ability to help, not just say, we will look into it and more drivers die!!

Then there is the issue of the failure to properly repair roads, patching that is done haphazard, the waste of money and time of the spray on repairs which do not fix the problem, just cover our trucks with bitumen, the continued failure to do a suitable and lasting repair, the waste of money and the risk of the bad repair still contributing to a crash and or loss of life, no grading of shoulders which sees them fill and hold water for months which then seeps under and sees yet more failures.

I am seriously concerned with both the value and lack of accountability of road repairs and how they are done. Many machines there for weeks, with at times only one working, there does not seem to be any real effort to provide better utilization and value. There often seems to be more money spent on "road safety" that does not increase or improve safety of anyone, including escort vehicles, one example the road repair just south of Gilgandra was only 150 metres long, yet there was an escort vehicle, ridiculous. Vehicles parked on the side of the road to call trucks does not change anything if the truck driver has the radio down or off, yet we are paying them to sit there for months.

So many crew on traffic lights at roadworks, again on terrific money for them, seem to spend most of the time on their phones and it is rare to see any fit roadworkers, so very few of them can be working hard. I recognise those who do manual patching have a difficult job, yet again have watched crews patch one minor hole and leave three worse ones and these can and do both impact trucks and could cause a crash, yet the work is not checked or from where I sit, done properly.

Who monitors, repairs, their value, life and efficiency? At times when I have spoken with those working on roads in more than one state, they say the way the funding is done and or the people involved do not listen to those doing the job, or have no real clue and when the work fails as is done again and again, not only is the problem the cost, but the real condition of the road and how it can and does contribute not just to crashes, but to road deaths. Who really recognises and monitors this?

Then there is the way road funding is provided to councils, they hold some aside for repairs, yet then have to spend that money at the last minute of that funding period if not already spent, or it is not provided the following period. This means needed work is not done properly, the work rushed at the

end is either not required or the money is not used to the best value or result and is yet another failure to see best value for road funding and best safety supplied from the funding provided.

I have rang every state in Australia using their road authority call number, none are promoted to encourage reporting of not just potholes but failures. This is yet another issue, where a road has a deformation that could well be a serious and moving impact into a truck, load and driver, but the problem does not "break" the surface, I am told there is no problem, it does not meet our intervention levels (which they will not tell me either) or nothing is ever done and yet another hazard remains.

The last issue I will raise is the complete lack of education of car drivers at anytime, let alone at time of licensing about sharing the road with trucks. As a truck driver, I also drive cars, yet many car drivers have never even ridden in a large truck, let alone driven one to fully understand many of the issues they face but more often, do not even consider. For example the need for room for wider turns and the blind spots and braking distances involved. Too often now I see car drivers pull out or expect me to stop for them in a fully loaded b-double simply because they pull out in front of me or take away my braking space.

I fear that the years of playing car chase and crash video games when young, is then giving some young/learner drivers a false sense of security and when they do make a terrible mistake and get killed, not only is this a tragedy, but the truckie will be held accountable in the press when it is reported as a truck crash, not a crash involving a truck. This implies guilt to the truckie and within possible minutes of the incident, without any investigation or knowledge of the event, they will be guilty in the media.

I truly believe we as truckies are not only held accountable for the deaths involved without any proper investigation, but are never recognised for the lives we save every day by our actions and watching other drivers and expecting them to do something stupid that not only risk their lives, but ours as well. No matter whose statistics you use, fatal crashes between cars and trucks are over 70% or more the fault of the car driver, but whilst we had the silver bullets of seatbelts and RBT that have changed and reduced road deaths, we have done nothing to educate car drivers about sharing the road with trucks. I have tried for years and been ignored.

Please go to [www.whitelinetv.com.au](http://www.whitelinetv.com.au) and you will find the Truckies Top Tips for sharing the road. These videos were funded by the NHVR and are available free to any and all, yet when I again approached road authorities, it was simply too hard!! Nine minutes of video, which is visual and then better than questions (and please look and see how many in any driving test, not even in truck license testing, relate to sharing the road with trucks) is not too much to see less deaths on the road involving trucks and the cars that crash into them. This could be done easily, cheaply and simply and in a few years time, would save many lives and injuries.

I have contributed to more studies, meetings, inquiries etc and have done more kilometres on our highways than any of you involved, yet still have to chase and ring people to even get a say and still don't get "heard. My contributions to the 2003 National Road Safety Inquiry are still to be actioned, and you wonder why few truckies will contribute.

I could provide more if you want, specifically on the training currently being given, I am very concerned with the changes to NSW that have removed competency based licensing, am concerned with overseas drivers being allowed on the road with minimal if any real testing of their ability to drive trucks safely on our roads when some cannot even read our signs. How some get licensed in less than a day is ridiculous and the behavior of many on the road is downright dangerous at times.

I am very frustrated, towards becoming cynical, that our lives on the road as truckies really mean little to those in authority and this is borne of more than 20 years trying to see change. Safe Travelling, Rod Hannifey, Road Transport and Road Safety Advocate, member of the Newell Highway Alliance, Health in Gear Ambassador, member of the Federal Steering Committee for truck rest area funding, Owner Driver columnist and more.