



Not Criminals; Just hard working Truckies

As life on the road gets tougher for the small trucking operators the general public are oblivious to the compliance jungle that drivers are subjected to, I plan to expose the injustice of treatment dished out on a daily basis to the honest hard working men and women in the road transport industry.

I'm Mick Pattel President of the National Road Freighters Association (NRFA) and I believe that fair minded Australians with a sense of justice will be appalled at what is going on, for that reason I will outline the difficulties we face on the road every day.

Work Diaries

The requirement to carry a work diary is not disputed by the professional drivers in the industry and the need to demonstrate responsible on-road behaviour in relation to driver fatigue is accepted by all responsible drivers, I also point out that the rigid driving hours conformances applied to truck drivers have killed more drivers than they have saved, this is because time lost through no fault of the driver puts pressure on him/her to make up that time to complete the trip in the required time, for this reason the driver will push the limit in terms of speed, hence more accidents, (check the NTI accident report).

Road transport drivers suffer 'over zealous enforcement' of the work diary that leaves a lot to be desired, the requirement to complete the book every day and get it right 100% of the time is an unrealistic expectation, no-one in any other industry in Australia is expected to complete a daily record of their working day without one mistake, but drivers in the trucking industry are expected to.

To demonstrate this I will paint the picture of a typical day in the life of Adam a professional truck driver:

Adam (typical Australian truck driver) drives for a trucking firm with good business practises and industry accreditation, his day requires him to drive the standard driving hours prescribed by the law, in this case a twelve hour driving/ working day, since Adam is travelling more that 100klms/(200klms Qld) he is required to complete a work diary, he is now required to duplicate information every day on every page that is already recorded in the 'issuing certificate' in the front of his own personal work diary, this leaves him open to making a mistake re-entering this information every day when the information is already recorded.

This is where the problem begins, if Adam fails to enters his Licence Number, Name, State, wrong date or forgets to sign the book at the end of the day or a host of other requirements each and every one of these are classed as a separate breach, with 3 demerit points and \$600.00 applied even though they are not safety related and four breaches will mean a loss of licence as well as the \$2,400.00 fine, the authorities will tell you that non safety breaches do not attract such fines, but it is happening, to undo the damage the driver has to challenge the breaches in the courts and the officer issuing the breach knows that in most cases the driver wears it rather than fight it, going to the relevant department is a waste of time as they will not overturn their officers breach, so you do have to go to the expense of getting legal representation

Typical Scenario (more the 'norm' than the exception)

On this day Adam is breached for failing to record the date early in his shift just 2 hours into his twelve hour day, 3 demerit points \$600.00 thank you, Adam is not fatigued so he is not a threat to



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other road users but he has just lost a quarter of his licence and half his weekly pay packet, 4 hours down the track he is intercepted again and this time they discover that his medical has expired two weeks ago and since he is in a fatigue management scheme he cops another 3 demerit points and \$600.00 fine, he is still not outside his twelve hour day having been on the road just 6 hours and the book has recorded these hours and the required rest breaks, no issues relating to safety this time either.

Now Adam has lost half his licence and his whole weekly pay packet, how does he go home to his wife and children and explain to them that he won't be able to feed them or pay the rent this week because he got fined for not being perfect at his job, very few drivers get through an intercept without a breach of some description, you could be forgiven for thinking that it's mandatory for every intercept of a truck to be an earner for the Government.

Now understand this, Adam did not sit in the pub all week drinking his pay or betting on the horses or visiting the casino, he just went to work to earn an honest living to provide for his family, he is not a criminal just an honest hard working family man doing his best, but if you drive a truck in this country your best will not be good enough if you make a mistake in your work diary, you will pay dearly for it, the recovery of lost demerit points takes three years, a long time for a professional driver to go without making a mistake in his work diary, and that is without all the other possible traffic infringements that he is subjected to, it's not a case of 'if' but 'when' you will lose your licence.

Work Diaries do not make the road safer, they create undue stress for the driver and remove any flexibility that could improve safety, the lack of rest areas is amongst one of the major problems we face, the one size fits all doesn't work in an industry which has to consider such things as 'Animal Welfare', weather, road conditions, climatic conditions, (Summer Heat) breakdowns and a so many other variables that a driver cannot anticipate, and yet still meet the requirements of the driving hours regulation.

The demerit points and massive fines for work diary breaches have been the single most devastating blow to the truck driver population in Australia, because there is no consistency in enforcement between police and transport, the only conclusion we can draw from this is that the government aims to thin out the trucks numbers in an effort to reduce the carbon footprint that they believe we produce, and they always promote the railway as a clean viable alternative, on top of this the fines will raise much needed revenue.

As I said earlier any fair minded Australian would be appalled that this is happening, and it's only a matter of time before all the professional drivers are gone, how safe will our roads be with inexperienced drivers hitting the road in 600 horsepower trucks and no mentors to teach them the protocols of safe and efficient road transport.

Someone in Government needs to address this problem sooner than later, because later will be too late, we in the National Road Freighters Assoc will be only too happy to discuss the drastic changes needed before it is too late.



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