**REMOTE AREAS CONSULTATIVE GROUP**

**COMMUNIQUE**

**MEETING OF 18 NOVEMBER 2021**

The Remote Areas Consultative Group (RACG) consists of government and industry representatives from the Northern Territory, Queensland, Western Australia and South Australia.

A full list of member organisations is provided as an attachment to this Communiqué.

The purpose of the RACG is to act as an advisory body to provide a remote areas perspective on proposed and existing transport reforms.

Chairing and Secretarial responsibilities for the RACG are managed by member jurisdictions on a two-year rotation of hosting duties. Main Roads Western Australia is the host for the 2021-2022 rotation.

* **Remote Areas Cross Border Access Working Group**

Members noted that the Working Group has reconvened and is progressing preparation of a draft project proposal about steer axle mass and general heavy vehicle operations in remote border areas for the Austroads Freight Task Force, with the intention to circulate it to members out of session and report back at the next RACG meeting.

* **Truck driver training/competency issues**

Members noted that age and experience requirements are affecting driver licensing availability and that this is a problem nationally. South Australia and Western Australia have projects in place to address this issue. Austroads is developing a national Regulatory Impact Statement for release in early 2022 for comment.

It was reported that skills shortages are also affecting the availability of mechanics and operational and administrative staff.

* **Western Australian Regional Roadworks Signage Review**

Members noted the recently completed review and the acceptance by the Minister of all 13 recommendations. A project manager and team has been appointed to manage the implementation of the recommendations. The first meeting was held on 1 October 2021.

* **COVID-19**

Members commented that this is still an issue affecting industry, for example driver testing and the uncertain and evolving rules around border controls. Members noted the cost burden on remote transport operators due to rapid administrative changes imposed by Government. There are also issues for operators needing to access Aboriginal lands to deliver supplies to Aboriginal communities or mine sites.

* **NTC Reviews**

Members expressed concern with the ongoing Heavy Vehicle National Law (HVNL) Review and noted that the NTC Fatigue Paper was recently released but subsequently withdrawn. Members noted the NTC has recently performed industry consultation regarding fatigue and the method of stakeholder engagement for heavy vehicle reform. The NTC is working with jurisdictions’ regulators and industry, and a Work Program and stakeholder meetings will be commencing soon.

Jurisdictions are continuing to monitor the situation. Members welcomed the renewed approach with regard to interaction between the NTC and industry.

* **National Heavy Vehicle Regulator**

Members discussed the current high volume of permit applications being dealt with by the NHVR and the measures being taken to address it, such as resourcing and potential system and process improvements, including consideration of increasing the networks that are already gazetted.

Members noted the progress of the Commonwealth funded Local Government Assessment Program, which seeks to increase road manager capability with structure assessments.

Members further noted the recent release of PBS Notices by the NHVR and its continuing work in this space.

* **National Roadworthiness Survey**

Members noted that the report of the findings will be released in December 2021.

* **Severe weather events affecting road access**

Members noted the impact on industry of recent closures of the national highway network. Flood mitigation strategies are required to protect industries using unsealed roads and protect supply chains. The drought has not assisted the priority of flood mitigation activities on roads.

* **Truck drivers as first responders to road crashes**

It was noted that many remote area truck drivers are first responders who have not necessarily been trained. A submission was received by the Joint Parliamentary Inquiry on Road Safety regarding the trial that the NT and WA industry ran. Members noted the potential for it to be rolled out nationally.

* **Research and Development**

Members discussed emerging technologies such as heavy vehicle automation, Artificial Intelligence, fatigue monitoring, and trucks powered by alternate fuels such as electricity or hydrogen. It was noted that the introduction of alternate fuels for trucks is not occurring at the speed portrayed by the media.

* **Potential shortage of the fuel emissions additive AdBlue**

Members noted reports of an anticipated international shortage in the first half of 2022, with a need for a national response to guarantee the availability of critical supplies.

The issue has received widespread media coverage. The Commonwealth Government is aware of the issue and is considering how to address it at a national level.

**ATTACHMENT 1**

|  | **Organisation** |
| --- | --- |
| **Chair** | Main Roads Western Australia  |
| **Secretariat** | Main Roads Western Australia |
| **Western Australia** | Main Roads Western Australia  |
|  | Livestock and Rural Transport Association of WA |
|  | Western Roads Federation |
| **South Australia** | Department for Infrastructure and Transport (SA) |
|  | Livestock and Rural Transporters Association of SA  |
|  | South Australian Road Transport Association  |
| **Queensland** | Department of Transport & Main Roads (QLD) |
|  | Livestock and Rural Transporters Association of QLD |
|  | Queensland Trucking Association  |
| **Northern Territory** | Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics (NT) |
|  | Northern Territory Road Transport Association  |
| **National Bodies** | National Transport Commission (NTC) |
|  | National Heavy Vehicle Regulator (NHVR) |
|  | National Road Transport Association |
|  | Australian Road Research Board (ARRB) |
|  | Truck Industry Council |
| **Observers** | Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications (Cwth) |
|  | Transport for New South Wales |

**ATTACHMENT 2**

Under the Terms of Reference, the Group is hosted by each jurisdiction for a period of two years. The agreed hosting sequence appears on the table below:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Host Jurisdiction** | **Round 1** | **Round 2** | **Round 3** |
| Western Australia | 2004 - 2006 | 2012 - 2014 | 2021 - 2022 |
| Queensland | 2006 - 2008 | 2014 - 2016 | 2023 - 2024 |
| Northern Territory | 2008 - 2010 | 2016 - 2018 | 2025 - 2026 |
| South Australia | 2010 - 2012 | 2019 - 2020 | 2027 - 2028 |