**REMOTE AREAS CONSULTATIVE GROUP**

**COMMUNIQUE**

**MEETING OF 19 MAY 2022**

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 jurisdictional government subgroup RACBAWG submitted a project proposal to a recent Austroads Board meeting and it has been approved, focussing on increasing steer axle mass limits for remote freight operations. It has been included in a larger project looking at electric and hydrogen vehicles. Considerations include aspects such as the impact on Road Managers, industry and the Australian Design Regulations.

* **Performance Based Standards (PBS)**

Members discussed aspects of PBS and potential improvements that may be considered as part of the Heavy Vehicle National Law (HVNL) Review. These included:

* Certainty and streamlining of access (eg a gazetted network);
* Transparency of decisions about access;
* Governance of the PBS Scheme and the NHVR’s ability to manage changes to PBS rules in a streamlined manner;
* Self-certification;
* Approval process for component vehicles; and
* Updating PBS Standards.

It was noted that the NHVR have two Notices currently available covering Tiers 1 and 3 of PBS, which have networks and no permit is required. The NHVR is also developing a Hyperactivity PBS Tier 3 Notice with a network.

* **Austroads Projects**

Members noted the Austroads project relevant to the RACG in terms of automated heavy vehicle access decision making. It is a major priority for the Austroads Freight Task Force and important work that will resonate with this group, which will hopefully yield quicker access decisions across the board. Another project of relevance is titled Future Freight Vehicles and Buses, concerning what EVs and alternative fuel vehicles are likely to look like in terms of mass and dimension, and is expected to produce some insights around what can be anticipated in relation to steer axle and drive axle mass, vehicle and prime mover dimensions.

Given the relevance of Austroads projects planned for the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 years on remote and rural transport operations, the RACG group have supported Austroads joining the group in an observer capacity.

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

Members noted that the NTRTA and Western Roads Federation have issued a media statement calling for Federal funding to train truck drivers who are often the first on scene at traffic crashes in remote and regional Australia. 10% of road fatalities occur in remote or very remote areas of Australia. You are 11 times more likely to die comparable to the city (as reflected in the National Road Safety Strategy 2021-2030). Of approximately 160 drivers interviewed in remote areas, 70% have been first responders at accidents at least once, with 50% of those reporting they had been first responders and site controllers for over an hour before medical help arrived. Less than 6% had accessed medical mental health services after the incident. The proponents’ intention now is to seek funding to formalise a training program that can then be gifted to every other State road transport association or livestock association that wants it so they can roll it out to their own members. General expressions of support were made at this meeting for that course of action.

* **Heavy Vehicle National Law (HVNL) Review**

The meeting noted the progress of the comprehensive review of the HVNL. Mr Ken Kanofski is considering what the key issues have been from an industry perspective and is also dealing with jurisdictions to look at what are some implementable solutions and outcomes to make sure that the key issues around safety and productivity are addressed. Mr Kanofski will submit a report to Ministers in July.

* **Regulatory Services**

Members noted that on 1 August 2022 the NHVR will take over regulatory services for New South Wales. The next jurisdiction will be Queensland.

* **Heavy vehicle driver training and skills for drivers who are new to the industry**

Respectful feedback was provided by industry around the driving culture. Concerns were expressed regarding drivers travelling East-West across Australia, and also in Queensland and other jurisdictions, in rural and remote environments as well as urban areas.

Observations were reported of risky driver behaviour such as unsafe overtaking, not checking equipment (eg straps on tautliners), and also the on-road culture such as radio protocols and common terminology.  Industry emphasised that it is keen to see the concerns addressed by way of a more demanding competency-based assessment and training process to identify and resolve gaps in skills. It was noted that well-experienced drivers are leaving the industry due to perceived exposure. A consensus was reached that a mature approach is required to raise the profile of this issue and gain impetus.

**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 |