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More Than a Load of Hot Air

It has now been well over two years since the federal government announced its “whole of government” review of light and heavy vehicle exhaust emission standards for new vehicles in Australia. I detailed back in mid-2016 that on the table this time around for heavy vehicles was a move to Euro VI and equivalent emission standards from Japan and the USA. I also detailed that the review process would take some time and that any new regulations would likely take effect beyond 2020. Well it turns out that prediction may have been a little optimistic. So, what has happened in the past two years? Well seemingly not much!

The whole of government approach, which started out as the Ministers from Transport and Infrastructure, Environment as well as Industry and Resources joining together to review our future noxious and greenhouse road vehicle emissions. Draft Regulation Impact Statements (RIS) were developed and released, these were poorly conceived and gained much criticism from industry. These RIS’s led to much discussion about Australian fuel standards for petrol, that are sadly lagging behind Europe, the USA and much of Asia, with the poor quality of Australian petrol being the biggest stumbling block to the introduction of Euro 6 for light vehicles. The situation is very much different for heavy vehicles with our current diesel standards quite capable of supporting Euro VI and equivalent truck emission regulations. In fact, many Truck Industry Council (TIC) members are offering at least some advance emission vehicles in their Australian model ranges. Euro VI product sales in Australia can be traced back to 2015, with no less than six truck Brands now offering Euro VI, or equivalent, trucks in our market.

Those Euro VI and equivalent trucks are operating successfully, reliably and efficiently in our country, very efficiently by all reports. Owners and operators are reporting these new emission trucks are returning, on average, 10 percent better fuel consumption compared with current and previous emission standard vehicles. That is a substantial fuel saving for operators and a 10 percent decrease in CO₂ emissions from these new trucks. Emissions of NO_x and Particulate Matter are also significantly reduced at Euro VI and equivalent levels. So, you would think that government would be keen to realise the introduction of these vehicles, not so apparently. The respective Ministers in the “whole of government” review of emission regulations appear to be in no hurry to see these cleaner and more efficient truck emission standards introduced here in Australia. Standards that would see health and environmental improvements for all Australians, as well as operator fuel savings.

While our politicians procrastinate, our CO₂ emission performance continues to wane. Recently the National Transport Commission (NTC) released their annual review on the fuel-efficiency of our light vehicle (cars, SUV’s and light commercials) fleet. The report found that in

Truck Industry Council Limited

ABN 37 097 387 954

T: (02) 6273 3222 E: admin@truck-industry-council.org W: www.truck-industry-council.org

2017 the reduction of average CO2 emissions from new light vehicles purchased in Australia has continued to stall. Last year higher polluting SUV's outsold less polluting passenger cars locally for the first time. This resulted in the smallest CO2 reduction improvement since such data started being recorded in 2002. Private buyers purchased vehicles with the lowest average emissions intensity (an average of 176g/km), followed by business buyers (186g/km), while the highest emission intensity vehicles were purchased by government (199g/km)! A similar emission comparison is not available for heavy vehicles because there is no regulation that measures and rates the fuel efficiency of trucks. However, there is nothing to suggest that our government's purchasing behaviour would be any different when it comes to their heavy vehicle investments, even if fuel efficiency comparisons existed.

Australian Governments are in the perfect position to "lead by example", as many other governments around the world do. We are lagging most developed nations in the adoption of Euro VI and equivalent standards for heavy vehicles, by 5 years, or more now. When will our government bodies get on the same page as the majority of the developed world, reducing noxious truck emissions, as well as reducing our road transport greenhouse emissions? Enough talk, enough expelling of hot air, it is time for action. TIC calls upon the Ministers involved to split the introduction timing of light and heavy vehicle emission standards, allowing the timely adoption of Euro VI and equivalent standards for trucks.

Phil Taylor
President, Truck Industry Council