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Twenty years behind the rest of the world

In my May column this year I made the comment that the Truck Industry Council's (TIC) research showed that Australia was lagging two decades behind many countries in the western world with the take up of new safety and emission technologies. That cannot possibly be right I hear you say, well here are the numbers; Australia's truck fleet average age is 14 years now (for trucks above 3.5t GVM), in Western Europe the average is approximately 7 years for those trucks above 3.5t GVM. You then need to double these figures to account for the oldest trucks in the fleet, so Australia's older trucks are 28 years of age, while in Europe the age is 14 years. A conservative estimate of Australia's mandated adoption of heavy vehicle safety and emission regulations from Europe, Japan and the USA is 5 years, that is when an Australian Design Rule (ADR) becomes law. Examples are:

- Front Under-run Protection System, 7 years after Europe.
- Anti-lock Brake System, 10 years after Europe (Rigid trucks).
- Electronic Stability Control, 7 years after Europe.
- Autonomous Emergency Braking System, likely to be 7 years after Europe.
- Euro VI and equivalent emission regulations, estimated to be 8 years after Europe and Japan, while lagging USA adoption by 15.

In Europe it will, in theory, take 7 years x 2 = 14 years for a new regulation to be fully implemented across their heavy vehicle fleet from the year of introduction. In Australia it will take 14 years x 2 = 28 years for full implementation, due to our much older fleet and hence much slower take-up rate of new vehicles. So, 28 years – 14 years = 14 years longer in Australia. BUT, we have that lag of at least 5 years before our government regulates the technology, therefore 5 years + 14 years = 19 years. The best part of two decades! TIC has been somewhat generous to our regulators in the above analysis, if you average the delay in adoption timing by our Government of the ADR's detailed above the lag is not 5 years, but 8. Taking us well over the 20 year mark. These are the numbers and government cannot continue to ignore these facts.

The delay in realising newer trucks on our roads with their advanced safety features and environmental technologies is no doubt negatively impacting on road safety outcomes and the health of all Australians. Put simply our nation's truck fleet is not as safe as it could be, it is certainly less safe than the European truck park.

So, what can be done to improve this situation in Australia? Obviously we need to introduce safety and environmental technologies as soon as practical after they are implemented in Europe, Japan and the USA. To this end we need regulators to work more closely with truck manufacturers, the companies developing these technologies, to develop processes that could see the streamlining of new regulation development and introduction in Australia. However, most importantly, we need these new technologies and features to

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filter through our nation's truck fleet far more quickly than is currently happening and that can only be achieved with a younger, newer, truck fleet. Natural market dynamics are not working in this regard and this must be acknowledged and accepted by government. They, government, are not meeting their own safety and environmental objectives due to the age of the Australian truck fleet. Incentives, not merely regulations, are required to achieve these desired outcomes. In Europe we can see governments pursuing a safety and environmental agenda, by restricting the areas, or roads, where an old truck can be operated (emission zones), increasing tolls and registration charges for older heavy vehicles and other similar such measures. While at the same time these governments are offering incentives to operators who purchase the latest technology trucks. Incentives for clean energy alternate powered trucks are common in Europe, as are tax concessions and of course heavy vehicles in Europe are allowed higher axle mass limits, allowing more payload to be carried per truck. All of these are operational benefits for the owner of a newer truck and are the types of incentives that our governments must consider to lower our nation's heavy vehicle fleet age and deliver on their own targets for improved safety and environmental outcomes.

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