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Out of Step with the World

The pace of technological development in the trucking industry, both here in Australia and globally, is greater now than we have probably ever seen, producing substantial safety, environment and productivity improvements. The rate of innovation is expected to accelerate over the next decade as we move towards connected and autonomous vehicles and zero emission trucks.

Despite a strong local heavy vehicle design and manufacturing industry that produces trucks, bodies, trailers and specialist road transport equipment, Australia is effectively a technology taker. We primarily obtain our major components, systems, technology and a large portion of new trucks from beyond our shores. Australian new truck sales represent just 1% of global truck production. The Australian government recognises this dynamic and has introduced measures to reduce the barriers for importation of new trucks and truck technologies. These include being a signatory to the UN 1958 Agreement that advances the adoption of UN-ECE vehicle regulations. The Australian government also has a long tradition of accepting equivalent alternative global heavy vehicle standards (particularly USA and Japanese standards). These measures are intended to enable Australia to capitalise on global vehicle innovations and technologies.

However there are a couple of harsh realities that the Australian government needs to face. Firstly, Australia does not recognise global dimensional and axle mass limits and hence we are NOT truly aligning with global vehicle standards. Secondly, Australia has an old heavy vehicle fleet, approximately 15 years average age, that is typically twice the age of other countries in the Western World we would compare ourselves with. I contend that the two issues are linked. There is a disconnect between the government's intention to remove barriers and the reality of being able to import vehicles, components and technology from global markets. While Australia is aligning with UN-ECE (and equivalent global) safety and emission standards, Australia is not aligning with the dimensional and axle mass limits of these global markets. Dimension and mass limits are fundamental to heavy vehicle design. Many globally developed trucks cannot be brought to Australia without redesign and modification, resulting in cost increases and/or the reduction in heavy vehicle model availability here. These technical restrictions stifle new truck sales and are contributing to an excessively old Australian truck fleet.

In not aligning with international dimensional and axle mass limits Australia will miss out on many safety, environmental and productivity improvements, technologies that will be built around country of origin limits in Europe and the USA and not restrictive Australian regulations. Electric, battery, fuel cell and hydrogen storage technologies, as well as automated driving functions will place significant strain on the dimensional and mass "envelopes" of heavy vehicles. For example, batteries and hydrogen storage will use more

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space and weigh significantly more than current diesel fuels tanks, for an equivalent “energy density”. So what is Australia missing out on, or what is being delayed from coming to our shores?

- Access to full truck model ranges, option and safety features (ESC, AEBS, ACC, LKAS.....)
- Wider and safer cab steps and grab handles
- Ultra-wide tyres (replacing dual tyres) that are more fuel efficient
- Increased axle masses to improve productivity (present in global markets)
- Aerodynamic cabs, fairings, air deflectors and bodywork
- Electric and alternative fuelled “zero emission” vehicles
- Autonomous vehicles
- Connect “Intelligent” vehicles

Is Australia getting left behind? Yes we are! Take for example Australia’s take-up rate of alternative powered and fuelled heavy vehicles, this currently stands at just 0.1% of our new truck sales. Compare this to the global average that is approximately 2%. We have one twentieth the take-up rate. Re-engineering these globally developed products for Australia’s restrictive dimensional and mass regulations is simply not viable in many cases. Product availability in Australia is limited and our take-up rates are poor. Our communities and environment are missing out on these ultra-efficient environmentally advanced trucks.

The Truck Industry Council (TIC) believes that Australia must align with international dimensional and axle mass regulations and take full advantage of globally developed safety, environmental and productivity truck technologies. The increased uptake of these vehicles reducing the age of the Australian truck fleet in the process. TIC requests that the Transport and Infrastructure Council, within COAG, adds this key heavy vehicle safety objective to the National Road Safety Strategy 2011–2020 for Federal and State Government action.

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