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Defining the Goal

Defining where you want to go in life can be very important. It has many potential connotations in the road freight sector, it could be as simple as defining your next freight pick-up or drop-off point, or if you will pardon the pun, looking down the road a little further, where you see yourself or your business in this industry in ten or more years' time. Often when setting a goal you may not have a clear vision of how you will achieve it, however one will typically have a path to start out on and be open minded to make objective decisions along that path as you seek out your ambition. Those decisions may take you down a path, or paths, that you never imagined, but that is just part of the journey and those with an enquiring mind-set and who are willing to embrace change will reach, or even exceed, their goals.

Based on the above open minded philosophy, it is with a certain degree of frustration that I and many in the automotive industry look upon proclamations from an increasing number of overseas nations announcing plans to ban the internal combustion engine within their borders by a certain date in the future. The most recent was Britain, announcing a ban on diesel and petrol vehicles by 2035. Instantly that limits the pathways that can be travelled in the quest to reduce carbon emissions, potentially eliminating some very effective strategies and technologies. There now appears little doubt that the world needs to contain its CO₂ emissions, however banning specific technologies should not be the mechanism used. Goals and timelines should be defined and then let the scientists and engineers work on the technical solutions to reach those required outcomes. At the moment there is no clear pathway, no one specific solution, to reducing CO₂ emissions in the road transport sector. In Australia the problems are arguably greater than for many international countries, the sheer size and remoteness of many of our freight tasks, our sparse rural population, extremes in climate and limited services and infrastructure outside of our cities and major towns, all play a significant part in where, how and when freight is moved. If you were to ban the diesel engine as a useable pathway, much of that freight simply could not be delivered.

Along with the current well-known alternative transport power sources such as battery electric and hydrogen fuel cells that can lead to zero emission outcomes, there are other technologies that can reduce, or even eliminate, truck CO₂ emissions if the earth-to-earth impact is considered. However, many of these alternate technologies rely on keeping the

internal combustion engine, something that many countries want to ban. Sustainable fuels, known as “carbon-neutral re-use of CO₂” are a good example. Carbon is captured out of the atmosphere and is converted into fuel using renewable electricity. There are also carbon neutral bio-diesel fuels made from plants. As the plant grows it absorbs and captures carbon from the atmosphere. *High school science, all plants need CO₂ to survive, it is a key ingredient in their photosynthesis process.* The crop is eventually harvested and the plant material converted into a fuel. Notably, these sustainable fuels look, feel and can be used in the same way as diesel or petrol, however they can be 100 percent carbon neutral. As such, these fuels could use our existing infrastructure. Stored in existing fuel depots, transported by our existing fuel tankers, purchased and dispensed at our existing fuel stations and importantly, used in our vehicles with minimal, or no, adaption. However, if cars and trucks as we know them now, are banned by governments, these carbon neutral pathways could not be utilised.

It should not be governments’ role to try and pick winners, no technology should be ruled in nor any out, as we seek to find a better carbon balance for our planet. The Truck Industry Council calls upon all levels of Australian government to define appropriate environmental goals and to resist the temptation to ban specific technologies. In doing so, letting industry develop the most appropriate future road freight solutions for our country.

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