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A Clear Blue Sky

Many governments around the world have, over a long period of time, introduced ever stricter noxious vehicle emission regulations to curb air pollution generated by busses, cars and trucks powered by internal combustion engines. While by far from being the only cause of noxious air pollution, the focus of the world is slowly turning to this source, as other emitters, such as power generation, clean up their act. The first vehicle emission laws were introduced in the state of California, USA, in 1963, then Japan in 1966. Australia was one of the first countries globally to follow, introducing our first vehicle emission standards in the early 70's. Fast forward almost five decades to 2020 and Europe is now making plans for a Euro VII regulation with a planned implementation of 2026. Unfortunately, over the past ten years Australia has lost its way, stuck at Euro V when the USA introduced their equivalent standard in 2010, Europe in 2013 and Japan 2015. In fact, our government has been talking about delaying Euro VI until 2027. By that stage, China, India and most of South America would have introduced Euro VI and Europe would have had Euro VII for over a year!

Now some may argue that we do not have an air pollution issue in Australia, however recent events have shown that not to be the case. If there has been one unexpected silver lining to the tragic COVID-19 crisis, it is that urban centres, such as around Wuhan in China, northern Italy and Spain, have recorded vastly lower concentrations of air pollution since home isolation measures were introduced to fight the spread of the pandemic. In India the reduction of air pollution has been so great, the Himalayan mountains have been visible in the north of the country for the first time in 30 years. Closer to home, preliminary results of the satellite data analysed by researchers from the Land and Atmosphere Remote Sensing group at the Physical Technology Center in the Polytechnic University of Valencia show that pollution levels over Brisbane and Sydney fell by approximately 30 percent after the isolation measures were introduced.

These results do not come as a surprise to the Truck Industry Council (TIC), who has long argued that Australia's combination of delayed uptake of current global emission standards, coupled with one of the oldest truck fleets in the developed world, could only lead to one outcome, poor air quality in our largest cities. There is substantial medical evidence linking air borne vehicle exhaust pollutants with respiratory illnesses such as asthma, while vehicle

particulate matter (PM) emissions have been linked with causing cancer. There is equally damning scientific evidence that this same pollution causes acid rain that can make the waters of lakes, streams, wetlands, and other aquatic environments more acidic and at extreme levels, harm the fauna and flora in those areas. The devastation of parts of the Black Forrest in Germany was attributed primarily to acid rain.

So why is a younger truck fleet and cleaner emission standards so important? Well let me explain this with some simple numbers. Firstly, almost 25 percent of trucks registered and operating on our roads have little, or no, exhaust emission control systems. These trucks, over 100,000 vehicles, were manufactured before 1996. Just one of these truck's emits the pollution of 60 new Euro V trucks, or 120 new Euro VI trucks. It does not matter how well maintained those old trucks are, due their lack of exhaust aftertreatment and basic fuel injection systems, that is the rate at which they emit noxious emissions compared to new trucks. There are a similar number of Euro V trucks on Australian roads, over 100,000. Now we all know that those old pre-1996 trucks travel less distance each year than newer Euro V trucks that have been on sale in Australia for the past nine years, so I will be generous and say that the Euro V trucks are travelling ten times the distance that the pre-1996 trucks are. The relative pollution numbers look like this;

Pre-1996

100,000 trucks x 1 distance factor x 60 pollution factor = 6,000,000 units of noxious pollution per year

ADR80/03

100,000 trucks x 10 distance factor x 1 pollution factor = 1,000,000 units of noxious pollution each year

These old trucks are collectively generating at least 6 times the pollution of new trucks, 12 times if the new truck was Euro VI.

The lack of government action in addressing Australia's uptake of Euro VI emission standards, as well as a reluctance to tackle our aged truck fleet, is an extremely disappointing outcome. TICs National Truck Plan proposes a range of levers that government could pull in order to tackle these issues, while at the same time improving road vehicle safety outcomes and operator productivity. If such actions were to be implemented by government, those clear blue skies that we have been experiencing recently could be a permanent fixture, wouldn't that be nice?

Tony McMullan

CEO, Truck Industry Council