



Prime Mover Magazine – TIC Article October 2020 Issue.

## **The National Road Safety Strategy, a credible plan, or a road to nowhere?**

Australia's first National Road Safety Strategy was established by Federal, State and Territory Transport Ministers back in 1992. It was designed to provide a framework for national collaboration on road safety improvements and has evolved and been updated over the last three decades. The current, but soon to expire, version is the National Road Safety Strategy 2011 to 2020 and it introduced the concept of a Safe System Principles approach to tackling Australian road safety. This edition of the Strategy presented a ten year plan to reduce the annual numbers of both deaths and serious injuries on Australian roads by at least 30 percent. Noted by Governments at the time of introduction as being an “ambitious target”, how successful has this, or previous versions of the Strategy been? Well that is a difficult question to answer because there is no official audit or review process that evaluates the initial goals against the final outcomes and here in lies a fundamental problem with the Strategy.

The Truck Industry Council (TIC) recently took part in a Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications, Office of Road Safety, run consultation session to discuss, at risk accident groups/types, priorities, actions, planning and timelines for the development and release of the next generation of the National Road Safety Strategy, that being the 2021 to 2030 version. During this session TIC raised a number of key issues and concerns including:

1. The lack of a tangible audit/review process for past Strategies
2. No current Australian regulatory recognition that the deployment of advanced safety systems is irrevocably linked to current global engine emission regulations, our government cannot simply “cherry pick” advanced safety features without also adopting the latest emission standards too
3. Australia’s very old heavy vehicle fleet
4. The Federal Governments protracted timelines for introducing new vehicle safety regulations (Australian Design Rules) that are compounded by the complex and time-consuming Regulation Impact Statement (RIS) process employed by government

The second issue (2) is particularly frustrating to TIC and our members. Within the Department of Infrastructure there are two separate groups, one that is responsible for safety technology introduction and one focused on emission regulations. It would appear

that they develop policy in isolation. Whilst in the real world, truck manufacturers develop the vehicle as a whole. The reality is that the electrical architecture of a truck developed in Europe, Japan, or the USA (these three regions account for 99 percent of Australian truck technologies) is designed to meet their market's safety and environmental regulations. Here in Australia we lag these markets in the take-up of heavy vehicle safety technologies by about five years, however our emission regulations lag international market by close to fifteen years. This mismatch in Australian vehicle safety and environmental regulations, relative to these key global markets, makes it very difficult, impossible in many cases, to implement the latest safety systems on trucks with an emissions platform that is a decade older.

The last two issues above (3 and 4) are significantly impacting the timeline for advanced safety technologies to penetrate through the Australian truck fleet. With the average age of our country's truck fleet at 14.9 years and trending higher, coupled with the Australian government currently introducing safety regulations, on average, five years after Europe, TIC has estimated the timeline for the uptake of heavy vehicle Electronic Stability Control (ESC) and Autonomous Emergency Braking (AEB) across the Australian truck fleet. With current uptake rates, fleet age and fleet renewal rates applied, it would take until 2049 for 95% of the fleet to be fitted with ESC and a further 3 years, 2052, for 95% of the fleet to be fitted with AEB (assuming an ADR enforcement date of 2024 for AEB). Monash University Accident Research Centre (MUARC) estimates that these two technologies will save approximately 80 lives each year, once the technologies are fully implemented across our truck fleet. The sobering truth is that this will not be achieved for more than 32 years from now, with only incremental benefits being achieved until then.

Unless all of the issues raised above are adequately addressed in the new National Road Safety Strategy 2021 to 2030 it is doubtful that the new Strategy will achieve its projected outcomes, with road users left the poorer.

Tony McMullan

CEO, Truck Industry Council