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The COVID Excuse

There is no doubt that the past two years have been challenging for most and truly devastating for some. I doubt that anyone can claim that they have not been affected by COVID 19 in some way. Be that through boarder closures, changes to work, meeting, travel and education routines, as well as, direct and indirect financial and health impacts, etc, the past twenty-four months have truly been unprecedented times. Of course, not all the change has been bad. New work practices have benefitted many, reduced vehicle traffic, particularly in those States effected by lockdowns, have led to reduced pollution and accordingly, some of the best urban air quality that we have seen in decades, whilst road trauma for 2020 and 2021, is 20% lower than the baseline set in 2011 for the National Road Safety Strategy 2011 to 2020. I believe that in general, we have become more adaptable, patient and embrasive of change. We are also far more conscious of the basic expectations that we have taken for granted for so long, none more so than the freedoms that we enjoy here in Australia.

Many of the disadvantages of life over the past two years are obvious, however some are not as evident. When I look back over 2020 and 2021, one such deficiency is the lack of progress in the area of regulation. This is none more evident, than in the development and approval of new Australian Design Rule (ADR) regulations for heavy vehicles. Prior to the start of 2020, discussions were well underway between government and industry, with regard to heavy vehicle Advanced Emergency Braking Systems (AEBS) and the extension of Electronic Stability Control (ESC) to cover new Rigid trucks. While discussions and development of the next step in exhaust emission standards, ADR80/04 (Euro VI and the Japanese and USA equivalent alternatives), had been underway for some time. Given the maturity of these deliberations, one could have well expected that these three ADRs would have been finalised during the course of 2020, or given the initial COVID disruptions, at least by early 2021. However, we now find ourselves in 2022 and none of these significant safety and environmental regulations have been finalised. The reason for the lack of action by governmental departments was again and again, blamed on “COVID”.

It is simply not acceptable that these departments keep hiding behind the “COVID excuse”. The road freight industry did not hide behind COVID. Truck Industry Council members kept building, importing and delivering new trucks and kept servicing and supporting the needs

of Australia's existing truck fleet. Operators worked through the differing State and Territory boarder restrictions, kept delivering goods to supermarkets and retail shops, medical supplies to hospitals, doctors and chemists, building supplies to construction sites, fuel to service stations, farm produce to market, kept containers moving in and out of our ports and delivered online purchases to you and I. Trucks continued to pick up our garbage each week, ensured critical electrical and water utility maintenance was carried out, emergency service trucks provided fire, storm and flood responses, as well as road infrastructure construction and repair. There were many road blocks, some quite literal, placed in our way, but we just got on with the job. Our industry did not hide behind the "COVID excuse" at any time over the past two years, we stepped up and faced the challenges, found solutions and simply delivered when it counted.

2022 will be a year disrupted somewhat by a Federal Election and time will again be lost in finalising and enacting regulation if decisions are not made early this year. It is critically important that governmental departments spend less time working on their excuses and focus on making up for their period of COVID inactivity.

The Truck Industry Council calls upon government to finalise and gazette ADR80/04 (Euro VI and Japanese and USA equivalent alternatives), ADR35/07 (Electronic Stability Control for Rigid trucks) and ADR97/00 (Advanced Emergency Braking Systems) early in 2022, so as to ensure that these important regulations are not delayed by the upcoming Federal election. No more excuses, the time for action on these regulations is long overdue.

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