

Thank you for your invitation to speak at today's public hearing. I have a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Social Policy from University of Sydney and have been researching in the field interviewing Australian workers, firstly the police, secondly interstate truck drivers and recently shearers for nearly twenty years. I am not a medical or treating professional in the field of illegal drug use. I would like to focus on the Term of Reference regarding the nature, prevalence, and culture of methamphetamine use in Australia in particular in the interstate trucking industry. I again wish to state I am neither working in that industry as a driver nor within a trucking company, and I have no affiliation with any interest group. My book Conversations with Truckies: Life behind the Wheel was launched in 2013, I spent four years in contact with drivers, either as a passenger in a long haul truck or by phone, or by conversation in truck stops. My comments at this inquiry are based on the rich data from those experiences. My submission to this inquiry is about the anecdotal evidence I have collected within the interstate trucking industry and how the culture of drug use might be addressed by improving skilled employment opportunities.

A conservative estimate of drug use in the industry is 2 per cent. This aligns with the general public use of just under 2 per cent. These figures appear not to have changed recently. If we have 100,000 drivers then we have approximately 2,000 with a long term amphetamine use problem. The weight of a truck moving within the environment, highways, other cars, means that when an accident occurs, the outcome for the drivers, passengers and others during and after an incident will mean that fatalities are more likely to result. I am proposing a strategic model for cultural change to stop illegal drug use in the industry. This model could sit within the Federal Parliament's move to improve employment opportunities and/or The NSW Transport and Logistics Industry Skills Council would be able to provide an established infrastructure for an apprenticeship program.

There is a shortage of interstate drivers. Long haul driving has particular requirements different to local driving. The Grade of license means the drivers are paid at a different rate for a different category/type of work For example: Heavy Haulage Driver, Livestock Carrier, Logging truck driver and/or Road Train Driver. Interstate drivers, drive in different seasonal conditions in one day, drive in steep terrain while keeping loads safe with ropes, straps, tarpaulins and moving equipment, such as pallet jacks, knowing how to adjust cargo for safety reasons. Loading and unloading at each destination requires experience and efficiency. Employers within the interstate trucking industry could, with government assistance, establish a mentoring/apprenticeship program. The mentoring program would include Industry partners such the Transport Workers Union and Work Health and Safety (WHS) agencies (refer to diagram). The program would mean that employers would be confident that apprenticed drivers would have the guidance required for completing a safe trip with product delivery on time: Equal Opportunity Model With Apprenticeship Model

I would encourage women to also undertake truck driving as an occupation. They will embrace the opportunity to be in a mobile work place becoming connected within a “trucking community”. If you are in trucking school when you are offered the traineeship, it is possible to apply for an early exit to concentrate at the employer’s training facility. “Aside from proper licensing, take a Transport and Logistics (Road Transport) class full time at Pilbara TAFE (Pundulmurra Campus). You’ll receive a Certificate III that verifies that you are proficient in freight record-keeping, moving stock and special loads, and occupation safety and health” (Gruppelear 2015).

The Federal Government’s Program within Employment Services recognises that a new model should supply good coverage and delivery of quality services in all employment regions. Changes have also been made to the purchasing processes to encourage bids from partnerships and consortia which will assist small and specialist providers for example; owner operator trucking small businesses.

The mentoring program alongside the apprenticeship employees would mean that rehabilitated truck drivers with the skills of interstate driving would have valuable input into the development of the future drivers’ skill base. Gruppelear for example, lists the following tasks; detailed log reports, petrol amounts, driving hours, accident reports, fatigue breaks and mechanical breakdowns. All must be noted in a log. Date, time and duration are critical points to list. Each day, drivers must check the truck’s vital fluids and mechanics for a safe trip. Water, tires, electrical systems, oil, brakes and tires must be inspected and checked for any problems. “Keeping yourself and others on the road safe is a main priority” (<http://harleyfinance.com.au>).

The importance of the program is the cooperation of the employer alongside work, health and safety units to monitor the ongoing drug free position of the mentor. The skills that need to be passed on are; driving long distances, within speed limits, while manoeuvring heavy loads. A mentor can assist/supervise that the apprentice is complying with regulations. The value of the experience of working alongside an experienced driver means employers are addressing “risks” within the industry prior to an incident/s.

CHANGING THE CULTURE OF LONG TERM DRUG ABUSE

