

NSW Police Force – Traffic and Highway Patrol. A response to serious road trauma and non-compliance in the Heavy Vehicle Industry

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Abstract

The Traffic Taskforce (Formally known as the Joint Traffic Taskforce) was formed in 2014 after a string of Heavy Vehicle incidents on the NSW road network. The Taskforce's main role is to provide the NSW Police Force an ability to rapidly respond to high risk incidents/non compliance involving Heavy Vehicles and investigate these incidents against the requirements of Heavy Vehicle legislation. In the past four years the Taskforce has conducted numerous reactive and pro active interactions with Operators within industry, with very positive outcomes.

Background

The Traffic Taskforce was formed by the NSW Government in 2014 after a heavy vehicle collision on the Hume Hwy, Menangle south of Sydney. This crash claimed the lives of three innocent family members. The investigation into this tragedy revealed that the driver of the offending truck was under the influence of illicit drugs and had an extremely adverse driving history. Another incident involved a petrol tanker rolling on Mona Vale road, Mona Vale which also claimed two lives and a subsequent audit of the fleet involved revealed a litany of serious mechanical problems. The NSW Police and Road and Maritime took the unprecedented action of grounding that fleet effectively reducing the flow of petrol to NSW motorists. The Traffic Taskforce has over 35 fulltime specialist Highway Patrol Officers operating throughout NSW under the control of an Operations Manager (Inspector). The Taskforce has the ability to rapidly deploy to any incident in NSW and work with the Crash Investigation Unit involving Heavy Vehicle collisions. The Taskforce has extremely close ties with the NSW Road and Maritime Heavy Vehicle Compliance area and many of our Operations are assisted by RMS Inspectors.

Aim of the Traffic Taskforce

The main focus of the Taskforce is to assist Industry to self regulate and self improve. Due to the size of the entire Heavy Vehicle fleet operating in NSW and the number of heavy vehicle movements throughout NSW the Traffic and Highway Patrol cannot stop and inspect every vehicle. Due to this the Taskforce needs to look at prioritising its focus. There are two main factors which alert the Taskforce to particular operators. The first is if the operator is involved in a serious incident. This could be an operator's involvement in a fatality or serious crash. Normally this involves the Taskforce working in conjunction with the Crash Investigation Unit. The second area is when an operator comes under the notice of the Taskforce through an individual interaction with Police, reported poor driving from Community Sources or through intelligence received. When an operator comes under notice from either area the Taskforce will complete an analysis process to determine what action is required.

Analysis of Information

Once an operator comes under the notice of the Taskforce a number of internal processes are undertaken. A full history of the operator is reviewed for from a variety of sources. The Taskforce are not in a position in this abstract to divulge police methodology however most of the records are publically available. Records which are also reviewed include a full compliance history from the RMS database and NSW Police Force COPS database. The analysis is conducted by the Operations Manager, Operations Supervisor and allocated Officer In Charge. At times the Crash Investigation Unit Manager is invited to participate and provide insight. Factors which are considered in this analysis are the severity of the incident which has brought the operator under notice, the compliance history, size of the operator's fleet and locations.

Traffic Taskforce Action

Once a full analysis is completed by the management team and the decision has been made to audit the operator the Taskforce considers a number of ways to review the operator. The action can depend on the on the operators fleet size, location and type of vehicle used. The action taken can be by way of Distribution Inspection, operator served with a production notice, RMS Alert System through Heavily Vehicle Inspection Station and use of the NSW Police Force Mobile Automatic Number Plate Recognition Technology (MANPR) and Compliance Operations.

Distribution Centre (DC) Inspection – Taskforce Officer's operating under Heavy Vehicle National Law (HVNL) will enter a premise and conduct an inspection of the DC including vehicles, loading, unloading, storage systems (Dangerous Goods) and WH&S practices.

Production Notice – A notice under the HVNL will be served on the operator directing all vehicles be presented for inspection at a particular time and date.

RMS Alert and MANPR – Vehicles registered to a particular operator will be loaded into these two systems and stopped on the road network and inspected by RMS and/or Police.

Compliance Operations – Static Inspection locations can be set up in and around major projects, dumping sites and Regional locations within NSW to allow police and RMS to direct vehicles to be inspected and weighed. This has been extremely successful during the Operation Catapult (1-6) series at Sydney Olympic Park targeting the Truck and Dog Industry. The Traffic Taskforce has undertaken Operation Impact which has seen them deployed to remote regional areas such as Broken Hill, Hay and Boggabilla to conduct compliance operations. This was with the assistance of Centre for Road Safety who funded the operation.

Industry/Operator Engagement

Once the Taskforce has completed an audit of the operator an extremely important function must be completed. That function is the de-brief with the operator. In line with the aim of the Taskforce to assist industry to improve, the operator is given advice on areas in which it needs that improvement. At times legal action is taken when offences are detected however this is not always the case. The main areas historically where industry have had issues, have been in servicing schedules, loading/weights, drugs detected in drivers, unlicensed driver, inability to effectively manage sub-contracting. One common theme amongst smaller operators is they have a lack of understanding with their responsibilities under chain of responsibilities requirements. This has been at all levels. In most instances operators have been receptive to this advice and the Taskforce has several examples where operators have greatly improved their compliance after an audit with the Taskforce.

The Future

The Taskforce will continue to work with the RMS and the ever evolving National Heavy Vehicle Regulator to engage with industry to improve standards. The continued goal of the Taskforce is in line with the theme of the 2018 conference in that we want to move towards zero in road related deaths involving Heavy Vehicles.