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# Truck drivers to test flexibility in hours on road

KIM RUSCOE

SOME truck drivers will stay at the wheel for longer than the legal maximum of hours under a six-month trial.

Up to 250 drivers from five trucking companies are to take part in a Land Transport Safety Authority fatigue management programme, modelled on a scheme that has been running successfully in Queensland for five years.

Under the trial, operators will manage their own driving hours and exceed prescribed maximums provided they have strategies to detect and manage fatigue.

Fatigue has been traditionally managed by the logbook method, which regulates a driver's working hours and sets a maximum of 11 driving hours for any 24-hour period.

Authority spokesman Andy Knackstedt said driver fatigue was a significant road safety risk for commercial drivers and accounted for about 5 per cent of crashes where truck drivers were at fault.

"This is due, in part, to the considerable distances these people are required to drive and to the economic pressure they face in order to meet delivery schedules."

Those taking part in the trial must have an authority-approved fatigue management plan which would be audited regularly to ensure standards were complied with, he said.

"Companies must agree to implement fatigue counter-measures such as longer rest times or restructured schedules which allow drivers to start work an hour or two later in the morning, allowing them more time to sleep. The longer driving hours are only able to

be used a set number of times each week or month."

Road Transport Forum chief executive Tony Friedlander said the trial would allow drivers to work closer to their actual schedules.

Drivers often found they had reached the 11-hour limit a short distance from their destination, he said. Under the trial, drivers could legally exceed that maximum to complete the trip, then take an extended rest period at the end of their journey.

Police Vehicle Investigation Unit manager Inspector Ian James said trial drivers would have to produce a logbook on demand, as well as proof of their approved extended driving hours.

"I think it's a good idea. It [the trial] focuses more on mitigating the effects of fatigue rather than just the number of hours they have driven."

Queensland truck company owner Darren Nolan said his drivers had not been involved in a fatigue-related incident since the company joined the Australian trial five years ago. In the three years before the trial, his drivers had been involved in four fatigue-related crashes.

Mr Nolan said customers' demands on transport companies were the main cause of driver fatigue.

"We had to sit back and say: 'You want this but how do you want us to do this in a safe and legal manner?'"

"We lost some customers."

Mr Knackstedt said five operators have been selected to take part in the trial. Two had almost completed the first stage of approval and were expected to be working under the more flexible rules next month.

*The Dominion*  
*Tuesday April*  
*16<sup>th</sup>, 2002*

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