

# Inquiry told of truck danger

By KAY DIBBEN

LOW pay and unrealistic delivery demands have pressured truck drivers into dangerous driving practices, an inquiry has been told.

Some interstate trucks were being used as "mobile refrigerated warehouses" by chain stores demanding "just in time" delivery of products, one operator said.

Professor Michael Quinlan, chairman of the NSW Motor Accidents Association inquiry into safety in the long haul trucking industry, heard criticism of legislated driving hours under the log-book system from both trucking companies and drivers.

At a Brisbane hearing on Friday, Transport Workers Union Queensland secretary Hughie Williams reported on numerous companies that allegedly forced drivers to work and drive long hours without sufficient rest.

Mr Williams told of one driver working 22 hours without a break and six days straight, starting fuel.

He said cut-throat



**PERIL:** Last week The Sunday Mail centred attention on the plight of trucking operators

tactics by transport companies, loading agents and manufacturers who wanted goods transported by unrealistic deadlines forced drivers to do extra trips, sometimes while on illegal stimulants to stay awake.

One owner-driver told the inquiry: "It's come to the stage that unless you're prepared to break the law, you're not going to survive."

Brisbane owner-operator Patricia McEwan said she and her partner had made only \$4000 each last year because of low interstate freight rates

and high operating costs.

Darren Nolan, the quality manager of refrigerated produce transporter Nolan's Transport at Gatton, outlined his company's health and safety strategies under a pilot fatigue management program.

But Mr Nolan also told of produce price wars, with growers delaying picking crops, then asking for freight to be moved to interstate markets in the least possible time.

And he said that because most chain stores carried a minimum amount of fresh prod-

ucts on shelves, they wanted "just in time" delivery.

The inquiry heard calls for a code of practice or accreditation system that would force transport companies and their customers to recognise their duty of care regarding driver safety.

Queensland Trucking Industry Association executive director Peter Garske called for "intelligent policing" to rid the industry of cowboy operators.

Queensland Transport director of road use, management and safety Gary Mahon said the department was investigating several fatigue-related cases.

He said there would be prosecutions under chain-of-responsibility laws which could go beyond drivers to penalise companies, clients, consigners and freight forwarders.

Last week "Tom", a Queensland Transport mobile inspector, told The Sunday Mail there were insufficient inspectors to investigate illegal practices, and weighbridges and mobile inspections needed to operate for longer hours.

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