

## Bruce McIver - Second presentation to Logging Industry Research Organisation

### 'Public Attitude to Trucking in Australia'

Thank you

I have been asked to talk about public attitude to trucking in Australia

- I'm not going to

What I will talk about though, is how do you influence public attitude towards the road transport industry.

The RTF is a dynamic industry body representing an equally dynamic industry.

- We won't, and can't, afford to accept the status quo.

- what we can do though, is to accept the challenge of changing the status quo

- changing people's opinion of road transport in Australia

This has been one of the RTF's goals since day one.

The four goals of our organisation are:

Building industry unity  
Introducing self-regulation  
Changing community attitudes  
Influencing governments

All work hand in hand

- Unity. We need a unified industry speaking with a single voice

- Self-regulation. We need a workable, realistic

mechanism to raise the safety and professionalism of road transport in Australia

- Community attitudes. The public have to not only accept us, they have to like us

Why? Because whilst ever they continue to:

- complain about us to politicians

- form community groups to restrict our access to certain routes

- encourage environmental limitations on us

We will never be able to achieve our final goal - influencing governments

Sure, we will - and have - been able to make much progress in dealing with governments

- but the bottom line is if you are fighting the community you will never achieve your full potential

- governments base their decisions on community attitudes.

So, the question facing us was how do we get the public to like us?

- not tolerate us, but like us

It's not an easy task but the RTF hasn't resiled from other, equally tough questions.

We began by developing face to face initiatives where operators could talk to the public about what we do

- and more importantly, what we are doing to improve our safety and professionalism.

Our work centres around four key areas:

1. Road Transport Awareness Week.
2. Mobile Safety Information Display Semi-Trailer.
3. National Awareness Campaign.
4. Raising our Standard through self-regulation.

Our work began in 1992 with a series of Road Transport Awareness Weeks in 6 major urban and rural centres.

Operators and their families went out and met people on a one to one basis.

The activities included:

- school visits
- shopping centre display
- truck parades
- barbeques
- open days

Such was the success of the events that in 1993 we expanded the program to 25 centres spreading from Perth to Sydney.

The organisers in Perth received unprecedented support from the Western Australian Government

- a grant for \$25,000 to help the proceedings. Certainly a landmark in Government support for an industry initiative such as this.

The RTF supplied operators in all areas with a resource kit including

- merchandising
- press releases
- TV, radio and newspaper ads
- and a step by step 'how to' kit.

By far the most important lesson that was learnt was that operators could influence public opinion in their local areas

- people who have previously only thought about themselves as transport operators found that they had the skills to work together to form regional groups and raise the positive profile of the industry in those areas.

Such was the success that an operator from one of the areas - Rockhampton in Qld - received an Advance Australia Award for his work

- he was presented with the award by the Governor of Qld at a special ceremony at Government House

- an impressive effort indeed!

Next we built a shopping centre display which toured Westfield Shopping Centres across Australia.

In essence, the display is a simulator which allows the public

to experience what it is like behind the wheel of a truck/trailer combination in traffic.

We concentrated on situations which can improve safety -

- 'cut out cutting in' - to stop people cutting in front of trucks when stopping at traffic lights
- 'turning truck needs more space' - to let people know that trucks can turn left from the centre lane on a two lane road
- 'beware reversing vehicles' - to make people aware of the limited visibility of a reversing truck

The display was a phenomenal success

- 2,400,000 shoppers had the opportunity to visit the display and about 400,000 people participated directly.

Some of the comments we received were

*"Very informative - I'll be careful of turning trucks from now on. I hadn't realised what a limited rear view they had until I saw for myself".*

*"Great. Needed for many years."*

*"Excellent. Every motorist should be made to watch this."*

*"I'm sorry truck drivers, I'll never do that again."*

The display is now mounted in a former furniture van and now

tours Australia as our Mobile Safety Information Display Semi-Trailer.

- In one day at a major event in Victoria an estimated 5,000 people went through the display.
- Over a six week period in Canberra it is estimated that 80,000 people were exposed to the display.

As impressive as these successes are, the next step though is a truly national public awareness campaign.

To do this we began with research

- to find out what the public really thinks of us

Why? Because it's no use devising a campaign on what we think the public's concerns are

- if we guess - and that's exactly what it would be, a guess - then we've wasted a lot of time, effort and money.

We contracted a specialist research company to conduct interviews in households across Australia.

Next those findings were then checked against wider face to face random interviews to verify the trends picked up in the 'qualitative' interviews.

What the research showed was -

- The public does not see the drivers and related professions behind road transport

- people's perception of road transport is based on trucks alone and therefore it is seen as a very 'impersonal' industry.
  - The community feels unsafe when driving near trucks on the highway.
  - People felt that speed was a major concern with many saying that "trucks speed too much".
  - Women and elderly drivers feel more threatened by trucks than do male drivers.
  - Many people felt that there are too many trucks on the road although when prompted admit that the alternative - the rail system - is inefficient and not able to perform the tasks undertaken by road transport.
  - People lacked knowledge about what it takes to become a truck driver.
  - Trucks tailgating cars and trucks travelling in convoys were identified as major problems by other road users.
  - Truck drivers' appearance and mode of dress is seen as one of being "practical but scruffy" and was a major area where the industry could improve its image, people felt.
  - People generally believed that it takes a high degree of skill to drive a semi trailer.
  - People were conscious that long distance drivers were put under pressure and were fearful that this leads to unsafe driving habits and drug taking.
  - Many people believed the standard of equipment used in road transport, particularly on long distance work, was extremely high.
  - Contrary to popular belief, people in country areas in Australia were no more sympathetic to road transport than were people who lived in the major metropolitan areas.
- If those comments sound negative - you're right. The industry has a big job in front of it.
- The next step was to look at how we address the findings of the research. We
1. Developed brief for communication agencies (based on the research)
  2. Selected a short list and interviewed them
    - getting the right company was hard
  3. The short list of agencies were then asked to present their ideas to the RTF
  4. Finally, we decided which way we needed to go, always referring back to the research findings to ensure we didn't waste our efforts.
- We have now selected our communications company

- a group called Marketforce

The next stage is to determine the communications mediums we will use and then fund the campaign.

Marketforce has recommended a combination of radio, TV and newspaper advertising combined with public relations activities.

It has been recommended that the advertising use former Australian cricketer Mike Whitney

- many of you will know of him from thrashings he has metered out to New Zealand cricket sides.

You may be surprised to know that many people actually like him in Australia.

- Mike's father was a truck driver and he has a great affinity for the industry.

Here's an example of some of the proposed ads

The public relation aspects of the campaign will build on our existing community based work

- we don't want to take it out at the hands of the operators. We want people to feel involved with what we are doing.

We will build on that with campaigns such as the 'miles of smiles' program.

- one day of the year where trucks 'wear' a smile to show people we are a friendly industry.

To fund the campaign we have already approached the major multinational and national players in the Australian road transport industry.

We have an in-principle agreement that if we can get the groundwork right they will support us. We believe we have the groundwork right.

We also have the support of the wider industry

- at our recent 1994 National Convention 900 delegates pledged \$600,000 over three years for the campaign - and the money is still rolling in.

We hope to have the campaign up and running before the end of the year.

The campaign will also build on the growing professionalism in our industry through self-regulation.

This groundbreaking scheme is seeing the industry raise its own standards through developing realistic, achievable standards in four areas:

- Driver Training
- Driver Health
- Vehicle Maintenance
- Management

The scheme is now working with new levels of pride and professionalism amongst operators

- drivers are now saying 'Why don't I have a uniform?
- why aren't I being trained?'

Of course, there are some in our industry, and possibly yours, who

may be thinking that this is all a waste of time.

- well, I suggest you think again

I recently visited the US .... during my visit I spent some time at the Offices of the American Trucking Associations ... they employ over 300 people to look after their National interests

- I picked up this leaflet from CRASH
  - *(read crash document)*

This is the very thing we are about to face in Australia

- and don't think its not going to happen in New Zealand
- its already spread to Europe ... and it won't take our opponents long to find out about it both here and in Australia So to you here in New Zealand I'd say be aware of what's going on overseas
- and what we are doing in Australia

There's one school of thought that says the public can't do without us.

Perhaps that's true

- but if they don't like us then governments have no hesitation in applying heavy penalties, taxes and restrictions on us

Why? Because they know that if the public doesn't like us they can do what they want.

The RTF is determined that this isn't going to be the case in Australia!

In closing, I'd like to say that not only are we changing community attitudes

- we are changing road transport people's attitudes.

We are saying 'look at what you do in your business.

- don't complain about anything, or anyone else.

Don't complain about car drivers or any of a hundred other matters you may think of

- fix up road transport first. That's where our future, and the future of our industry lays.

Thank you.