



VOLUME LOADING
23 February 1994

Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders): I wish to raise the issue of volume loading for the livestock road transport industry in South Australia. As members are all aware, the road transport industry in South Australia has taken on the massive task of shifting most of the livestock that are moved around the State and also interstate. Australian National still carries some cattle by rail into Gepps Cross from the Alice Springs and north-west pastoral regions. However, most of the remaining livestock in South Australia find their way into stock crates at some stage or another.

Volume loading has been an industry goal for many years. It has many advantages over the present axle limits set to control overloading. For the benefit of members I point out that the Highways Department has many permanent and semi-permanent axle weighing stations dotted around the State for the purpose of weighing trucks and buses. All operators and drivers of these vehicles must observe strict axle limits. This is only right and just to avoid damage to our roads system.

However, the livestock industry has difficulty in observing these axle limits as it is hard to predetermine the weight of the livestock to be carried. Recognising this fact, the Interstate Commission for the Road Transport Industry recommended the introduction of volume loading for livestock in November 1989. Queensland, that State so often held up for ridicule in this House and elsewhere, has had volume loading for its road transport operators for many years. It is time that we in this House consider with some feeling the welfare of animals. In fact, I would be surprised if I discovered a lack of resolve to get on with the introduction of this measure.

I would be concerned if any member of this House were not fully informed about how frustrating and restrictive the present laws are to transport operators. As an example, I refer to the case of an Elliston based transport operator. In this case the cargo was cattle bound for liveweight selling at Gepps Cross in Adelaide on a Monday morning. The industry has a curfew operating in Gepps Cross and it closes at 4 p.m. on the Sunday before the Monday morning market for selling the cattle over weighing scales. In this case the transport operator had timed his run from the West Coast to be at Gepps Cross in plenty of time to meet the deadline. However, just outside Port Augusta at the highways weighing station the transport was stopped for a normal axle test.

The cattle were heavier than expected and the truck was overweight. Two cattle had to be offloaded and their welfare attended to before the truck could continue on its journey. This all took some time to organise, and the truck missed the curfew that was imposed at Gepps Cross. The only exception to this curfew has been granted to Australian National as it is impossible to tamper with the railway crates on their way from the Alice Springs region to Gepps Cross.

There is an optimum loading density for livestock, and every good operator knows what that is. If the stock crates are packed too tightly the animals get down and are bruised. No farmers would allow their stock to be carried in this manner. However, if too much space is left in each pen animals tend to rush around the pen, leading to slipping and bruising and also causing large trailers to sway. Operators know what the optimum density is for each class of animal carried in their stock crates. It is only when the operators have their trucks weighed at Highways Department weighing stations that they know whether they are overweight.

In cases where axle limits are exceeded it is rarely by large amounts as most of the modern trailers are designed to meet axle limits presently set. Often when the axle limits are exceeded the Highways weighing officials will demand that one or two animals be removed from the transport until the axle weights are under the limits set. This is against all good commercial transport operations. Often these transporters have to meet deadlines set by the abattoirs or meet curfews imposed by liveweight selling over scales. The delays caused by offloading a few cattle and making arrangements for their welfare are time consuming and unnecessary. It is causing resentment and frustration in the industry and leading to lost market opportunities for the producers. The benefits of volume loading were estimated by the interstate commission to outweigh costs by 12 to one. I seek the indulgence of this House to support immediate steps to introduce volume loading for the livestock transport industry in South Australia.