

RAIL SAFETY NATIONAL LAW (SOUTH AUSTRALIA) BILL

Mr BROCK (Frome) (12:22): I would also like to contribute to the Rail Safety National Law (South Australia) Bill—a very important bill. Let me first say that Port Pirie has had a long association with the rail industry over many years. Port Pirie was unique in that it had the three different rail gauges going through our community, requiring all trains (both passenger and freight) to come into our city and to transfer all the passengers and all the freight. As the member for Schubert has indicated just a minute ago, the rail system, including Crystal Brook, has had a great history in the rail industry.

One of the issues that I feel bad about is that it is diminishing. In regional South Australia we seem to be getting fewer passenger and freight trains into the regions. However, this bill is regarding rail safety. We, as Australians, have had a long association with the rail activities across this vast continent. South Australia, in particular, has always been a leader in rail safety; however, we always must ensure that the train operations have a consistent regulation and operation facility across all the state borders.

As the member for Schubert has indicated, one of the issues that you can take on board that may not be evident is fatigue. I drive a fair bit in my job as the elected member for Frome, and we do get fatigued just driving a car but we can stop and pull over on the side of the road, put the seat back and have a kip. A train driver cannot do that, and it is one of the issues we have to identify: that we have the same fatigue laws for South Australian operators so that when they are transferring into Western Australia or Victoria, they have the same qualifications and requirements.

I agree with the member for Schubert about drugs and alcohol, in particular. Again, a lot of people do not understand the unseen effects that drugs and/or alcohol can have on the ability of a driver—whether of trains, trucks or other vehicles—to be able to react. With a train, you cannot just stop within a short distance. You need to have the same requirements across all states. The other thing we really need to take on board, and I hope this is being looked at very seriously, is the unseen issue of depression. Train drivers, vehicle drivers and even people in this house may have depression and you do not see it on the surface so you need to be able to be on top of that and to identify that, and the criteria for all states across national lines should be the same.

As I said earlier, Port Pirie had the great privilege of having three different rail gauges in the city which resulted in all the trains having to stop there and which created many, many jobs. Unfortunately, the state government of the time did not allow the trains to come into Port Pirie, using the excuse of re-laying rail sleepers or standardising them between Port Pirie and Crystal Brook, and allowed the bus services, which were not usually allowed, to come into Port Pirie. From that day, our rail systems and passenger service operations were completely eliminated.

However, we now need to look forward and I certainly commend the bill and congratulate the minister for bringing it forward. The aim of it is to have one national rail safety regulator who will provide the rail industry with a consistent and reliable co-regulatory approach, and we need to do that because there are no differences in the requirements between each of the states. This will become a common approach to the prescription of drug and alcohol requirements and fatigue management. As I said earlier, I hope it will take on board how to identify if the train operator or the staff have an unknown issue with depression and also take on board any hard issues with their general health and things like that. We need to be very, very careful.

Trains are an integral part of the growth of Australia. They should be increasing their operations and their presence across all of South Australia and into the Northern Territory, accommodating and growing the grain industry and the resource opportunities. I certainly will be supporting this bill and I commend it to the house.