

MEDIA RELEASE

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States and Territories must unify on updates to Freight Movement Protocol

National Cabinet met last Friday to consider requests by the freight and logistics industry to make changes to the Freight Movement Protocol ratified by state and territory transport ministers in July 2020 that would further streamline border crossing rules and regulations for linehaul operators.

For weeks, our group of state and national transport industry Associations have been agitating for the Commonwealth to formally declare the road freight industry as an Essential Service while in a state of emergency, and to set in motion a unified national framework governing the requirements for transport workers who regularly cross state and territory borders carrying out their work.

Along with this Essential Service designation, our request has been for the Therapeutic Goods Administration to approve rapid antigen testing for freight drivers so that a self-administered COVID test could complement a weekly pathology test at a registered laboratory. We also requested states and territories agree to a uniform set of rules and regulations on COVID testing for our industry to remove confusion that is rife because of discrepancies between jurisdictions.

Freight workers can be required to test from anywhere between once, twice or three times a week depending on their destinations, which can be personally very intrusive and, for some, a cause of chronic nasal bleeds from repeated skin trauma.

While the National Cabinet meeting was successful to the extent that it was agreed that freight workers crossing state and territory borders must have a negative COVID test result in a rolling seven-day period, the discussion was a missed opportunity to *compel* states and territories to uniformly do this. In the [updated Protocol](#), there is no *requirement* for jurisdictions to implement what was agreed at National Cabinet, which will see states and territories continue to write their own rules when it comes to COVID testing for freight drivers. In practical terms, this means South Australia and Victoria can continue to require, respectively, negative COVID tests every two- or three-days, significantly exceeding the rolling seven-day average stipulated in the Protocol.

On the issue of rapid antigen testing – which we have been requesting be approved as a complement to once-weekly lab testing – National Cabinet’s recognition of it means nothing until health authorities formally approve what is a reliable and faster form of testing. Jurisdictions would then need to sign off on it, requiring yet another level of red-tape and bureaucracy before rapid self-testing can be administered by drivers.

While we appreciate the spirit and intent of the Freight Movement Protocol, it is reasonable to question the point of the document when there is no *requirement* for signatories to uniformly implement its directives. For a supply chain in Australia to be truly national, we need jurisdictions to adhere to a uniform a set of rules – particularly during a pandemic when communities need certainty about availability and supply of fuel, food and medicines.

Our efforts continue to have the road transport industry formally designated as an Essential Service, and we will continue to advocate for state and territory transport ministers to uniformly do what they agreed to at National Cabinet.

Media Contact: Brian O’Neil, 0411 055 284 or bconeil@prx.com.au

Endorsed by:

