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| **Submission to:** | NSW Roads & Maritime Services (RMS) |
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| **Title:** | Vehicle Safety Compliance Certification Scheme |
|  |  |
| **Date:** | 06 February 2015 |

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# Introduction

NSW Roads and Maritime Services (RMS) is seeking feedback regarding a proposal to create a second tier of requirements for low risk J and P code modifications under Vehicle Standards Bulletin number 6 (VSB6) Heavy Vehicle Modifications covered by its Vehicle Safety Compliance Certification Scheme (VSCCS).

The ATA supports the creation of a two tiered system with less arduous requirements for low risk vehicle modifications. These modifications are often carried out by operators during initial vehicle build up and as part of normal servicing or maintenance of their vehicle fleet.

There is a significant amount of supportive and instructional information/guidelines available including VSB 6, relevant Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) Body Builder Guidelines, NSW RMS (RTA) Vehicle Standards Information (VSI) 23 and Australian Standards AS2174 and AS1773.

In the case of fifth wheels, VSI 23, which replaced the previous Automotive Information Sheet 51, offers operators a simple, acceptable standard with no negative safety consequences noted since it was first released by the RTA 1998.

The ATA seeks an exemption from the NSW proposal for the fitment, servicing and maintenance of fifth wheel and tow couplings with a Component Registration Number (CRN). This proposal does not extend to the mounting structure for the fifth wheel or the tow coupling.

VSB6 is currently being reviewed, and the ATA intends to provide input into this process.

# Australian Trucking Association

The ATA is the peak body that represents the trucking industry. Its members include state and sector-based trucking associations, some of the nation’s largest transport companies, and businesses with leading expertise in truck technology.

# Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1

A two tier modification scheme should be enacted and adopted nationally under the Heavy Vehicle National Law (HVHL) with standardised requirements across all areas.

Recommendation 2

Fifth wheels and tow couplings with a CRN should be installed, serviced and maintained by qualified technicians without the need for blue plating or VSCCS certification or other state modification schemes. The mounting structures (fifth wheel angles, towing cross member etc) should have either Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) approval (holder of an Identification Plate Approval (IPA) from the Federal Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development) or approval via an appropriately certified VSCCS signature.

Recommendation 3

The insurance costs noted by the NSW RMS scheme should be based on the modification code (higher risk, higher fee) and the quantity of certificates the Signatory has approval to sign-off.

Recommendation 4

RMS should provide a regulatory avenue for highly experienced persons, currently undertaking the fitment of fifth wheels and tow couplings to become qualified to sign-off P code activities under the proposed VSCCS scheme.

# Discussion

From discussion with operators with servicing facilities and key suppliers of coupling equipment, the RMS issues with CRN certified components have effectively been eliminated. Any additional managerial or training burden will have an impact on the efficiency of the freight operators increasing their overheads compared with the status quo. The RMS accepts this given based on their own Request for Comment paper.

Couplings (fifth wheels, kingpins, towing couplings hooks etc) are considered a “wearing” item, requiring regular routine maintenance and frequently replaced at the end of their useful life. In a typical servicing environment, these are treated in the same vein as the brake systems with the qualified servicing technicians fully understanding the importance and the care required to attend to these items. There is adequate guidance available to support technicians’ understanding, combined with the frequency of servicing required, which has resulted in a significant build-up of experience in the Australian workshops.

The component assembly’s CRN is of ongoing importance with its “D” & “V” ratings of the component providing compliance information to ensure the vehicle’s combination rating for GVM, GTM and /or GCM are achieved.

The ATA understands the requirement for sign-off by an Authorised Vehicle Examiner (AVE) for the fitting of a fifth wheel to a prime mover or a tow coupling to a truck will be enforced by the NHVR and participating jurisdictions from 1 July 2015, but does not accept the need for this.

Recommendation 1: to minimise the compliance burden for operators, workshops and equipment installers/providers, all States and Territories must have the same regulatory approach to the implementation of those laws in a seamless manner. To achieve this outcome, the modification scheme should be enacted under the HVNL.

Recommendation 2: RMS acknowledges that J and P code items are low risk by proposing the two tier approval modification scheme. The low risk nature of this fitment activity has been reflected in the experience of the industry through to the negligible reported incidents of installation failures.

The ATA through the advice of its Industry Technical Council endorses a requirement for the inspection and certification of modifications including:

* body mounting;
* tow coupling cross-members (where not by the OEM); and
* fifth wheel mounting angles (where not by the OEM).

Recommendation 3: the RMS insurance cost proposal does not differentiate between the risks of such modification other than on the basis of the two tiers concept, nor does it take into account the volume of modifications being approved. This places proportionally higher costs on the small operators whom are usually remote outside capital cities, further diminishing their viability.

Recommendation 4: some experienced installers may not have the qualifications required to comply with the NSW scheme. Again, historical experience, is that the fitment of fifth wheels and tow couplings are low risk with no empirical evidence to show there is a problem. The RMS scheme provides no path to transition these technicians or provide grandfather rights to them. This will impact on a range of businesses, increasing operating costs and at least dislocate the business while staff are hired or retrain to comply.