

Truck and Trailer Registration – The Rules



I often get calls from operators wanting to bring a truck or trailer in from overseas. It poses a simple question with a complicated answer. I have worked in the certification space for about 20 years and it's not an easy place to be in. Here is a guide to the certification and regulation rules for heavy vehicles in Australia.

Government Responsibilities

The Federal Government administers the technical rules for new vehicles and state and territory governments administer the rules when the vehicle is in-service. The key date in the life of a vehicle is when it is first used on a public road for its intended purpose. Before this date the Federal Government has authority, after this the state road agency is the primary authority. A new truck or trailer will usually have a compliance plate attached. This shows that the manufacturer has an approval from the Federal Government to sell this model in Australia. State governments will register the vehicle without question. State work-safety authorities administer some vehicle standards rules for special purpose vehicles. Work-safety authorities are independent of the road-agencies.

Ratings

Compliance plates will show the approved gross rating (GVM or ATM) of the vehicle. The rated towing capacity (GCM) is not usually on the compliance plate. Ratings cannot be set above the levels that the original equipment manufacturer sets. An accredited engineer may be able to reassess ratings.

Modifications

Heavy vehicles are often modified before registration. For example, a body might be attached. Second-stage manufacturers can get a 'second-stage of manufacture' compliance plate to cover the modifications, but this is impractical for one-off modifications.

Modifications to new vehicles that are organised by dealers will often not have any formal approval for the modification. Dealers usually have the ability to register new vehicles without having them inspected by the road agency. Major modifications made to in-service vehicles after registration should be approved by an engineer who has an accreditation from a road agency. Engineers are required to assess the modifications according to guidance in the Heavy Vehicle Modification Code of Practice (VSB 6). Engineer's certificates and plates are generally not accepted by other state jurisdictions.

Imports from Overseas

Heavy vehicles can only be imported into Australia with a specific import approval. As a guide, assume that an approval for a new heavy truck can only be obtained with the support of the local truck supplier. An import approval for trucks or trailers of a special-purpose nature might be approved. For example, a truck with a drilling rig on the back may be able to get an import approval. Usually the support of a road agency is needed.

Registration History

Registration details and history of all trucks and trailers are in a national database called NEVDIS. Data can be viewed by authorised people at each registry. Don't assume history in one state will be unknown in another state.

National Vehicle Standards

The national standards for vehicles are the Australian Design Rules that were in force when the compliance plate was affixed. State road agencies may add or subtract conditions away from the national standards. Ultimately, the state road agency is responsible for in-service vehicles. It can also register vehicles that have no compliance plate affixed.

The Performance-Based Standards (PBS) approach has been developed by the NTC and accepted by all states and territories. This provides an alternative compliance approach for new vehicle configurations and dimensions. ADR rules might be waived and PBS standards substituted. It is a world-leading reform. For articulated vehicles, the rules are applied to the combination vehicles.

Some state/territory requirements differ from these in a few cases. Routine roadworthiness inspections are at the discretion of the state road agency. The administration of many of the in-service rules and permits will become the responsibility of the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator (NHVR), when this office is established on 1 January 2013. This is an exciting and welcome initiative. Be patient as it will take some years for the NHVR office to have a significant impact. Permit requirements for non-standard vehicles are set by the state/territory road agencies. In time, the NHVR will administer permits for non-standard vehicles that cross borders.

Peter Hart
ARTSA Chairman

Version with Web Site Information

Government Responsibilities

1. The Federal Government administers the technical rules for new vehicles and the State and Territory Governments administer the rules when the vehicle is in-service. The key date in the life of a vehicle is when it is first used in road transport in Australia. This is when it is used on a public road for its intended purpose. Before this date the Federal Government has authority and after that date the state road agency is the primary authority.
2. A new truck or trailer will usually have a compliance plate attached. This shows that the manufacturer has an approval from the Federal Government to sell this model in Australia. State governments will register the vehicle without question.
3. Before the day the vehicle is first used in road transport in Austral, the Federal government has responsibility and after this day, the state road agency administers the vehicle.
4. The state work-safety authorities administer some vehicle-standards rules for special purpose vehicles, such as fuel tankers and large cranes. The work-safety authorities in each state are independent of the road-agencies.

Ratings

5. The compliance plate will show the approved gross rating (GVM or ATM) of the vehicle. The rated towing capacity (GCM) is not usually on the compliance plate.
6. Ratings cannot be set above the levels that the original equipment manufacturer set. An accredited engineer may be able to reassess ratings. Testing may be required to make the ratings higher; sometime that can be lowered.
7. The Federal government does not regulate axle weight limits.
8. The approved ratings of vehicles can often be found at:
http://rvcs-prodweb.dot.gov.au/pls/www/pubrvcs.Notify_Search

Modifications

9. Heavy vehicles are often modified before registration. For example, a body might be attached. Second-stage manufacturers can get a 'second-stage of manufacture' compliance plate to cover the modifications; but this is impractical for one-off modifications.
10. Modifications to new vehicles that are organized by dealers will often not have any formal approval for the modification. Dealers usually have the ability to register new vehicles without having them inspected by the road agency. Road agencies seem to accept this unless the modification changes the number of axles or the ratings are being increased. Do expect that the OEM has supervised the modification.
11. Major modifications made to in-service vehicles after registration should be approved by an engineer who has an accreditation from a road agency. The engineer's certificate is normally

only issued to a vehicle that is, or has been registered. That's why there is a grey area for new vehicles.

12. The engineers are required to assess the modifications according to guidance in the Heavy Vehicle Modification Code of Practice (VSB 6). In most jurisdictions, a national HV Modification Plate should be affixed. The Code is available at:

http://www.infrastructure.gov.au/roads/vehicle_regulation/bulletin/vsb_06.aspx

11. Engineers certificates and plates are generally not accepted by other state jurisdictions. If truck or trailer registrations are transferred interstate, and the vehicle has been modified, then a new engineering certificate may be required.

Imports from Overseas

12. Heavy vehicles can only be imported into Australia with a specific import approval. As a guide, assume that an approval for a new heavy truck can only be obtained with the support of the local truck supplier. If the local supplier will issue a certification letter or attach a compliance plate, then this support will facilitate an approval. It is usually easier to get an import approval for a new (or used) heavy trailer.

13. The import application will lead the applicant to a conclusion about whether an import approval is likely to be issued. But don't import the truck unless the approval has been granted! The form, together with information can be downloaded at:

http://www.infrastructure.gov.au/roads/vehicle_regulation/bulletin/importing_vehicles/general/index.aspx.

14. A scheme called the Registered Automotive Workshop Scheme (RAWS) exists that can be used to import second-hand motor vehicles. The RAWS takes responsibility for ensuring that the vehicle complies with acceptable standards. Not all vehicles can get in under RAWS. The motor vehicle model must first get onto the:

<http://www.infrastructure.gov.au/roads/motor/sevs/index.aspx>

15. An import approval for trucks or trailers of a special-purpose nature might be approved. For example, a truck with a drilling rig on the back, might sometime get an import approval. Usually the support of a road agency is needed to get the approval.

Registration History

16. The registration details and history of all trucks and trailers are in a national database called NEVDIS. The data can be viewed by authorized people at each Registry. Don't assume that the history in one state will be unknown in another state.

National Vehicle Standards

17. The national standards for vehicles are the Australian Design Rules that were in force when the vehicle when the compliance plate was affixed. The ADRs can be viewed via

<http://rvcs-prodweb.dot.gov.au/>

The Vehicle Standards Bulletins can be viewed at:

http://www.infrastructure.gov.au/roads/vehicle_regulation/bulletin/index.aspx

18. The national standards for in-service vehicles are in the Australian Vehicle Standards Rules (AVSRs) that were developed by the National Road Transport Commission. The AVSRs can be viewed at:

http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/nt/consol_reg/avsr324/

19. The state road agencies may add or subtract conditions away from the national standards. Ultimately, the state road agency has responsible for in-service vehicles. It can also register vehicles that have no compliance plate affixed.

20. The Performance-Based Standards (PBS) approach has been developed by the NTC and accepted by all states and territories. This provides an alternative compliance approach for new vehicle configurations and dimensions. ADR rules might be waived and PBS standards substituted. It is a world-leading reform. For articulated vehicles the rules are applied to the combination vehicles. See:

<http://www.ntc.gov.au/viewpage.aspx?documentid=1230>

21. The national road worthiness guidelines for in-service vehicles are available at:

<http://www.ntc.gov.au/DocView.aspx?DocumentId=394>

Some state / territory requirements differ from these in a few cases. Routine road worthiness inspections are at the discretion of the state road agency.

22. The administration of many of the in-service rules and permits will become the responsibility of the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator (NHVR), when this office is established on 1 January 2013. This is an exciting and welcome initiative of government. Be patient because it will take some years for the NHVR office to have a significant impact. See:

<http://nhvr.gov.au/>

23. Permit requirements for non-standard vehicles are set by the state / territory road agencies. In time, the NHVR will administer permits for non-standard vehicles that cross borders.