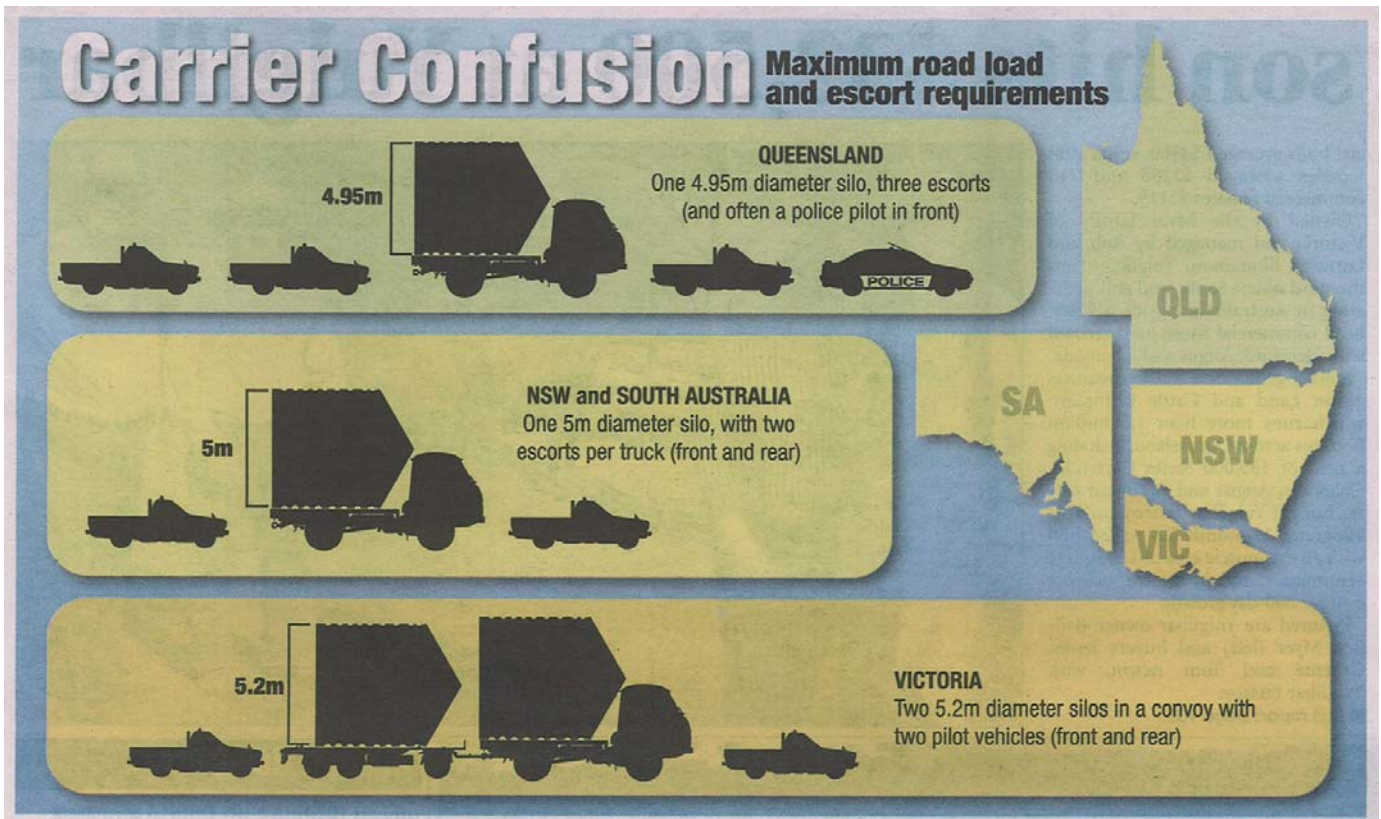


PRESS ARTICLE

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By ANDREW MARSHALL

THE pressure is on a newly emerging national regulatory body to quickly straighten out the costly mishmash of rules relating to trucking over-sized farm equipment across States borders.

Grain harvest season can be a logistical headache at the best of times for farmers and farm service industries, but despite some States recently cutting red tape for operators shifting harvesters and other grain equipment, the regulatory differences remain perplexing.

One of the most frustrating aspects is the big variation in laws for escort vehicles which warn motorists about an over-sized header or grain silo moving along a public road.

"It's not just frustrating working with multiple road authorities, it costs many of our customers up to 50 per cent extra for delivery when we require additional escorts," said Ahrens Agri group general manager Tim Barrett.

South Australian-based Ahrens has six silo manufacturing sites dotted from Tasmania to Queensland and builds transportable silos, field bins

and augers under its Sherwell, Jaeschke and Webster brands.

"In Victoria we can move two 5.2 metre diameter silos in a convoy with two pilot vehicles (front and rear); in NSW and South Australia we need two escorts but can only move one five metre diameter silo at a time," Mr Barrett said.

"In Queensland you need three escorts and the load can't be bigger than 4.95m in diameter and in

Western Australia the load widths are up to 6.5m."

Police escorts were also required, mostly at an additional cost, on certain routes in Queensland's grain-growing regions, but not necessarily on other nearby roads.

The subsequent variation in Ahrens' delivery costs (ranging from \$6 a kilometre per silo in Victoria to \$9/km in Queensland) meant typical costs of up to \$6000 might be added

to a 120-tonne transportable silo's base \$14,000 price tag.

"One of our Victorian plants is 150km from the SA border – as soon as we drive into SA we have to find two more cars and employ two more drivers," Mr Barrett said.

"We're also often doing battle on the law enforcement side because the rules aren't even properly understood by the relevant authorities.

"Trucks get approval to travel one

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– Ahrens Agri group general manager Tim Barrett

day, but are stopped the next."

Eastern States grain harvesting contractors face similar problems every summer as they follow the harvest from Central Queensland to Victoria and South Australia.

"In Victoria the 'over limit' load length is 35m, in NSW it's 30m and in Queensland it's 25m," said Australian Grain Harvesters Association (AGHA) senior vice-president, Bob Wythes.

"It's fairly ridiculous, but at least

there's some hope on the horizon for a more simplified regulatory system some time next year."

The new Queensland-based National Heavy Vehicle Regulator is intended to provide a one-stop administration and law-setting body that will handle all licence and travel permit applications for vehicles over 4.5t.

Eventually permit applications will be assessed by the new authority, while road rules and penalties will also be set on a common platform nationwide.

But Mr Wythes said with so many different regulations and regulatory authorities currently involved he doubted if a seamless approval system could be quickly or easily established for farm equipment.

"If you thought the Murray-Darling Basin Plan was hard work, you won't find this problem any easier to fix," said Mr Wythes, who runs his three-State harvesting activities from central NSW.

To help ease the confusion for machinery operators and provide practical feedback to roads authorities the AGHA already runs big pre-harvest forums in Queensland and NSW attended by senior State roads officials.