

#### The National Heavy Vehicle Driver Competency Framework Consultation RIS

The National Heavy Vehicle Driver Competency Framework (NHVDCF) has been in place since 2011 but only been adopted in four jurisdictions (Victoria, NT, Tasmania and NSW). Industry feedback, emerging research and evidence point to opportunities to improve safety, the driver training experience, and job readiness.

Austroads worked with its members to develop an 'exemplar framework', based on industry feedback, academic research, coroners' reports and senate enquiries, among other sources. A suite of options for analysis and consultation were derived from that exemplar framework.

Austroads published the [Consultation RIS](#) in August 2022, and accepted submissions into November 2022. The options considered are presented in detail in the Consultation RIS and outlined in this Consultation Summary.

#### Policy options presented in the Consultation RIS

##### Eligibility – open car licence required

The option proposes a requirement for drivers to hold an open car licence – that is, not a probationary licence – before being eligible for a medium rigid licence or higher class. Light rigid licence eligibility would not be affected.

This option is based on evidence that driving experience is a significant factor in heavy vehicle safety but may result in younger drivers facing barriers to entering the industry.

##### Eligibility – low risk driving record

The option proposes that drivers with a high-risk driving record, such as recent high-level speeding, hooning, drink or drug driving offences, are ineligible to attain or upgrade a heavy vehicle driver licence.

This option is based on evidence that risk-taking behaviour on the road is a significant factor in heavy vehicle safety. There may be challenges in the details of implementation, such as court delays between a charge and a conviction and access licensing history for all drivers.

##### Competency enhancements and minimum training hours

The option involves expanding the scope and increasing the fidelity of the existing 15 *Licence to Drive* competency elements such that there are over 180 specific competencies, with minimum training hours (including behind the wheel). Further, the option is supported by hazard perception testing.

While better training is expected to improve driver competence, and address exceptionally short courses currently available, it comes with a cost to prospective drivers. On-line training to reduce cost impacts is included in the option.

##### Progression changes

The option proposes drivers may be eligible for the next-higher licence class through their choice of tenure, experience or participation in a supervision program.

While the existing tenure pathway is not preferred, the option retains it to ensure career pathways are not inadvertently limited by lack of access to a vehicle.

##### MC class split

This option proposes that the MC licence class, which enables drivers to drive B-doubles and larger combinations, be split into three classes recognising the size and complexity of the largest combinations today is substantially beyond that of a B-double combination.

There are differing views on the right places to split the MC coverage and the largest of vehicles, proposed to be covered by the MC3 licence, cannot operate in some jurisdictions which could mean drivers need to train interstate. This option was not progressed in the Decision RIS.

### **Post licence supervision**

This option includes a requisite minimum level of supervision for newly-licensed drivers for each licence class. It presents an opportunity for an experienced driver to mentor and guide an inexperienced driver.

There would be costs associated with post-licence supervision and potentially challenges where vehicles are unavailable or operations make supervision impractical. This option was not progressed in the Decision RIS.

### **HC as a prerequisite to MC class**

This option proposes that drivers must hold a HC class licence before being eligible for an MC class licence.

This option is based on progressive experience with larger and more complex vehicles. Some operators may not include heavy combinations in their fleets which limits the opportunity to develop experience with that combination.

### **Standardised training materials**

This option aims to deliver improved national consistency in licensing through the use of common and agreed training materials.

### **Enhanced training governance**

This option proposes improved governance of training providers to ensure acceptable training standards. Jurisdictions have different perspectives on the role of existing national training governance options.

## **Qualitative description of the feedback to the Consultation RIS**

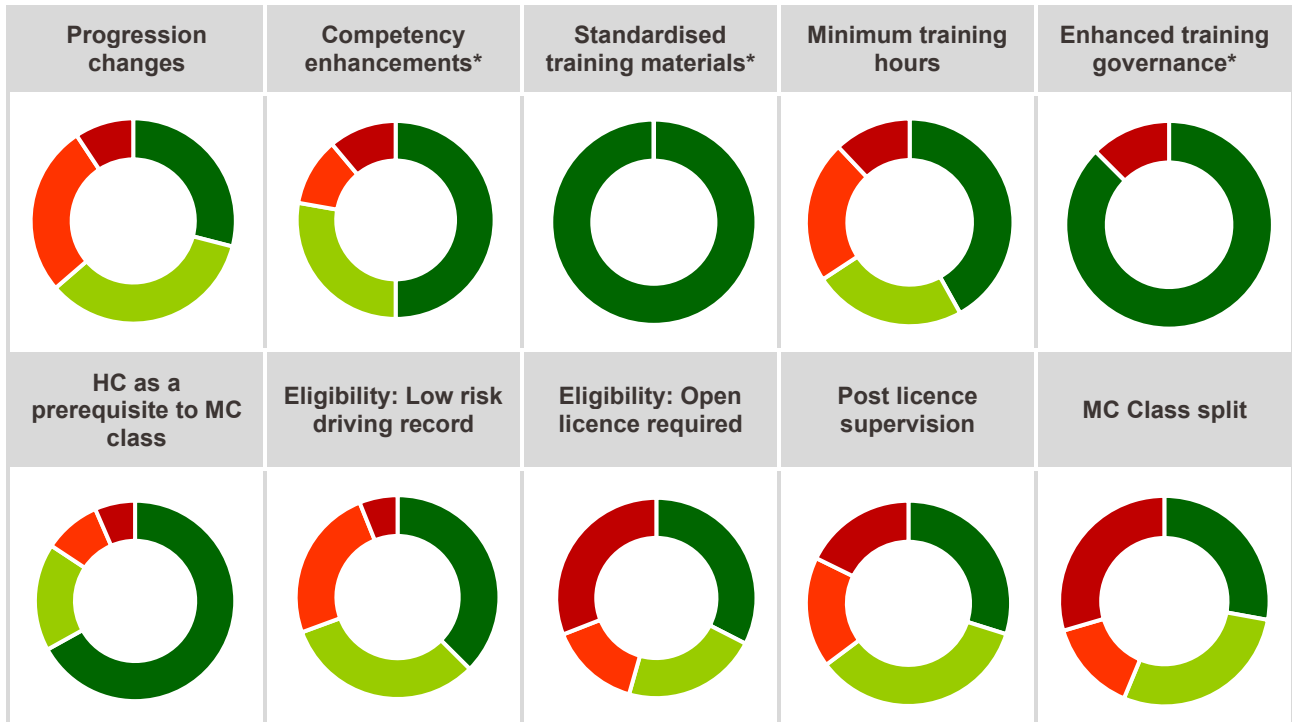
Most proposals received positive support overall, although there were concerns and questions raised.

General themes which came through in feedback included:

- A desire for a national approach adopted by all jurisdictions.
- Need to consider the impact on smaller operators who have less flexibility and capacity for driver supervision.
- Not all heavy vehicle owners/operators have a mixed vehicle fleet, and this limits opportunity for experience in some vehicle classes. This especially affects regional and rural operators, including in the agriculture sector.
- A desire to bring young people into the industry with training and mentoring to build competence.
- Despite support to limit licensing eligibility to drivers with no recent offence history, there were concerns that this could be seen as a double penalty, or impact people with relatively minor offences.
- Support for industry to take a proactive role in training and developing drivers' skills and behaviour, noting existing legislation already places an obligation on employers to ensure driver competence for the task.
- Online training is not suitable for all people and alternatives should be provided.
- Mixed support for minimum behind the wheel and training times. Some supported the proposals as an opportunity to improve the base competency of licensed drivers, but others wanted the focus to be on supporting quality training rather than minimum training times.
- Some saw the progressive movement through rigid classes to smaller and then larger combinations as a good way to build and embed skills over time. Others wanted to move away from this progressive movement through classes to simply focus on competency in a given vehicle/combination class.

- General support for improved governance of training providers and provision of standardised training and assessment materials, provided it does not create red tape for training providers or barriers to recruiting driver trainers.
- There was some support for additional competence development in very heavy combination vehicles. However there was some confusion around the proposed MC class split. There were also concerns about the viability of providing training for a small cohort of licence applicants in the largest combinations given the limited routes available to these vehicles.
- There were concerns that some proposals would negatively impact driver supply in an already tight industry.

### Relative support levels on the policy options presented in the Consultation RIS



\* Questions regarding these policy options were asked in the Consultation RIS, but not in the short-form surveys. Responses, therefore, represent a smaller sample.

#### Key

Totally support	Support in principle with some implementation variations	Mixed - some support and some do not; or some elements supported and some are not	Do not support

### Where to next?

Austrroads will be leading a national program of work with the states and territories to support harmonised implementation. The program will be rolled out in stages and is anticipated to be implemented in phases and take a number of years to be put in place.

Austrroads will be actively engaging with the driver training and heavy vehicle industries providing information, as well as opportunities for input into on-the-ground delivery elements.