



# Heavy vehicle drivers have a cross to bear

Financial pressures on truckies contributing to accidents

By **DIGBY HILDRETH**

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CROSSES bearing the number 287 were lined up along Lismore's Ballina Street bridge on Saturday.

They were put there by the Transport Workers' Union (TWU) to remind motorists of the number of road deaths involving heavy vehicles in 2009.

But there was a broader point to the road safety message, according to TWU sub-branch secretary Mick Forbes.

He said financial pressures on truck drivers was a big contributor to heavy vehicle crashes and that fatal accidents would continue to occur until this was sorted out.

"This is a public awareness campaign, because the average Joe Blow doesn't understand how a truck driver is paid," Mr Forbes

said.

"Drivers and owner-drivers are not paid enough to make their business viable."

Mr Forbes said a driver could spend up to 20 hours a week waiting to be unloaded at delivery centres, but was not reimbursed for that time.

Drivers needed to make up for this lost time, and so were forced to cut corners. This could be in a reduction in maintenance standards, by working longer hours, or by going over the speed limit.

A truck may represent an investment that is based on a second mortgage on a driver's house, Mr Forbes said.

"So if they can't make their business pay, they lose everything – their truck, their income, their

homes.

"Big retail clients can afford to pay the large transport operators properly, so they can pay their drivers properly.

"We are calling on all levels of government to provide legislation that will ensure that all waiting time is paid for; that there is fair remuneration for maintenance costs; and that there is some hedge provided against fluctuating fuel costs."

Lismore mayor Jenny Dowell attended the rally and said the 'number of deaths really hits you when you see the crosses like that'.

"Whenever there is an accident on the Pacific Highway and the roads are closed, residents are on to me asking what's going to be done about road safety," she said.



**SUPPORT NEEDED:** Truck drivers and Transport Workers' Union officials rally in Lismore on Saturday. Pictured (from front) are Phil Manning, a truck driver from Lismore; Bill Patterson, Mick Forbes and Richard Priest, all of the TWU; and supporter Nicole Nittig, of Lismore.

Picture: CATHY ADAMS