



Deaths a cross to bear for truckies

Bid to lighten the load in terms of hours behind the wheel

By TRACEY PRISK

LOCAL truck drivers joined their colleagues from throughout NSW this week to campaign for better working conditions and a reduction in the number of deaths in this sector.

Seasoned truck driver Colin Hansen said the transport sector had a "dog eat dog" mentality with drivers forced to drive for long hours at a time to meet tight deadlines.

"This industry has always been about making money," he said.

"The pressure is always on to give the customers what they want so it's push, push, push," he said.

Now working for Linfox, Mr Hansen said he is no longer under the same pressure he once was.

"Linfox has a pretty good reputation for fatigue management but in the past I've had to work long hours to suit the customers' demands."

Like Mr Hansen, Dave Anderson has been involved in a truck accident as a result of the unrealistic expectations placed on drivers by both the transport companies and customers.

"An accident is bound to happen purely as a result of the number of miles travelled day in, and day out," he said.

"While I don't do those sort of hours now

I've seen the sort of pressure drivers are under."

The Transport Workers' Union (TWU) staged the demonstration at Cook Park yesterday, as part of a state-wide road trip to raise the plight of truck drivers on our national highways.

Two hundred and eighty seven people were killed as the result of heavy vehicle crashes last year.

TWU campaigner Ken Hurst said this was an issue the entire community should be aware of.

"Orange and its surrounding area relies on truck movements for its very existence and road safety should concern not just local businesses, but the community as a whole," he said.

TWU campaigner Richard Priest said he wanted to see mandatory increases in the pay and working conditions of truck drivers.

"Some drivers are forced to work 18 hours straight ... often there are clients who say if you don't do it then we'll find someone who will ... cowboys," he said.

"Owner operators make such a small margin that they can't even afford to maintain their vehicles and that's dangerous.

"Feeding their families comes first and maintenance on their vehicles second.

"These people shouldn't have to break the law to keep their job."



CRUNCH TIME: Truck drivers Colin Hansen and Dave Anderson were alarmed to learn 287 people were killed as a result of heavy vehicle crashes last year. Photo: STEVE GOSCH 0209jgtrucks2