



Low pay linked to truck accidents

By **JAMES BELL**

IN A bid to improve working conditions for truck drivers, Transport Workers Union official Mick Forbes and local truck driver Frank Black have met with Armidale mayor Peter Ducat to deliver a report on the issue.

The Transport Workers Union recently held a summit in Sydney and want to give politicians a chance to study the outcome of the event.

Mr Forbes said the inquiry, led by transport safety expert Professor Michael Quinlan, had found a direct correlation between low rates of pay and fatalities in truck-related road accidents.

The union has approached all levels of government to ensure drivers are paid for all hours worked.

"When that occurs, those drivers have to try and make up for lost remuneration in some other way and this generally leads to fatigue, speeding and in some instances, if the truck is owned by the driver, they can be forced to skip maintenance schedules," he said.

"That leads to the possibility

of having a disaster on the road."

Truck-related fatalities totalled 281 last year - an increase of 24 per cent on 2007.

While the national road toll has been declining, there has been a steady increase in deaths in the trucking industry.

"With road movements by truck expected to double by 2020, you can only imagine what the road toll will be if we don't act now," Mr Forbes said.

"If we had statistics like this in any other industry there would be an immediate inquiry."

According to the union, the current system of pay being tied to kilometres travelled is a serious problem.

Many owner/drivers borrow against homes to pay for vehicles and are under pressure to travel further to cover costs.

Mr Forbes said companies needed to share some of their profits and put this money back into the industry, to keep road users safe.

"New legislation will deliver that because we will then have a legal avenue to pursue those companies and say 'you now

need to pay, and if you don't pay you're in breach of the law'," he said.

Local owner/driver Franck Black, said conditions were tougher than ever due to waiting times at retail and supermarket delivery centres.

"It's very competitive out there and rates are always getting driven down," he said.

"When you're getting low rates and unpaid waiting time, you have to try and make it up because you have bills to pay."

Mr Black said it was not uncommon for drivers to wait at a distribution centre from four to six hours without notice and rest was not possible because 'we don't know when we will be called in'.

"Shortcuts get taken, rules are twisted and truck drivers run the risk of having accidents," he said.

"We all share the road so everyone stands to benefit from these changes."

Armidale mayor Peter Ducat said he would ask council to consider the report.



Truck driver Frank Black, Armidale Mayor Peter Ducat with the report and Transport Workers Union representative Mick Forbes.