

# WE ARE THE GOOD GUYS

**We spend a lot of time at AAAA working on vehicle and product regulations**

It doesn't sound like a particularly important or even glamorous part of the job, but for our product manufacturers, distributors, retailers and vehicle modifiers – it can be the most important thing that we do.

Last year, our phones ran hot with complaints from NSW about tradies that were pulled off the road and fined for vehicles with H-Racks (sometimes called ladder or tradie racks).

These drivers were not fitting home-made racks, they were professionally designed and manufactured by our members as safe and fit-for-purpose, but one particular enforcement officer in one region in NSW presumably woke up one morning and decided that these products are not legal in NSW.

What was the reason given? That they were not part of the original design of the vehicle. The rationale here is that if the designers of these Utes felt that they needed a H-Rack, they would have put one on in the first place. Sounds a little crazy doesn't it? And yet the fall out for our members was devastating. Local businesses stopped fitting the products and our members that make these products were concerned about their future.

This is a familiar story for us – our reactive work is at least 50 percent of our advocacy efforts. We get a call about some Police action, then we get another 100 calls, and check social media. That's when we find out that, without consultation, an enforcement agency has decided the time has come to 'clamp down' on an activity that they deem to be outside of the regulations. In the majority of these ill-informed actions it is a misreading of the regulations – or in the case of the H-Racks action, no regulations existed either way.

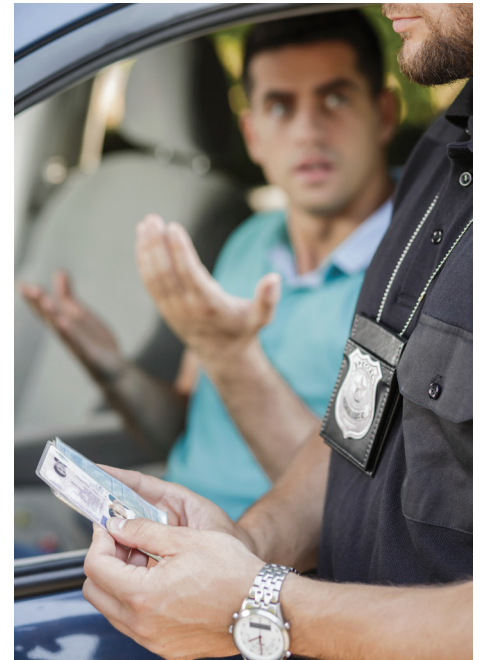
This is how a week or a month can get hijacked: we have to meet urgently with a Government department, a Minister, a local Member of

Parliament – whomever we decide is the best way in – and then we start the process of what we hope is logical, sensible, rational discussion. It's not easy – some of what we encounter is a bias against the aftermarket and sometimes the regulators are of the view that the vehicle, when it left the assembly plant, is perfect in all circumstances and should not be modified. We can normally work around these poorly informed views, but it takes a little time and a lot of strategy.

We believe in good regulations. We don't want people making their own bull bars – please don't do that! We also don't support homemade H-Racks. Our products meet Australian Standards where these exist; our manufacturers design, develop and test products for safety; we are the good guys – we make cars safe, and fit for purpose and we do this responsibly. Now – you and I know that, but government takes some convincing and a lot of evidence and persistence on our behalf.

In the past 12 months, we have responded to over a dozen vehicle standard and regulatory issues. The most high profile was the Queensland Government decision to launch 'Operation Lift', whilst we were still in negotiation on a possible amendment to the lift regulations to allow a 50mm suspension lift plus a 25 mm tyre lift without an engineer's certification. We thought discussions were going well, until the phone rang hot one morning and we put together what we call an 'escalated' strategy to tackle this issue head on. One million Facebook hits later and we had a reversal of their opposition to a combined 75mm lift. I say this not to criticise the Queensland Government – indeed we now enjoy a good relationship with the Queensland Transport Department – but it's a good illustration of how our week can be hijacked pretty quickly.

I don't have room to detail all of our work on vehicle standards and modification regulations but here is a quick list of our work in the past



12 months: Bull Bars (WA), Aftermarket Lights (NSW), Brake Testing (NSW), Gross Vehicle Mass Upgrades (Federal), Jerry Cans (Federal), Recovery Straps (Federal), H-Frames (NSW), Suspension Lift (QLD), Seat Belts and Child Restraints (Federal).

How did the H-Frame story end? Well the NSW Roads and Maritime Services issued a new Vehicle Standard for Ladder Racks. A sensible and clearly articulated position that requires *that rack and vehicle must be compatible, and a ladder rack should be designed and manufactured for the vehicle model to which it is fitted and the mounting structure must be able to support the fully loaded ladder rack; and the fully loaded ladder rack does not overload the vehicle's front axle.*

This is what happens when government articulates clear sensible guidelines in consultation with industry. When we work together the outcome is that the industry can responsibly produce and fit these components, and consumers can confidently purchase and use these products.

Crisis over – everyone wins.

**With thanks to Lesley Yates, AAAA Senior Manager, Government Relations and Advocacy**



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