

STANDING UP FOR CONSUMER RIGHTS AND OUR GREAT INDUSTRY

I hope everyone has enjoyed a rewarding and restful Christmas and New Year break and are just as motivated as I am for a dynamic and successful 2024

As we get cracking into a new year, I reflected back to reading the news late last year about Maurice Blackburn's extended warranty class action against JB Hi-Fi. I immediately considered the broader issue of consumer warranty rights, and the similar challenges facing consumers with new car warranties, as well as the flow on effect for independent workshops across the country.

Up to 40 percent of new car owners incorrectly assume that they must take their vehicle back to the dealer for servicing to maintain their new car warranty. This is despite the fact that there is no requirement under Australian Consumer Law for a vehicle to be serviced by an authorised dealer to maintain the manufacturer's warranty.

Consumers have the right to use an independent automotive service centre to service their new vehicle and maintain the logbook schedule, even when the car is within the manufacturer warranty period. Some consumers also believe that only the car manufacturers have access to the parts, software and information to properly service and repair their vehicle. This is absolutely false.

In July 2022, the Federal Government brought in the Motor Vehicle Information Scheme (MVIS), which enshrines, in law, the rights of consumers to choose who services and repairs their vehicle, and the right of independent mechanics to obtain all the manufacturer technical and diagnostic information they need to service vehicles proficiently.

We championed this law on behalf of the aftermarket industry, and we continue to support and advocate for the rights of independent workshops. Taking out AAAA membership and AASRA membership (for access to service and repair information), could make the difference between a struggling workshop and a bona fide 'dealer alternative' – which is good for consumers and good for the industry. The strength and capability that an independent workshop can gain from AAAA and AASRA membership enables these businesses



to make smart decisions and offer products and services that fulfil their customers' needs.

It is not just standard warranties that are confusing, extended warranties are equally a concern. Consumers are often purchasing extended warranties because they believe that their right to repair or replacement will end when the manufacturer's new car warranty ends. It doesn't. The warranty may end, but that's not the end of the manufacturer's obligations to the purchaser of that vehicle. Extended warranties generally don't offer any additional consumer benefit, and they are usually conditional – often tying the consumer to the dealer and car company branded parts.

"We are constantly receiving complaints from consumers uncertain about their rights relating to warranty, so we know this is a real, and widespread issue."

The fundamental misunderstandings consumers have around manufacturer's warranties and extended warranty rights is due to an immense power imbalance, and the result of two factors. Firstly, vehicle manufacturer advertising, and complicated terms and conditions, often overwhelm consumers, and instils their beliefs around warranty rights being tied to the manufacturer and dealerships, which is not true.

The second factor is the lack of a serious, national education campaign supporting consumer rights, no accessible complaints system, and lack of enforcement. **We need government to step up in a big way to support consumer rights.**

The AAAA has produced several information guides to help consumers, including our Truth About New Car Warranties guide at www.choiceofrepairer.com.au. Spread the word – share this with your customers and their networks. Every bit of communication helps.

I also wanted to touch on the recently released Federal Government Migration Strategy. The new Strategy creates a framework for positive change; however we are extremely concerned about the time frame and implementation process of this strategy to address current shortages and current barriers to entry for small businesses. You can read more about our view on this new Strategy on page 12 of the magazine.

In exciting news, we are only two months away from Australia's biggest ever automotive industry trade event, the Australian Auto Aftermarket Expo and Collision Repair Expo, taking place from the 11th to the 13th of April in Melbourne.

Why should you attend? Not only is it the biggest industry Expo in the country, but you will also see



over 400 of the best brands, the latest technology, tools, and equipment, and have access to an unparalleled training program, led by world class international and local trainers.

These exciting training programs cater to automotive technicians, collision repairers, and business owners. Sessions are designed to meet the demand for the latest information, trends and expertise to support their future success.

With technology at the forefront of the Expo we are also introducing two exciting new features. The Expo Electrified Zone will provide hands on training opportunities, and you will learn tips on how to diagnose, service and repair EV and hybrid vehicles safely and efficiently. The dedicated space will showcase new EVs, plus the latest EV tools, equipment and PPE. Visitors will gain the confidence and information they need to adapt their business to leverage the car-parc shift to electrification.

The ADAS Technology Zone will feature ADAS calibration demonstrations led by experts, using the latest ADAS equipment and answer important questions around this emerging and crucial component of collision and automotive repair.

Taking place every two years, you can't afford to miss this incredible industry event! The Expo is free to register for anyone in the trade, and if you want to take your training even further, we have additional exclusive training sessions for purchase that will be in high demand.

To learn more about all the features and training programs available, and to register, head to www.autoaftermarketexpo.com.au or www.collisionrepair.com.au



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