

## Letter to the Editor

### The Road Transport Directive – A Warning

Sir, -The Working Time Directive (WTD) first appeared in a 1993 EC Treaty and was adopted by the UK - October 1998. Due to the commercial damage that this directive was capable of inflicting, most sectors were allowed to opt out. However, the Road Transport Directive (RTD) – the Working Time Directive as applied to the transport industry – was implemented throughout the UK on 25 March 2005 'to improve road safety'.

Although most businesses are susceptible to the effects of the RTD, the quarry industry is particularly exposed. Not only are we almost totally dependent on road transport, we also have the cheapest freight. A 25-tonne load of beef costs round £250,000, whereas the value of a 25-tonne load of aggregate seldom exceeds £350. We will, therefore struggle to compete for trucks and, even if we buy our own, will equally struggle to compete for drivers.

Nor will it always be possible to pass large increases to end-users. Many of the UK's cities are coastal with established facilities for handling marine-borne aggregates, and it can already cost more to deliver by road than in bulk from overseas. The WTD does not apply to shipping and a high percentage of asphalt and concrete plants are in the docklands.

Many small companies and owner-drivers have already thrown in the towel and accident rates are rising as the need to get trucks earning has allowed less-able drivers to get behind the wheel. The traditional route into transport was for owner-drivers to grow into small or even large companies. However, if new operators are to be denied entry this vital industry will change beyond recognition.

At present, hauliers are still managing to cope thanks to the lax interpretation of Periods of Availability. However, this could change overnight as the VOSA guidelines are at odds with the EU directive. It would only take one fatal accident involving a driver judged not to have had sufficient rest. Both the WTD and the RTD are creatures of the EU and the only possible way to get rid of this crippling legislation would be for the UK to withdraw. A prospect which some might find appealing now that it has made work a crime.

Yours etc,

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