

Proposed changes to heavy vehicle mass and size rules

Heavy Vehicle (Mass, Dimension and Loading) National Regulation (MDL Regulation) Amendment.

This fact sheet provides a plain language overview of the National Transport Commission (NTC) consultation and the proposed draft changes, with a focus on the practical implications - what is changing and why it matters.

Who does this apply to

- The Heavy Vehicle National Law (HVNL) covers heavy vehicles over 4.5 tonnes gross vehicle mass in most Australian jurisdictions (it does not apply in Western Australia and the Northern Territory).
- The MDL Regulation sits under the HVNL and sets mass limits, dimension limits (like length), and related operating conditions.
- The NHVR administers and enforces the HVNL; the NTC develops and maintains reforms.

Key dates

If approved, the amendments are intended to commence alongside the updated HVNL, anticipated in mid-2026 (while the official commencement date of the amended legislation is still subject to Ministerial approval, the NHVR is working towards being implementation-ready by 1 July 2026).

The four main proposed changes (“the big four”)

1. Raise General Mass Limits (GML) to match today’s Concessional Mass Limits (CML)

In simple terms: Mass limits that currently apply under “concessional” rules would become the new general access limits. The separate CML category would be removed, while Higher Mass Limits (HML) would not change.

- Tandem axle group maximum mass would increase to 17 tonnes; tri-axle group maximum mass would increase to 21 tonnes.
- Quad axle groups and groups of five or more axles would also have a maximum mass of 21 tonnes (to keep them aligned with tri-axle limits).
- Overall increases are capped similar to current CML caps: +1 tonne below 55 tonnes and +2 tonnes above 55 tonnes.
- The existing 5 per cent gross mass restriction would be removed.

- Some previously excluded vehicle types would gain access to the higher masses (for example, the drive axle group of truck and pig combinations would increase to 17 tonnes; pig trailer limits remain unchanged).
- The “one-tonne tri-axle mass transfer allowance” would be removed.
- Mass management accreditation would no longer be required just to operate at the new GML masses (although it may still be required in some access schemes, such as certain Class 3 Notices, or HML operations).

2. Expand Euro VI (ADR 80/04) steer-axle mass concessions to road trains

In simple terms: newer Euro VI trucks are heavier due to emissions and safety technology. The draft change would let eligible Euro VI prime movers in road train combinations access the same type of steer-axle concessions already available to some other combinations.

- Eligible Euro VI road train prime movers: +0.5 tonnes on the steer axle, up to 7.0 tonnes, with tyres at least 315 mm wide.
- Eligible twin steer axle groups: +0.5 tonnes up to 11.5 tonnes, with load-sharing suspension and tyres at least 275 mm wide.

3. Increase the prescriptive length limit from 19 metres to 20 metres (for certain combinations)

In simple terms: several common heavy vehicle combinations would be allowed to be up to 20 m long (up from 19 m), subject to compliance with matching truck and semi-trailer wheelbase dimensions and equipment requirements.

- The 20 m limit would apply to: prime mover + semitrailer; rigid truck + pig trailer; rigid truck + dog trailer; rigid truck + tag trailer.
- In a combination that is longer than 19m but not more than 20m, trailers over 10 tonnes Gross Trailer Mass (ADR category TD) must have braking systems compliant with ADR 38/05 (or later) and the brakes must be powered by the towing vehicle.
- For truck + dog/pig/tag combinations, the extra length is intended to come from the truck (not larger trailers). Trailer dimension limits in the regulation do not change for these combinations.
- For prime mover + semitrailer at 20 m: the maximum distance from the front articulation point to the rear overhang line increases from 9.5 m to up to 10.5 m,

depending on the prime mover's wheelbase (per the Schedule 6 Part 4 table). Where this distance exceeds 9.5 m, the trailer must be fitted with side underrun protection compliant with ADR 106; rear overhang increases from 3.7 m to 4.0 m; and the front articulation point to rear of trailer distance increases from 12.3 m to 14.5 m.

4. Change the tag trailer tow-mass ratio and add a steer-axle safeguard

In simple terms: the current 1:1 tow-mass ratio for tag trailers would be replaced with a more flexible ratio, paired with a requirement to keep enough weight on the steer axle for safe handling.

- Remove the current 1:1 tow-mass ratio.
- Introduce a new 1:1.3 tow-mass ratio.
- Add a requirement that steer axle mass must be the greater of: (a) 20% of the sum of the mass limits applying to all axle groups and single axles of the towing vehicle, or (b) the manufacturer's minimum steer or twin steer axle mass requirement when towing.

Source

National Transport Commission (2025), "Heavy Vehicle (Mass, Dimension and Loading) National Regulation Amendment consultation overview", dated 2 December 2025.

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