

WESTMINSTER RED LIGHT DEBATE

THOSE of you who know me, will know I've been involved in the motor trade for over 40 years with a direct relationship with the recovery industry for over 36 years, now I can remember industry meetings having the use of Red Lights on the agenda as far back as the early to mid 1980's.

So with PROF and CSRRR bringing the debate for the use of red lights for the recovery industry to the House of Commons it becomes a real landmark moment for the recovery roadside worker; the true fight for a safer working environment for the rescue and recovery industry has only just begun.

For those who didn't know, on the 23 July 2019 in Westminster Hall, within the heart of Westminster Palace, Tracey Crouch Conservative MP for Chatham and Aylesford, secured the debate within the 'House' for the use of red lights for roadside recovery vehicles, calling for greater recognition of the dangers faced by roadside recovery operators. Plus for the Department for Transport to collect data on the number of accidents specifically involving roadside recovery workers, to provide greater understanding of the problem; and, following the success of the 'Slow Down, Move Over UK' campaign, for a change to the highway code that makes clear to road users what to do when approaching a breakdown.

Who is and why Tracey Crouch? Well Tracy was elected as the Conservative MP for Chatham and Aylesford with a majority of 6,069, winning with a 46.2% share of the vote. Now Tracy being the MP for Chatham and Aylesford, Sam Cockerill is a constituent of Tracy's, now

The true fight for a safer working environment for the rescue and recovery industry has only just begun. **Derek Firminger** has his say.



I'm sure all you readers are now familiar with Sam, she is the partner of the late Steve Godbold. Steve was hit and killed by a lorry on the M25 whilst preparing to recover a stranded RAC member back in 2017, so you can see how all this is connected.

Lobbying

Using details secured from the evidence session, another landmark date 11 June 2019 where oral evidence was gathered to support the lobbying for red lights, Tracy spelt out exactly why nearly half a million roadside recovery operators, in a variety of guises, deserve the same protection as others, namely Highway England's Officers. Tracy's in-depth overview of the risk's operators take every day, yet simply asking for recovery operators to be permitted to use prominent red warning beacons while attending accidents and breakdowns on the hard shoulder or on other similar roads.

Now this is how a debate in Westminster works. An MP brings the debate to the house, other MP's attend and where they see fit stand and interrupt the debate with questions and or observations, each time introduced by the chairman of the house,

in this case Mr Davies.

On this occasion the debate then followed with The Minister of State, Department for Transport, Michael Ellis, to reply with his comments and details.

Initially he expressed his sympathy for those affected by the individual tragic case that Tracy referred to and the incident he believed provoked the debate; from that comment alone it's obvious he is totally unaware of our industry fight for the use of red lights. To believe it's just one case - no this one case has been the final catalyst and the events then orchestrated by Richard Goddard, Sam Cockerill and Tendo consulting.

Michael Ellis showed his admiration for the work performed by the men and women of the roadside rescue and recovery operations. Sighting how the industry operators provide a crucial service to stranded motorists and motorists in danger, and how they do so 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, in all weathers including severe weather conditions.

He also commended the support the recovery industry adds to the UK economy by getting goods moving and

preventing the build-up of congestion on our very busy road network, then referring to a report published by Highways England in 2017 noted that business sectors reliant on the strategic road network contributed more than £314 billion to the UK's economy.

Warning Beacons

Assuming Michael Ellis is briefed by civil servants, (I'm sure he didn't do his own research, Highways England providing most of his brief is most likely), Ellis continues his response explaining how amber warning beacons can be a valuable tool for conveying important information to other road users and that the road vehicles lighting regulations restrict the fitting of amber warning beacons to vehicles only with a specified purpose and goes on to say this includes recovery vehicles, as well as vehicles used for highway maintenance, refuse vehicles and so on. Without realising it's the 'so on' that's the real problem as the 'amber beacons' are no longer successfully convey that important information, they are diluted and have no value.

Then quoting Highways England's involvement within the SURVIVE group, making it sound as if without HE support our certified standard may not have been possible. Explaining this standard and not quoting its correct reference (PAS:43) stating it was first introduced in 2015, that really fills me with NO confidence whatsoever, our, well I say our as the recovery industry is meant to own PAS:43

AA Professional Recovery **AA** TO SPONSOR HALL 1 AT THE TOW SHOW 2019

was in fact first published on the 28 April 2006. PAS 43:2006, Ellis's researcher's must have simply googled PAS 43 and of course it will show the latest revision and its previous withdrawn copy, so 2018 - previous revision 2015, HE was really part of its success?

Then quoting the 500 organisations that are currently accredited to it, remarking what a significant achievement that demonstrates and the real professionalism the recovery industry has. Unfortunately he misses the 2,000 or so operators that are yet to make the investment.

Hard Shoulder

Now sighting the real debate; the use of Red lights. Remembering we are only asking to be afforded the same protection of the Highways England Traffic Officers and only to use them when our operators are stationary, Ellis shows some more confusion this time over the use of red lights by the Highways England Traffic Officers. As I see them using reds in all situations and am confident to say they always use them when working on the hard shoulder, when they should only use them in a live lane.

Why do they use them on the hard shoulder when it's actually illegal? Well that's because it's safer. What does Ellis say?

'Assuming that drivers are paying attention to the lights on a stationary vehicle, it is vital that they identify what the hazard is and what action might be necessary while they still have reasonable time to act. That requires early recognition of whether the hazard is in a live lane or on a hard shoulder. Permitting the wider use of any restricted lighting function, including red flashing lights, needs careful consideration, because the warning message they are intended to give will become diluted if they are used too often. Ultimately, that will be to the disadvantage of those who currently use them'.

Ellis also draws our at-

tention to the changes with the lighting regulation 2010 and explains the measures that recovery operators can already take to improve the conspicuity within the existing regulatory framework. Those include the use of retro-reflective materials to increase conspicuity at night or under low-light conditions, and the use of fluorescent materials to improve daytime visibility. I'm sure you will recall me writing about this a few issues ago, yes it will help and yes we should take heed of his good advice. Oh, let's not forget Ellis reminds us we can use illuminated signs reading for example, 'Recovery Vehicle' that will draw attention and help save lives!

However, and once more miss-guided as recovery vehicles are exempt from the 2010 change in legislation as by definition it would be near impossible to outline a recovery vehicle in conspicuity tape.

Listen, this is not all doom and gloom, I've just highlighted a lot of inaccuracies, or lack of a true understanding of how our industry works alongside Highways England. There are some real positives coming from this, acknowledgements of the effectiveness of the newly formed APPG, all-party parliamentary group for roadside rescue and recovery and the CSRRR, Campaign for Safer Roadside Rescue and Recovery, and the excellent work they have been doing to engage with stakeholders. Plus, he is now fully aware of the 'Slow Down, Move Over UK' campaign as this was sighted by Tracy Crouch.

But the main win, and this is a big win, is the Department for Transport will be reviewing this issue over the coming months and will undertake a review of existing policy and report back, now we know this could take some time, but with over 30 MP's championing our cause through PROF this will no longer get pushed under the table.

Derek Firminger
FIVR, MSOE MIRTE.

www.slowdownmoveover.uk



Working towards education and awareness



Awareness to broken down public



Awareness to the public passing



Awareness working at the roadside



You can find us on:



We have created social media links to help raise awareness! Please share!
Find out more go to the website www.slowdownmoveover.uk
Slow Down Move Over is a non profit organisation

Visit these websites for more information

www.tendoconsulting.co.uk/

www.csrrr.co.uk/