



Fuel quality concerns in Australia

The recent submissions to the Commonwealth's Motor Vehicle Standards Act review included many points of interest. In Ford Australia's submission (https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/vehicles/mv_standards_act/files/Sub186_FordMotorCompanyAustralia.pdf), they raised fuel quality concerns.

Ford asserted that the primary issue preventing full harmonisation with UNECE regulations is the poor quality of Australian petrol compared to global standards. Australian unleaded petrol (ULP) has a lower octane rating of 91 RON compared to the 95 RON of Western Europe, and has extremely high sulphur content at 150 parts per million (ULP) and 50 ppm (premium ULP) compared to the European standard of 10 ppm and the USA range of 15 to 80 ppm (30 ppm average). Poor quality fuel is seen as a major impediment to achieving optimal CO₂ and tailpipe emission outcomes.

Ford believes the Federal Government needs to take immediate action to address the long standing issue of Australian fuel standards being significantly deficient compared to other Western markets. It states that unless immediate steps are taken to address high sulphur levels in petrol, the automotive industry may struggle to achieve the Euro 6 emission standards that are due for introduction from July 2017. Another consequence is that consumers will face an escalation in vehicle operating costs due to potentially compromised fuel efficiency and the need for catalytic converters to be serviced and/or replaced more frequently.

Australia has had a low-sulphur requirement for diesel fuel since 2009, at 10 ppm. For petrol, the Fuel Quality Standards Act of 2000 set a maximum of 150 ppm for regular unleaded in 2005 and 50 ppm for premium unleaded in 2008. In March 2010, the Australian petroleum industry told the Federal Government it did not support proposed changes to the fuel quality standards to make it easier for some vehicle manufacturers to achieve the upcoming Euro 5 and 6 emissions standards. At that time, the FCAI (Federal Chamber of Automotive Industries) reasoned that, because so many cars sold in Australia are imported, steps should be taken to harmonise fuel standards with Europe.

Mercedes-Benz Australia product manager Gordon Jones agreed that regions like Europe are leading the way with reduced vehicle CO₂ emissions while the rest of the world undoes some of the good by lagging behind due to factors such as fuel quality and less stringent legislation. Mercedes-Benz are unable to offer the most efficient versions of some four-cylinder and V6 petrol engines in Australia due to the high sulphur content of local fuel. The company has to fit homogenous direct injection (DEH) systems instead of the more efficient stratified direct injection (DES) system to cars destined for high-sulphur markets like Australia. He said that, although fuel economy suffers, power and torque outputs are unaffected by the situation because the company's DES systems switch to DEH mode under greater load or throttle openings. See <http://www.goauto.com.au/mellor/mellor.nsf/story2/818CE14DE489F17ACA2579F80029C18C> for the full story.

In the end, moves to improve petrol quality by lowering sulphur content will cost refineries and thus cost motorists more at the pump. It may also result in damage to rubber o-rings and gaskets in fuel systems, as found in the experience of low-sulphur diesel. See <http://mbm.net.au/b100/lsc.html>



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19 November 2014



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