



## **ETOA Urges the European Parliament to Re-Introduce a 12 Day Rule**

6<sup>th</sup> June 2008

On Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> June the European Parliament voted (591 plenary votes for and 18 against) to introduce a twelve-day continuous driving derogation for drivers engaged in international coach tours in Europe.

Prior to 2007 coach drivers were allowed to take their compulsory weekly rest at the beginning of one week and at the end of the following week, thus giving them up to twelve consecutive days on the road. This was known as the Twelve Day Rule. In 2007, new European legislation abolished this Twelve Day Rule.

Abolition of the Twelve Day Rule proved to be highly damaging. It made the operation of tourism unacceptably complicated and more expensive as tour companies had to bring in relief drivers to operate many popular itineraries.

Companies have had problems retaining experienced drivers. With a twelve day rule, drivers were able to enjoy rest time at home. Under current regulations, drivers often have to take their breaks on tour away from home.

By making coach travel less attractive, alternatives start to be used. Some groups (particularly from emerging markets) now hire minibuses, which are exempt from the 2007 legislation. This is clearly bad for the environment as well as for the comfort and safety of the passengers.

There has been no measurable improvement in road safety as a consequence of the legislation.

In a survey of over 20 leading European inbound tour operators, who bring approximately two million tourists a year to Europe, 86% said that new drivers' hours legislation had hindered their business; none felt it had helped.

Now that European Parliament has voted in favour of a new twelve-day rule, for it to succeed the Council of Transport Ministers, which meets on June 12<sup>th</sup>, will have support it unanimously. If that happens it is possible that new legislation will come into force in time for the 2009 holiday season.

Tom Jenkins, Executive Director, European Tour Operators Association (ETOA), explained that last year's legislative changes had not been based on hard data but on trying to solve a problem that did not exist. There was an assumption that increasing the amount of rest that drivers would be required to take would lead to greater road safety; however, this does not appear to have been borne out in reality over the past year, probably because coaches were already an extremely safe mode of travel.

He added: "This legislation has been a huge mistake. Everybody makes mistakes. But the important measure is how quickly they rectify them. The Council of Ministers are being presented with a chance to repair an error and help a beleaguered industry. The impact of this legislation is not limited to affluent visitors. The removal of the twelve day rule particularly hurt poorer elements in society and clients from new markets such as India and China. Wednesday's vote was the opportunity to undo the damage by reinstating the Twelve Day Rule. The inbound tourism industry is waiting with bated breath. Failure to act will further exacerbate Europe's declining share of world tourism."

Other findings of ETOA's survey of leading inbound tour operators revealed emphatic opposition to the new drivers' hours provisions, as follows:

- 86% said a reinstatement of the twelve-day rule would increase profitability.
- 86% agree that the new rule has required them to re-plan many of their best-selling or most profitable itineraries.
- 68% agreed that the new rule has required them to accept new drivers who are considerably less knowledgeable
- 68% say that the working relationship between tour managers and drivers has worsened
- 55% are considering reducing the range and choice of itineraries to customers as a result
- None of the tour operators' relationships with coach operator suppliers have improved; indeed, 41% say relations have worsened

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#### **About ETOA**

Since its foundation in 1989, ETOA has grown exponentially to include over 350 member organisations, of which 102 are Tour Operators. Collectively, ETOA represents over €6 billion spending on accommodation and travel services annually.

ETOA provides representation at the European government level for companies involved in bringing tourists to Europe. The Association promotes greater awareness of the benefits provided by the group travel industry in Europe - particularly increased income and employment. ETOA also influences European tourism policy and legislation.

Areas of specific activity include:

- Promoting Europe as a tourism destination
- Establishing codes of conduct and guidelines for its members
- Establishing commercial opportunities between buyers and sellers
- Working with other travel & tourism associations to raise the industry's profile