

Proposed taxi industry shake up causes concern

Fears for nest egg

PETER BEGG

A 71-YEAR-OLD Geelong cab driver says proposed changes to the taxi industry will strip him of his livelihood and retirement nest egg.

Henk Blumink started driving cabs 45 years ago and has invested \$800,000 in two taxi licences, mortgaging his house to do so.

But with the taxi inquiry looking to make available unrestricted numbers of Open Market Licences at only \$20,000 a year, Mr Blumink's investment looks like going up in smoke.

Mr Blumink said he borrowed heavily to get back into the industry in 1991 after working in retail for a number of years.

"So I worked 12-hour shifts, seven days a week and got on my feet and now I've got two licences," he said.

"Hopefully it was going to be my retirement investment and something for the kids to get. It doesn't only concern me, the public is going to suffer with this deregulation as well.

"If you look at where they have got the deregulated industries in Dublin, for argument's sake, it's a shocking situation over there, and it's the same with some of the Mini Cabs in London - people get in them and they don't

know who the driver is or what the story is - there's no security for the passengers or the drivers.

"Here in Geelong we've got the best industry that you could get."

Geelong Radio Cabs CEO Peter Valentine said he was concerned how any new individual licences might operate, noting that a Nunawading taxi company went under this week.

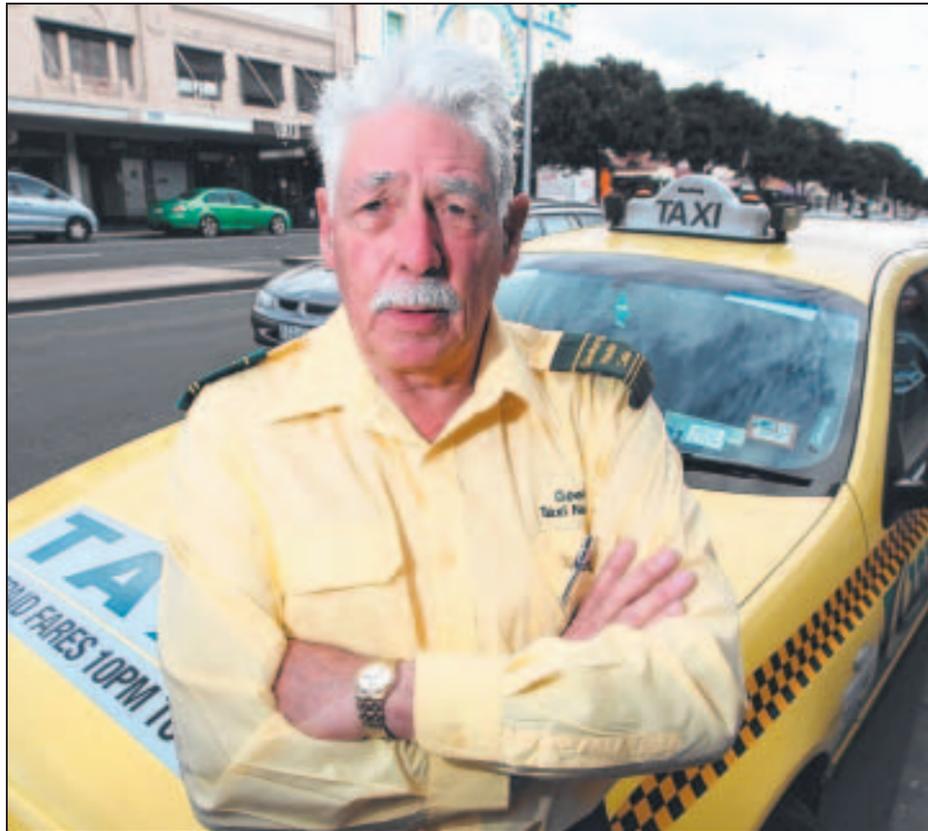
Mr Valentine said the important thing was the way cab numbers were increased on a controlled basis rather than just anywhere.

He said he was in the process of preparing a response to the 145 proposals that have been put up.

"We have done a fair bit of work with council, the police and the Committee for Geelong," he said.

"The message that we have given the inquiry is very simple, and after some discussions it made it even more simple, and that was 'that we will tell you Mr Enquiry what we believe is right for Geelong, which might be light years away from what's required in Melbourne'.

"And whilst we have an interest in the industry up there, what affects our passengers and operators down here is what's more important."



WHAT'S THE CHARGE? Taxi driver Henk Blumink is worried about proposed taxi changes. Photo: MIKE DUGDALE



Snoop Dogg

Doggie sniffs out Snoop

SNOOP Dogg has been briefly detained in Norway after entering the country with marijuana and a large amount of cash.

Customs officials declined to confirm the Norwegian media reports, saying only that an American artist entered Norway with a small amount of marijuana that was detected by a sniffer dog. Norwegian law prevents law enforcement officials from naming suspects.

A customs officer who spoke on condition of anonymity said on Thursday the artist was also carrying more cash than is legally allowed and was fined \$8560 for the violations.

The rapper, whose name is Calvin Broadus, has in the past been arrested on marijuana possession.

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