



SENATE SELECT COMMITTEE ON PRODUCTIVITY IN AUSTRALIA

AUSTRALIAN TRUCKING ASSOCIATION SUBMISSION 25 FEBRUARY 2026

1. About the Australian Trucking Association

The Australian Trucking Association is a united voice for our members on trucking issues of national importance. Through our eleven member associations, we represent the 60,000 businesses and 200,000 people who make up the Australian trucking industry.

2. Introduction and summary

On 4 November 2025, the Senate established the Select Committee on Productivity in Australia to inquire into and report on the history of Australia's productivity, opportunities to drive growth and the structural barriers to growth.¹

The committee's discussion paper notes that the freight and logistics industry's productivity has experienced either limited growth or declines in most years since 2003-04.²

The Australian and state governments have agreed to a revitalised National Competition Policy (NCP), which includes a package of heavy vehicle reforms. The Productivity Commission is providing advice on the potential impacts.³

This submission reviews the history of productivity growth in road freight transport and its stagnation since the 2000s, before arguing that the Government should—

- make NCP payments to the states that achieve the milestones for delivering the emerging regtech solution to high productivity vehicle road access
- eliminate bottlenecks in the road network
- adopt the UN light vehicle regulations along with some other international standards, to give vehicle purchasers more choice, reduce compliance costs and enable the government to focus on maintaining Australia's heavy vehicle standards
- improve landside port productivity by regulating stevedoring charges
- address the industry's driver shortage with better licensing and training, and adding articulated truck and tanker truck driving to the occupation list for skilled migration.

¹ Parliament of Australia, [Select committee on productivity in Australia](#). Viewed 16 February 2026.

² Select Committee on Productivity in Australia, [Discussion paper](#). Viewed 19 February 2026.

³ Treasury, [Revitalising National Competition Policy](#). Viewed 19 February 2026.

3. History of productivity growth in road freight transport

The trucking industry achieved extraordinary productivity gains between 1971 and 2007.

During this period, the industry's productivity increased six-fold due to—

- the increased use of tri-axle trailers from the early 1970s
- the expansion of road train access in NSW and Queensland in the 1990s, after being used since the 1920s in the remote South Australia, Western Australia and the NT
- the use of B-doubles, which were first trialled in the 1980s.⁴

The increased use of B-doubles was supported by the *Interstate Road Transport Act 1985* (Cth), which defined a network of federal B-double routes. Despite strong objections from the industry, the Act was repealed in 2018 on the basis that there was now better co-ordination and harmonisation between the states and territories.⁵

The better co-ordination and harmonisation that was to be delivered through the HVNL was predicted to deliver up to \$12.4 billion in economic benefits.⁶ But the reality has fallen short. Between 2014, when the HVNL came into force, and 2018, the productivity of the transport, postal and warehousing sector went down.⁷

There have been some productivity improvements. Trucks in the NHVR's Performance Based Standards (PBS) scheme are on average 23 per cent more productive than conventional heavy vehicles. For example, a 20 metre PBS truck and dog trailer can transport 28.5 per cent more payload than a conventional 19 metre combination.⁸

The HVNL itself has been under review since 2019. The amendments to the law that resulted from the review are to come into force mid-2026. Although the industry was disappointed with the results of the review, the amendments will include two productivity improvements of value—

- an increase in the general access mass limit for heavy vehicles by up to 5 per cent to match the current concessional mass limit
- an increase in the maximum length of a general access vehicle from 19 metres to 20 metres.

Other improvements, such as increasing the height of general access trucks from 4.3 metres to 4.6 metres and improving PBS will need to be considered under the ongoing review and maintenance program that the ATA is advocating.⁹

⁴ BITRE, [Truck productivity: sources, trends and future prospects](#). Research report 123, 2011. xv-xvi.

⁵ Commonwealth, *Parliamentary debates*, House of Representatives, 28 February 2018, 2205 (Damian Drum, Assistant Minister to the Deputy Prime Minister).

⁶ Deloitte Access Economics, [Economic benefits of improved regulation in the Australian trucking industry](#), March 2019, 17.

⁷ *ibid*, 21.

⁸ Bruzsa, L (NHVR Chief Engineer). *Safer, more productive trucks*. 2024 Technology and Maintenance Conference presentation, 22 October 2024.

⁹ ATA, [Heavy Vehicle National Law Amendment Bill 2025](#). Submission to the Queensland State Development, Infrastructure and Works Committee, 16 September 2025. 9-11.

4. Increasing the use of high productivity vehicles

The HVNL and its regulations impose significant and unnecessary constraints on the use of high productivity vehicles. The rules for road network access remain inconsistent across state borders.

Table 1 shows how businesses that switch from conventional semitrailers to A-doubles can move the same amount of freight in half the number of trips while using 72 per cent of the fuel.

Table 1: Comparison of key road freight configurations

Vehicle type	Payload (t)	Length (m)	Trips to move 1000t of payload	Fuel required per 1000km lead (per cent)
Semi-trailer	24.0	19.0	42	100
B-double	38.8	26.0	26	82
A-double	48.7	36.5	21	72

Source: ATA, [Truck impact chart technical advisory procedure](#). Edition 3, September 2024. 14.

High productivity vehicles can only be used on specific road networks or under permits issued by the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator following what can be a complex and time consuming application process.

In 2024-25, the NHVR received more than 196,000 applications for these permits; the applications cost businesses more than \$6.9 million in fees.¹⁰

The 2019 modelling conducted for the ATA showed that increasing high productivity vehicle access to the road system could—

- reduce the industry’s operating costs by \$13.6 billion in NPV terms over the years to 2050
- reduce the cost of house construction by \$30 million per year by 2050 and the cost of construction services by \$70 million per year, and
- save a typical Australian household more than \$400 per year on their everyday purchases.¹¹

To unlock these gains, the ATA considers that the Government should press ahead with a regtech solution, road access upgrades and targeted infrastructure investment.

¹⁰ NHVR, [Annual report 2024-25](#). 67, 56.

¹¹ DAE, 2019. vi, 46.

Pressing ahead with a regtech solution to road access

Australia's governments are working to create a National Automated Access System (NAAS) based on a system used in Tasmania. The NAAS aims to replace 90 per cent of road access permit applications by providing users with an instant map showing the roads where their specific vehicle and load combination could travel legally and safely.

The NAAS has the potential to materially lift national freight productivity and the regulatory burden of lodging road access permits. For example, the extension of the Tasmanian system to mobile cranes was independently assessed as delivering a BCR of between 16 and 46.¹²

The NAAS is not simply a technology project. It is an enabling reform that underpins supply chain efficiency, infrastructure delivery and the Government's broader productivity agenda.

Phase one of the NAAS is being rolled out in Queensland and Tasmania; the plan and budget for phase two has been approved and will require its own steering committee to aid in the oversight of the rollout.¹³

Accelerating the rollout of the NAAS is part of the December 2025 NCP agreement.¹⁴ The agreement sets out clear performance milestones for its implementation but does not set competition policy payments for the states that meet those milestones.

The ATA strongly supports the rollout of the NAAS. Our concern is that the program may fail to deliver on its fundamental objectives: increased access certainty and a substantial reduction in permit requirements.

Lack of genuine stakeholder engagement

A central risk to the delivery of the NAAS against the milestones in the agreement is the absence of genuine, ongoing engagement with industry. The trucking industry and industry associations were regularly, proactively and meaningfully consulted on the development of the Tasmanian system. In contrast, engagement on the NAAS has been limited to information sharing or consultation after key decisions are made.

Without industry embedded in the design and delivery process, there is no systematic mechanism to—

- identify operational pain points
- test assumptions against real-world operating conditions
- ensure functionality is sequenced to deliver early productivity gains
- deliver a user experience that supports adoption instead of deterring it.

¹² Buxton, S. *Eliminating nine out of ten access permits*. Trucking Australia 2023 presentation, 30 March 2023, 8.

¹³ Heavy Vehicle National Law reform implementation steering committee, [Statement on the 5 November 2025 meeting](#), 1 December 2025.

¹⁴ National Competition Policy Federation Funding Agreement, [Schedule](#). December 2025, 34.

The risk that the NAAS will not meet the industry's expectations or needs is significantly increased because of the absence of industry expertise at the core of the program.

The need for accountable leadership

The successful delivery of the NAAS requires strong, independent leadership with clear authority and accountability.

The responsibility for outcomes must rest with a single, empowered Chair and program sponsor supported by effective technical and advisory committees that can play a vital role in providing advice and specialist input but cannot substitute for leadership.

The Chair/program sponsor should have industry expertise to understand operational priorities, implementation impacts and the practical consequences of design and sequencing decisions.

Without a clearly accountable Chair empowered to resolve issues across agencies and jurisdictions and informed by real-world industry experience, the NAAS risks delay, fragmented decision-making, and a diffusion of responsibility.

Recommendation 1

The Government should—

- add specific funding allocations to the December 2025 NCP agreement for the states that achieve the NAAS performance milestones
- embed genuine industry collaboration across the full lifecycle of the NAAS including representation on its steering and technical committees
- build on the decision to establish the dedicated NAAS Steering Committee by ensuring a Chair is accountable for delivery against agreed outcomes
- house the program within a stable national institution capable of supporting delivery discipline and industry engagement.

Eliminating bottlenecks in the road network

Once implemented, the NAAS would ease the compliance burden of applying for access permits.

It would not, however, eliminate the bottlenecks in the road system that need to be cleared to expand the use of high productivity trucks.

This can only be achieved through targeted investment in road upgrades, together with corresponding changes to heavy vehicle road access and more consistency across state borders.

While this is a cost to the Government, it is an investment worth making. It would deliver a significant productivity dividend that would flow right through the economy and to households.

The ATA considers that an appropriate level of Australian Government investment would be \$5 billion over ten years.

In conjunction with our members, we have identified eight projects that should be implemented as a priority—

- **New South Wales:** upgrade the Sheahan Bridge on the Hume Highway at Gundagai and extend parking bays to allow as of right access to the Hume Highway for 36.5 metre A-doubles
- **Victoria:** maintain the Australian Government's contribution to the non-tolled components of North East Link. The project will complete Melbourne's orbital system, improve access and reduce travel times.
- **Queensland:** upgrade the Inland Freight Route to establish an alternative to the Bruce Highway between Mungindi and Charters Towers.
- **Queensland:** replace the westbound Bremer River Bridge on the Warrego Highway near Ipswich. The westbound bridge was built in 1958 and has cracks in its steel girders.
- **South Australia:** build the Greater Adelaide Bypass to a standard that would allow trucks to bypass the Adelaide Hills at the open road speed limit. The Australian Government should cover 80 per cent of the cost of the bypass.
- **Western Australia:** upgrade the Great Eastern Highway from Perth to the Goldfields.
- **Tasmania:** complete the duplication of the Bass Highway between Launceston and Devonport.
- **Northern Territory:** comprehensively address the flood immunity of the Stuart Highway. The Stuart Highway is an essential link between the Northern Territory and southern Australia; flooding results in food shortages across the territory.

The ATA has previously argued that the Government should set mandatory service level standards to guide investments in the road network.¹⁵

The Government's funding for projects under this initiative should be consistent with the relevant standard and conditional on the state government delivering the level of high productivity vehicle access that the standard requires.

¹⁵ ATA, [Trucking Australia: the report](#). March 2023, 11.

Recommendation 2

The Government should invest \$5 billion over ten years to eliminate bottlenecks on the road system and upgrade key routes, including the eight projects identified in this submission.

The investments should be accompanied by corresponding changes to heavy vehicle road access and greater interstate consistency.

5. Vehicle standards

The Commonwealth regulates the import and first supply of road vehicles to the market under the *Road Vehicle Standards Act 2018* and the Australian Design Rules (ADRs) under the Act.

In our submission to the 2024 ADR harmonisation review, the ATA argued that Australia should replace the ADRs relating to light vehicles with the relevant UN regulations.¹⁶

Adopting the UN light vehicle regulations

Adopting the UN light vehicle regulations would enable global vehicle manufacturers to release new vehicles into our market with the latest technologies in a shorter time frame at lower cost.

Australian vehicle purchasers, including freight businesses buying delivery vans, would have more models to choose from. The vehicles would meet the latest global safety and emission standards.

Australia has worked to harmonise its ADRs with the UN regulations since 2000, but the process has been gradual, selective and administratively complex. Each UN regulation still needs to be converted into an Australia specific ADR rather than being adopted directly. This conversion process is resource intensive for both government and industry.

Our proposal instead is that Australia should rely directly on the UN regulations as the applicable standards. This would replace the current dual model where Australia adopts and redocuments the international rules.

A small number of local requirements would need to remain where the current ADRs allow vehicle components to meet a range of international standards. For example, ADR 95/00 allows motorbike tyres to comply with any one of five international standards.¹⁷

Retaining Australia's heavy vehicle standards

As the UN regulations are adopted, provisions affecting vehicles of mass greater than 3.5 tonnes should be moved to specific heavy vehicle standards.

¹⁶ ATA, [ADR harmonisation review](#). Submission to DITRDCSA, 31 January 2025. 1.

¹⁷ *Vehicle Standard (Australian Design Rule 95/00 – Installation of Tyres) 2018*, s 5.1.3.

These standards should be retained, because—

- Australia is the world leader in allowing long and heavy vehicles onto the road network. These need specific regulations for their safe and efficient operation
- Australia imports heavy vehicles from Europe, Japan, China and the USA. To support choice in the market, the ADRs allow a range of alternative standards on a deemed to comply basis
- International standards for overseas markets are not always suitable for Australian conditions or operational practices. For example, UN ECE R13 allows trucks to use service air to apply and hold the trailer parking brake. Trailer parking on air is specific to Europe where prime movers only tow a single trailer. Its adoption in Australia would require drivers to chock trailers when they park, which would be costly, time consuming and present an avoidable work health and risk¹⁸
- Australia manufactures and exports trucks and trailers. Our domestic truck and trailer manufacturing industry provides an individual and customised product to the Australian market; we need a local regulatory system for these products.

The heavy vehicle standards would continue to be based on the UN regulations and harmonised wherever possible but would continue to include standards to suit our own conditions and deemed to comply references to other international standards.

There is a currently a long backlog in reviewing and maintaining the heavy vehicle standards. Under the ATA's proposed approach, DITRDCA would be able to focus on these standards rather than replicating work already done internationally.

Recommendation 3

The Government should replace Australia's light vehicle design rules with the UN light vehicle regulations, except for specific local requirements allowing vehicles and components to comply with other international standards.

Australia should continue to maintain its own standards for vehicles with a GVM greater than 3.5 tonnes.

6. Improving landside port productivity

The trucking industry moves 86 per cent of the container traffic through Australia's ports but is subject to very high landside stevedoring charges.¹⁹

As the ACCC pointed out in its 2024-25 container stevedoring monitoring report, the stevedores began to increase terminal access charges significantly in 2017. In 2024-25, the

¹⁸ ATA, January 2025, 3.

¹⁹ BITRE, [Waterline 70](#), December 2024. Table 1.6, 18.

stevedoring industry collected almost half of its revenue from landside charges and other sources, mostly from charges on transport operators.²⁰

These charge increases have not flowed through to increased port productivity.

The ACCC concluded that the productivity of the stevedoring industry has been relatively stable over the past five years. The stevedoring industry reported the same average container turnaround time on the landside in 2024-25 as in 2019-20, 18.8 minutes.²¹

The ACCC's findings are consistent with the experience of the trucking businesses that service Australia's ports. In November 2025, the ATA member association representing NSW trucking operators, Road Freight NSW, pointed out that—

- landside fees continued to exceed inflation and wage growth
- there have been no service improvements at Port Botany, and that
- fees are imposed unilaterally and without consultation.²²

There are national voluntary guidelines for landside stevedore charges. These guidelines set out a protocol for communicating and consulting on price changes; they do not require stevedores to take action in response to feedback.²³ The National Transport Commission is consulting on updating the guidelines, including to require stevedores to implement price changes once a year, on 1 January.²⁴

Australia's transport ministers have also agreed to establish a working group to explore options and recommend next steps in response to the ACCC's price monitoring.²⁵

These steps do not go far enough.

There are clear market failures in the stevedoring industry. Fixing them would support trucking businesses, improve the productivity of Australia's ports, benefit Australia's rural exporters and result in lower prices for households and businesses.

Recommendation 4

The Australian Government should regulate landside stevedoring charges.

²⁰ ACCC, [Container stevedoring monitoring report 2024-25](#). December 2025. 9.

²¹ *ibid*, 8.

²² Road Freight NSW, [RFNSW warns of new supply chain costs hitting national productivity](#). Media release, 25 November 2025.

²³ NTC, [National voluntary guidelines for landside stevedore charges](#). Version 1, 2022.

²⁴ NTC, [Updating the national voluntary guidelines for landside stevedore charges and expansion to empty container park charges](#). Consultation paper, February 2026. 16.

²⁵ Infrastructure and Transport Ministers' Meeting. [Communiqué](#), 11 August 2025.

7. Addressing workforce shortages

There is a severe driver shortage that restricts the trucking industry's capacity and productivity.

In its 2025 Occupation Shortage List, Jobs and Skills Australia found there was a shortage of general truck drivers and articulated truck drivers nationally and in every state and territory.²⁶

Separately, the world road transport organisation, the IRU, found that in 2024—

- 28,000, or 13.3 per cent, of driver positions in Australia were unfilled, and that
- 43 per cent of Australian trucking businesses were experiencing severe or very severe difficulty filling driver positions.²⁷

The economic consequences of the driver shortage are serious—

- disruptions in the transport supply chain due to the lack of drivers cause interruptions to just-in-time inventory systems and adversely affect the capability and performance of logistics service providers²⁸
- delays have implications for agriculture sector exports and cause issues for supply chains involving perishable goods
- the disruptions add to the business case for reinstating local inventories to smooth out disruptions, but managing larger inventories carries an unproductive cost
- trucking businesses have equipment standing idle because they cannot source drivers to operate it.²⁹

Beyond the economic consequences of the driver shortage, there are animal welfare risks when pick-up or delivery windows in the agriculture sector are missed.

Three important changes that would improve the availability of truck drivers would be to—

- accelerate and modify the planned reforms to truck driver licensing through the National Heavy Vehicle Driver Competency Framework (NHVDCF)
- provide government support for drivers undertaking truck driver apprenticeships or short courses
- adding articulated truck and tanker truck driving to the occupation list for skilled migration.

Accelerating the reforms to the NHVDCF is part of the December 2025 NCP agreement.³⁰

²⁶ JSA, [Occupation shortage list](#). OSCA codes 713131 and 713231.

²⁷ IRU, [Global truck driver shortage report 2024](#). 37,33.

²⁸ Wang, M. et al, 'Transportation capacity shortage influence on logistics performance: evidence from the driver shortage,' in *Heliyon* 8:5 (May 2022). [Link](#).

²⁹ Industry Skills Australia (ISA), [Transport and logistics industry 2025 workforce plan](#), 24.

³⁰ National Competition Policy Federation Funding Agreement, [Schedule](#). December 2025, 39.

Fixing heavy vehicle licensing

Drivers currently advance through the truck licence classes based on the time they have held each licence, followed by training and competency tests.

The licence tenure requirements—

- unnecessarily reduce the supply of drivers who can operate high productivity vehicles³¹
- do not guarantee that a driver is competent and experienced at lower licensing levels before being allowed to progress, because drivers are not required to use their licences while they wait to advance to the next class.³²

Australia's transport ministers have agreed in-principle to redesign the learning and assessment requirements for each licence class and strengthen training governance.

The reforms would also introduce experience-based pathways to enable drivers who can demonstrate their driving experience to advance through the licence classes more rapidly.³³

Drivers will be able to advance along three pathways—

- **the current time based pathway**, but the Decision RIS found that drivers should not be able to go straight from driving heavy rigid (HR) to multicomination (MC) trucks.
- a **driving experience pathway**, which would enable a medium rigid (MR) or HR driver to progress to driving semitrailers (HC) after 600 hours of MR/HR driving over 26 weeks and an MC licence after 700 hours of HC driving over a further 26 weeks
- a **supervision pathway**. An MR/HR driver could progress to HC after 420 hours of MR/HR driving, 6x2 hour supervised driving blocks and 12 weeks. The driver could then progress to MC after 560 HC driving hours, 8x2 hour supervised blocks and another 16 weeks.³⁴

The ATA has significant concerns about the extended delays and uncertain timelines involved with the NHVDCF reform process and the direction of some of the reforms.

As an interim measure, we recommend that South Australia's MC Licence Program as announced be adopted nationally.

³¹ Austroads, [Decision regulatory impact statement – National heavy vehicle driver competency framework](#). 20 March 2023. 23.

³² *ibid*, 22.

³³ Austroads, [National heavy vehicle driver competency framework](#). Viewed 23 February 2026.

³⁴ *ibid*, table 11, 52.

Extended delays in the reform process

The industry's campaign for reforms to heavy vehicle driver licensing began after an incident in February 2016, when the crew of a B-double proved unable to reverse their overweight truck out of the entrance to a Sydney tunnel.³⁵

Ten years has passed. Austroads has drafted updated training and assessment material. An online learning platform is being developed. The driving experience and supervision pathways are still being designed.

But the NHVDCF project under the December 2025 National Competition Policy agreement does not include defined timeframes for implementing the changes.

It does not attach a share of the Commonwealth's competition policy payments to those timeframes being achieved.³⁶

The NCP schedule needs to be amended to set out specific implementation timeframes. These timeframes should be linked to the financial contributions that the states receive under the agreement.

Changes to the Austroads reforms are needed

The ATA strongly supports the driver experience and supervision pathways that Austroads is developing and has provided extensive technical advice about how to implement them.

We consider, however, that—

- **the heavy rigid (HR) to multicomcombination (MC) licensing pathway should be retained** for workforce retention reasons. Many industry employers need their articulated truck drivers to have MC licences, so a driver would need to move to a different business to gain enough HC experience to advance to MC. This may not be possible in rural and regional areas
- **the MC licence class should be split** at 37 metres of vehicle length to reflect the skill required to drive large combinations. Existing MC licence holders with more than six months of experience would be automatically upgraded to the new MC2 class.

³⁵ Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee, [Aspects of Road Safety in Australia](#) (Final report, 26 October 2017) 13-14 [2.7].

³⁶ National Competition Policy Federation Funding Agreement, December 2025, 39.

South Australia's MC Licence Program should be adopted nationally as an interim step

South Australia has implemented a new MC Licence Program as an alternative to the current 12 month HR or HC requirement. As announced by the government in August 2024, drivers undertaking the program need to complete—

- 50 hours of logged driving hours and learning components with a qualified supervising driver if they hold a HC licence, or
- 60 hours of logged driving hours and learning components with a qualified supervising driver if they hold a HR licence
- a practical driving assessment in an MC vehicle with an authorised examiner.³⁷

Additionally, South Australia no longer recognises overseas truck driving experience toward obtaining an MC licence (except for drivers from New Zealand).

To obtain an MC licence, overseas drivers must hold a South Australian HR or HC licence for 12 months or complete the MC Licence Program.³⁸

The ATA considers that governments should, as an interim measure, roll out the South Australian program as announced.

As well as improving safety, adopting the simple, rigorous SA model would help address the racism experienced by international drivers. Every MC driver would be on a level playing field. They would all have the same HR or HC experience on Australian roads.

Recommendation 5

The Government should—

- set timeframes for the implementation of the NHVDCF reforms and make NCP payments to the states that achieve them
- retain the HR to MC licensing pathway and
- split the current MC licensing class at 37 metres of vehicle length.

Governments should, as an interim measure, adopt the South Australian MC Licence Program as announced in August 2024.

Incentives for truck driver apprenticeships and short courses

To be successful, occupational truck drivers need competencies that go beyond holding a licence.

³⁷ Department for Infrastructure and Transport, [MC licence program](#). Viewed 19 February 2026.

³⁸ *ibid*, [Multi-combination \(MC class\)](#). Viewed 19 February 2026.

The VET system offers vocational qualifications, skills sets and units of competency in driving operations. The Certificate III is available as a two-year apprenticeship in Queensland and is eligible to be an apprenticeship nationally.³⁹

ATA member associations and companies offer short driver courses—

- the **Queensland Trucking Association** is running a Heavy Vehicle Safe Driver Project to employ and upskill drivers with an HR or HC licence who could not obtain employment due to their lack of supervised driving time.⁴⁰ In 2026, the QTA will also offer ten day pre-apprenticeship courses in Townsville, Mackay and Cairns.⁴¹ In addition, the QTA has an online program to help truck drivers make safer decisions.
- the **Western Roads Federation** runs a heavy vehicle driver training course that has now trained 1,630 drivers. About 25 per cent of the graduates from the course are women; 11 per cent of the course graduates are Indigenous.⁴²
- **Volvo Trucks Australia** has partnered with **Wodonga TAFE's** Driver Education Centre of Australia (DECA) to run its Australian Iron Women driver training program. On successful completion of the 12 month program, graduates receive a Certificate III in Driving Operations. The first cohort from the program has graduated.⁴³

Despite the national shortage of drivers, there are no Australian Government incentives available to drivers who undertake apprenticeships or these short courses. There are no incentives for their employers, either.

Recommendation 6

The Government should—

- provide financial support to driving operations apprentices and their employers. Apprentices should receive \$5,000 in support over their two year apprenticeship. Employers should receive \$2,000 after six months and a further \$3,000 after twelve months
- offer a completion bonus of \$1,500 to drivers who complete one of the short driver training courses run by RTOs and supported by state governments, trucking industry associations or major companies. The driver's first employer should receive a \$1,500 hiring bonus
- launch a national skills passport to make it easier for drivers and other workers to demonstrate their skills and qualifications. A skills passport would also help businesses hire new staff with confidence.

³⁹ Department of Trade, Employment and Training. [Heavy vehicle driver](#). Viewed 25 September 2025.

⁴⁰ QTA, [HV safe driver project](#). Viewed 25 February 2026.

⁴¹ QTA, [Driving futures project](#). Viewed 25 February 2026.

⁴² Emails from WRF, 25 September 2025 and 23 February 2026.

⁴³ Volvo Trucks Australia, [Volvo Iron Women](#). Viewed 23 February 2026.

Skilled migration

Recommendations 5 and 6 in this submission are essential, but they cannot deliver enough truck drivers to offset the retirements from the industry's workforce.

The IRU driver shortage report found that 28 per cent of the current truck driver workforce is projected to retire by 2029 – a loss of 50,000 workers on top of the 28,000 positions unfilled in 2024.⁴⁴

The ISA workforce plan reached similar conclusions and noted employer reports that there were not enough young drivers entering the profession to fill the vacancies.⁴⁵

At present, it is not possible for truck drivers to migrate to Australia through the skilled migration pathway, even though the ABS classifies articulated truck and tanker truck driving at the same skill level, level 3, as the trade occupations on the Core Skilled Occupation List.⁴⁶

70 per cent of the industry stakeholders that ISA surveyed in the development of its 2025 workforce plan agreed or strongly agreed that the current lack of skilled migration pathways to address workforce shortages was a challenge.⁴⁷

Given the economic consequences of the driver shortage, including the productivity impact in rural and regional areas of having idle equipment, the ATA considers that articulated truck drivers and tanker truck drivers should be added to the Core Skilled Occupation List for migration.

There should, however, be accompanying changes to the management of overseas licensed heavy vehicle drivers.

State governments are considering potential policy changes to overseas driver licensing.⁴⁸ South Australia has already decided not to recognise overseas truck driving experience toward obtaining an MC licence (except for drivers from New Zealand).

In 2025, the ATA convened a multicultural driver roundtable so multicultural drivers and employers could share their on-the-road experiences, as well as their views about training and licensing. The drivers at the roundtable had 64 years of combined driving experience.

⁴⁴ IRU, 2024. 63.

⁴⁵ ISA, 2025. 25.

⁴⁶ ATA, [Core Skilled Occupation List consultations](#). JSA submission, 26 November 2025. 5.

⁴⁷ ISA, 2025. 87.

⁴⁸ Austroads, [Key findings on the management of overseas licensed heavy vehicle drivers](#). Viewed 19 February 2026.

The drivers at the roundtable unanimously agreed that—

- in their view, all truck drivers should be required to meet the same licensing standards
- overseas driving credentials higher than a C licence should not be recognised, with drivers required to pass Australian licensing assessments and build up the required level of driving experience in Australia, noting that the driver experience and supervision pathways being developed by Austroads would deliver faster progression than the current time based system.⁴⁹

Recommendation 7

The Government should—

- add articulated truck drivers and tanker truck drivers to the Core Skilled Occupation List
- work with the states to reform the management of overseas licensed heavy vehicle drivers.

⁴⁹ ATA, [Multicultural driver roundtable findings](#), September 2025. 5.