TL;DR – What’s happening in freight right now:

- Freight rates continue to rise, with further GRIs, restorations and Peak Season Surcharges announced across Asia-Australia trade lanes
- Blank sailings, rolled cargo and tight vessel utilisation are placing pressure on capacity and booking availability
- Congestion is increasing across key ports in Europe and Asia, impacting global schedule reliability
- Ongoing Middle East instability continues to drive fuel costs, operational uncertainty and carrier network disruption
- New services and capacity additions, including Maersk's Qilin service, are expected to provide greater flexibility on the China-Australia trade lane

MIDDLE EAST & GLOBAL TRADE OUTLOOK

Ongoing instability in the Middle East continues to influence global freight markets, despite vessels maintaining transit through the Strait of Hormuz. Higher fuel costs, war-risk premiums and operational uncertainty are placing pressure on carrier networks, contributing to rising freight rates and ongoing schedule disruption across multiple trade lanes. While the impact on Australian supply chains remains largely indirect, the flow-on effects continue to be felt throughout the global logistics market.

What this means:
Middle East tensions remain a key factor influencing freight costs, carrier planning and supply chain reliability heading into the second half of 2026.

Source: Shutterstock

RATE & COST PRESSURE

Despite June traditionally being one of the quieter periods of the year for Australian imports, freight rates continue to climb across key Asia-Australia trade lanes. Carriers have implemented further rate restorations, Peak Season Surcharges (PSS) and capacity controls as demand remains stronger than expected and vessel space tightens across the market.
China-Australia spot rates have now increased significantly since March, driven by ongoing blank sailings, rolled cargo, higher fuel costs and continued disruption linked to the Middle East conflict. Several carriers have reported strong vessel utilisation through late May and early June, with some services restricting space allocations while clearing existing booking backlogs.

Key updates:
- China-Australia spot rates have risen by approximately 68% since mid-March
- MSC has introduced a USD300/TEU rate restoration from 15 June and a revised USD500/TEU Peak Season Surcharge effective 1 July
- COSCO, ZIM and other major carriers have announced additional restoration measures across Asia-Australia services
- Ongoing blank sailings continue to reduce available capacity across several major trade lanes
- LCL cargo from North East Asia, South East Asia, the Indian Subcontinent and the Middle East will also be impacted by new Peak Season Surcharges from July

What this means:
Importers should continue to plan shipments well in advance, with upward pricing pressure and space constraints expected to persist throughout June and into the third quarter.

CONGESTION & SCHEDULE RELIABILITY

Global supply chains continue to face reliability challenges as congestion builds across several major ports and transhipment hubs. While carriers remain focused on managing capacity, operational disruptions are increasingly being driven by weather events, port congestion and network imbalances.
In Europe, low water levels are impacting inland barge operations, while Rotterdam, Antwerp and Hamburg/Bremerhaven continue to experience significant congestion, resulting in schedule disruptions and port omissions. Across Asia, vessel delays of up to five days have been reported in Shanghai, Ningbo and Qingdao following fog-related channel closures. Congestion is also increasing across India, Southeast Asia, Singapore and parts of West Africa, placing further pressure on global shipping schedules.
Of particular concern for Australian importers, some shipping lines are reporting transhipment delays of up to four to five weeks on certain Fremantle-bound cargo, highlighting the ongoing vulnerability of global networks to disruption.

Key updates:
- Congestion continues across major European gateway ports
- Fog-related disruptions have impacted operations in Shanghai, Ningbo and Qingdao
- Increased congestion reported across Singapore, India, Southeast Asia and West Africa
- Extended transhipment delays are affecting some Australia-bound shipments

What this means:
Transit times remain unpredictable across several trade lanes, with congestion and operational disruption continuing to impact schedule reliability. Importers should allow additional lead time and maintain flexibility when planning shipments.

SERVICE & NETWORK UPDATES

Several new service developments have been announced across the Australia trade, aimed at improving capacity, connectivity and long-term supply chain resilience.
The Australian Government has confirmed the ANL Kokoda as the first vessel to participate in the Strategic Fleet Pilot Program, a key initiative designed to strengthen Australia's maritime capability and provide additional support during supply chain disruptions and national emergencies.

At the same time, Maersk has announced the launch of its new Qilin service, commencing in July. The service will operate a direct Shanghai-Sydney-Melbourne rotation, providing additional capacity and significantly improved transit times between China and Australia's east coast. The new service is expected to complement existing network offerings while supporting greater schedule reliability across the trade lane.

What this means:
Additional vessel capacity and service options should provide greater flexibility for importers and exporters, particularly as carriers continue to navigate ongoing market volatility.

Planning shipments over the coming weeks? Reach out to your S.A.L. contact early to stay ahead of delays.
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