



General Rate Increases

Carriers are signalling further upward pressure on freight rates into Australia, with rate restorations and general rate increases expected to take effect from 1 March across several key inbound trade lanes. Current market indications point to increases impacting shipments from North and Southeast Asia, the Indian Subcontinent and the Middle East. These adjustments are intended to support carrier cost recovery and capacity management and would apply on top of applicable surcharges at time of shipment.

Source: Various Major Shipping Lines

Chinese New Year

According to the Chinese Lunar Calendar, 2026 marks the Year of the Horse, with Lunar New Year commencing on 17 February and the Spring Festival running through to 3 March, with majority of businesses back from 24 February. Traditionally associated with energy, momentum and renewal, the Year of the Horse also coincides with one of the most disruptive periods in the global supply chain calendar. While the official holiday spans just over two weeks, many factories and logistics providers across China are expected to close earlier and resume later, resulting in reduced production, port congestion on either side of the holiday, limited vessel availability and increased pressure on equipment and space.

From a shipping perspective, carriers are again adjusting services in response to the seasonal slowdown. Rather than introducing peak season surcharges on the China–Australia trade, several lines are opting for additional blank sailings and schedule slides, particularly in late February as southbound demand softens. Some consortium services have doubled previously announced cancellations, while other carriers have removed peak season surcharges altogether. Combined with ongoing weather-related disruptions and congestion across the Tasman, Australian importers should expect continued schedule variability. We strongly encourage clients to finalise production early, secure bookings in advance and confirm documentation timelines to minimise delays during and immediately after the Lunar New Year period.

Why Truck Fuel Tax Matters for Supply Chains and Consumers

Ongoing industry debate around truck fuel tax settings highlights how transport costs extend well beyond the logistics sector. Any increase in diesel or trucking costs does not stay isolated with carriers — it flows through the entire supply chain and is ultimately reflected in the prices paid by importers, exporters, and end consumers. In a country like Australia, where long distances and dispersed populations already make freight movement costly, changes to fuel tax arrangements can place additional pressure on supply chains that are already navigating volatility and rising input costs. For businesses and households alike, this can translate into higher prices for everyday goods, reinforcing why transport cost policy remains a critical issue during a period of heightened cost-of-living sensitivity.

Source: ASCLA

Global Schedule Reliability and Port Congestion

Global schedule reliability softened at the end of 2025. While reliability remains notably stronger year-on-year, average delays for late vessels have crept above five days, highlighting that operational pressures persist.

Congestion across key Asia-Pacific hub (Shanghai, Ningbo and Nansha) has been driven by fog, vessel bunching and pre-holiday export surges, while Southeast Asian gateways such as Singapore and Manila continue to feel capacity strain. In Europe, severe winter weather has disrupted port and inland operations across major hubs including Hamburg, Rotterdam and Antwerp, increasing the risk of berth delays, port omissions and diversions. With weather impacts, labour constraints, inland transport bottlenecks and potential re-routing risks still in play, schedule reliability is expected to remain under pressure in the near term, reinforcing the need for flexible planning and close monitoring of shipment timelines.

In the Australian market, carrier cancellations have increased heading into February, with 21 blank sailings recorded out of 227 planned departures this month, lifting the cancellation rate to just over 9%, compared with 6% in November. This rise is largely in line with seasonal patterns and reflects carriers adjusting capacity ahead of the Lunar New Year shutdown, when factory closures and reduced export volumes across Asia typically prompt service reductions. While blank sailings have increased month-on-month, this appears to be a deliberate capacity management strategy rather than a deterioration in underlying market conditions. The focus now shifts to how quickly services and capacity are reinstated once Lunar New Year concludes, which will be key for Australian importers planning post-holiday replenishment.

Source: FTA

Fremantle Port Congestion Levy – Effective 9 February 2026

Due to the planned Fremantle Bridge closure, increased congestion, traffic delays and access restrictions are expected throughout the Fremantle Port precinct and surrounding areas.

As a result, a Congestion Levy will be applicable to all WA container movements scheduled between 6:00am and 5:00pm, Monday to Friday, effective 9 February 2026.

To help minimise delays and congestion-related issues, we strongly recommend considering alternative delivery windows where possible:

- After-hours deliveries
- Evenings: 5:00pm – 12:00am
- Early mornings: 3:00am – 6:00am
- These windows typically offer faster transit times and reduce the risk of delivery delays or container detention.
- Overnight container delivery
- Containers can be positioned on site overnight and ready for unpacking before your working day begins, supporting smoother operations and improved efficiency.

Please contact our team if you would like to explore these options.

New Staff Member Introduction

We're excited to welcome Chere Tannous to the SAL Global Logistics team. With over 20 years of experience in the freight and logistics industry, Chere brings a wealth of knowledge across operations, customer service and logistics. Her industry insight and practical expertise will further strengthen our service offering and support our clients with the high level of care and professionalism SAL is known for. Welcome aboard, Chere!