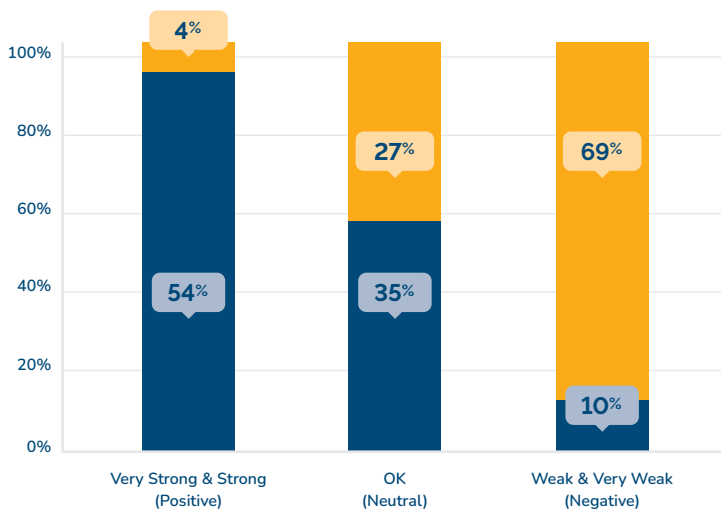


2026 Fuel Crisis. Insights from Australia's road freight sector.

The **NatRoad 2026 Fuel Crisis Survey** of Australian trucking operators in April 2026 demonstrated the conditions created by soaring fuel prices and supply issues rapidly cut the demand, capacity and sustainability of road freight businesses, particularly small fleets and owner operators. This is not a future risk. It is happening now.

Rapid drop in business confidence



There was a dramatic collapse in business confidence among all operators.

93% decline

in positive business outlook compared to before March 2026.

- Since the Federal Government has made changes to the Fuel Excise and Road User Charges to address fuel price spikes, how would you describe the potential financial performance of your business?
- Prior to March 2026, how would you have described the financial performance of your business?

Unsustainable business conditions

Operating in the conditions created by the fuel crisis is unsustainable for most trucking businesses.

83%

AT RISK OF CLOSURE WITHIN 12 MONTHS IF CONDITIONS PERSIST.

68%

AT RISK OF CLOSURE WITHIN 6 MONTHS.



Operators with **fewer than 10 trucks** face the most immediate risk of closure accounting for **75%** of respondents who had already taken trucks off the road.

Reduced industry capacity

Operators rapidly began experiencing reduced capacity with small trucking operators. Small operators with under 10 trucks being hit hardest.



Business loss

Most small operators reported losing **10–50%** of business; some have shut down entirely.



Trucks off the road

38% have taken trucks off the road.



Staff stood down

1 in 4 (26%) reduced their workforce. **Over 70%** of these are small fleets with fewer than 10 trucks.



Work turned down

40% declined or cancelled jobs due to the high of diesel since March 2026.

Road freight: an industry under pressure

Compounding financial challenges

Existing cash flow issues, payment delays, inflexible credit limits, rising input costs, and tax obligations were indicated as additional pressures experienced by trucking operators during the fuel crisis, accelerating business failure.

64%

Reported other financial pressures impacting their business during this time.



Cash flow is the single most critical financial issue, with many describing it as "non-existent" or severely strained due to paying fuel bills before receiving customer payments.



Mental health concerns were frequently mentioned alongside financial stress, with several responses indicating severe distress.

About the NatRoad 2026 Fuel Crisis Survey

The NatRoad 2026 Fuel Crisis Survey was open from 1 April to 30 April 2026. NatRoad received responses from 252 operators nationally. Of the respondents, 44% were owner-operators with 1-2 trucks, 45% were small and medium sized operators with between 3-19 trucks, and 11% were large operators 20 trucks or over.

About NatRoad

The National Road Transport Association (NatRoad) is Australia's largest and only national association for road freight operators. Founded in 1948, today NatRoad represents thousands of members, from sole traders to national fleets, with expertise, business savings, and strong advocacy.

As a not-for-profit, member-governed organisation, NatRoad works closely with governments, regulators and industry partners to improve the operating environment of road freight operators and help members run safer, smarter and more sustainable businesses.

