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Women in Trucking:

Perceptions, Contributions and Experiences of Truck Drivers in Australia (Summary Report)



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About this project and report

This report is based on the Women in Transport study undertaken by researchers from the Future of Work and Society Research Group at UNSW Canberra School of Business. Sponsored by the Transport, Education, Audit, Compliance, Health Organisation (TEACHO) Ltd., the Women in Transport research project examined the work experiences of Australian truck drivers, including perceptions of training, licencing and working conditions and, importantly, generated valuable insights into the perceptions, contributions, and career experiences of women truck drivers in the Australian trucking industry.

In addressing the latter, this report offers evidence-based knowledge about the work experiences of female truck drivers in Australia. This includes how they are perceived as members of the trucking industry, their contributions to the sector, the challenges they face, how they navigate these challenges, as well as how workplace cultures and norms shape their entry, retention, and exit in this male-dominated context. The report draws on a rigorous mixed-method research design combining interviews, surveys, and on-site observational data. Together, these methods generate an integrated, evidence-based analysis of the conditions shaping women's participation in the Australian trucking industry.

This research received human research ethics clearance from the University of New South Wales (UNSW) Canberra Human Research Ethics Advisory Panel A (iRECS8908).

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Executive Summary

Truck driving remains among the most gender-segregated occupations in Australia. According to Jobs and Skills Australia, women comprise just 6% of the broad truck driving workforce. Focusing on those who drive heavy trucks that require specially endorsed licences to transport bulky goods (e.g., heavy rigid, heavy combination, multi-combination, etc.), women comprise an even smaller number of just 4% of this driver classification. These figures have improved only marginally over the past decade despite sustained industry labour shortages and the emergence of targeted advocacy efforts. With the ageing workforce underpinning a driver shortage, the continued underrepresentation of women in the industry represents both an equity failure and an increasingly costly workforce constraint.

This summary report presents highlights from the full report, “Women in Trucking: Perceptions, Contributions and Experiences of Truck Drivers in Australia”. The findings are from a mixed-method study examining how women enter the Australian trucking industry, what they contribute, and what inhibits their full participation. This report examines perceptions of both male and female drivers regarding the extent to which women are accepted, appropriately skilled and safe in the trucking industry. Data were drawn from semi-structured interviews with 20 participants (9 female drivers, 11 key informants), an anonymous national online survey of 489 truck drivers conducted between December 2025 and March 2026, and a site visit to the Pilbara Heavy Haulage Girls in Geraldton, Western Australia.

Key Findings

The central finding of this research is that women are not absent from Australian trucking by choice. They are present, capable and, where working conditions are inclusive, demonstrably effective contributors to the workforce. Barriers to their full participation are visibly structural, not a reflection of individual capacity or inclination.

The evidence confirms a compelling case for women’s inclusion. Female truck drivers were perceived to show attentiveness to vehicle maintenance and safety, sound communication skills, and a consistently documented positive moderating influence on workplace culture. These are not anecdotal observations; they are patterns that emerged across interviews, survey data, and the broader literature, and they carry direct operational and financial significance for the industry.

Notwithstanding this evidence, a substantial gap persists between the industry’s stated openness to women, and the conditions women encounter in practice. Most surveyed drivers saw opportunities for women in the industry, but their perceptions differed on whether women are truly welcomed and whether their participation benefits the transport sector. These discrepancies reflect a structural misalignment between formal inclusion rhetoric and the everyday realities of a workplace culture, physical infrastructure, and job design that remain calibrated to a male workforce.

The challenges documented in this research represent the predictable consequences of systemic under-investment in the conditions necessary to enable women to participate equitably. A persistent industry culture, widely described by participants as ‘blokey’ and resistant to change, creates an environment in which women are rendered largely invisible, required to prove their competence repeatedly, and frequently exposed to sexism, discrimination, and sexual harassment. More concerning, our data reveal significant reporting barriers and a profound accountability deficit that cannot be remedied by employer goodwill alone.

Work-life conflict presents a further structural barrier: trucking job design continues to reflect a gendered ‘ideal worker’ favouring men with minimal obligations outside of work, a model that disproportionately disadvantages women with caring responsibilities and makes pregnancy, in particular, a professionally costly life event. Physical health and safety concerns compound these challenges, with inadequate hygiene infrastructure, poor lighting, and insufficient security at rest areas and service centres creating conditions of heightened vulnerability for women travelling alone.

Women in the trucking industry have responded with considerable resourcefulness and resilience, developing sophisticated individual strategies to navigate risks and barriers the industry has not addressed collectively. While this resilience is noteworthy, it should not be mistaken for evidence of an adequately functioning system. It is evidence of a structural deficit, managed through individual effort and at personal cost.

Results at a glance

- Opportunity for women to enter trucking is broadly acknowledged but they are not yet fully welcome. A significant gap between the number of survey participants who agreed that opportunities exist for women (86%) and those who agreed that women are welcome (72%) signals an observable gap between stated openness and experienced reality.
- Women contribute five consistently identified strengths to the industry: detail orientation, careful equipment maintenance, strong communication, empathy and patience, and a positive moderating influence on workplace culture.
- Women join trucking through various entry pathways including family connections and early experiences, having clear personal career aspirations, recognising the freedom and empowerment trucking careers offer, and lower entry barriers that do not require university degrees.
- Trucking presents a promising pathway out of domestic violence for some women, offering simultaneous access to employment, income, geographic anonymity, and mobile accommodation.
- Women in trucking face serious and overlapping challenges that persist in the masculine industry culture including work-life conflict, sexism and discrimination, sexual harassment, and physical health and safety issues.
- Women in trucking are at particular risk of sexual harassment with 70% of survey respondents expressing that female drivers will likely experience sexual harassment. Relatedly, sexual harassment appears to be substantially underreported with only 20% of survey respondents reporting known incidents.
- Women work to manage systemic challenges through individual resilience, in the absence of adequate industry-level support structures.
- Women navigate industry challenges through proactive strategies such as proving themselves and their technical competence, exercising self-protection and vigilance, seeking mentorship, networks, and training support, and exercising personal strengths.

Summary of recommendations

In developing recommendations, we applied a multi-level framework that covers societal, industry, and individual supports and interventions that can help improve the career experiences of women in trucking.

Societal level: Set national workforce targets for women's participation in heavy vehicle transport; strengthen regulatory oversight of psychosocial hazards including sexual harassment across the industry's fragmented, subcontracted structure; and formalise pathways connecting women in domestic violence situations with licensing support, training, and employment in the sector.

Industry level: Drive genuine culture change through bystander intervention training and consistently enforced reporting mechanisms; establish national minimum standards for rest area and roadhouse facilities; build a national mentorship register connecting women new to the industry with experienced drivers; and create a single accessible navigation point for industry support and resources.

Individual level: Promote licensing and upskilling resources with particular focus on reaching women in smaller companies and regional areas; expand mental health and wellbeing support to specifically address women's experiences in the industry; and ensure women have clear, accessible information about their rights and available recourse from the outset of their careers.

Conclusion

Recruiting more women into trucking is a worthy goal – but recruitment without retention is a revolving door. Genuine and lasting change requires coordinated action across government, industry, and organisations: setting targets, enforcing standards, investing in culture, and building the structures that make entering and staying in trucking not just possible, but worthwhile.

Introduction



The road freight transport industry is central to the functioning of the Australian economy. Representing approximately five per cent of the national GDP, the sector underpins the safe and timely movement of goods across the country's vast geographic distances, connecting ports, farms, factories, distribution centres, and communities.¹ It is also an industry navigating a period of significant pressure, facing concurrent challenges of workforce shortage, an ageing driver demographic, ongoing regulatory reform, and growing demands around decarbonisation and technological adaptation.

This summary report presents result highlights from the report entitled "Women in Trucking: Perceptions, Contributions and Experiences of Truck Drivers in Australia"². It provides a brief overview of the industry's worker profile, gender structure, scholarly literature on gender in road transportation work, and presents findings from a mixed-method study examining the perceptions of women truck drivers and their experiences of the challenges and opportunities shaping their participation in the Australian trucking industry.

Workforce profile

The profile of truck drivers is characterised by an ageing worker demographic, a strong gender imbalance, and the pervasive presence of precarity. Truck drivers have been described as one of the oldest workforces in the world.³ Jobs and Skills Australia report the median age of heavy truck drivers is 48 years, significantly higher than the national workforce median age of 40 years.⁴ In the United Kingdom, the average age of road haulage drivers is 57.⁵

In Australia as of April 2026, the total truck driving workforce is estimated at 195,800 truck drivers.⁶ Contrasting sharply with the 'all occupation' average of 49% female share of employment, only 6% of the broader truck driver workforce are women.⁶ This participation rate reflects a gradual increase from less than 3% to 6% of drivers over the last decade due to targeted industry initiatives. Focusing on just truck drivers who drive heavy trucks that require specially endorsed licences to transport bulky goods (e.g., heavy rigid, heavy combination, multi-combination, etc.), women only constitute 4%. Most women in the sector are employed in clerical, administrative and managerial roles.⁷

Table 1: Road freight transport workforce profile

Truck drivers in Australia	Truck (general)	Liquids tanker	Aircraft refuellers	Tow trucks	Furniture removal	Total truck drivers	All Occupations
Drivers (number)	148,400	3,800	710	2,600	5,800	195,800	
Median age (years)	48	52	46	45	32	45	40
Female drivers	4%	3%	8%	2%	5%	6%	49%
Part time drivers	16%	11%	22%	22%	54%	13%	31%
Average hours/week	50	52	42	49	43	49	44

Source: Jobs and Skills Australia 2026 (Note: the breakdown shows only the five primary categories of trucks as per Jobs and Skills Australia website)

Workforce sustainability is a salient concern for the road transport industry. NatRoad reports that the industry is navigating a sustained driver shortage of around 28,000 unfilled positions and, given the ageing workforce profile and existing recruitment challenges, projects the shortfall could grow to 78,000 positions by 2029⁸. The future introduction of autonomous vehicles in road transport is unlikely to more than marginally offset these labour shortages, even in the medium to long-term, given the regulatory, OHS and other issues that would need to be addressed. This has led to a focus on international recruitment strategies and fed pressure for faster licencing pathways to attract new drivers.

Crucially, the juxtaposition of a national workforce shortage despite untapped workforce segments reinforces a need to examine structural barriers to women's participation. At 6% of the driver population, women remain severely under-represented. Yet tight margins threaten to compound the structural barriers women already navigate, reducing employers' capacity to invest in entry-level training, facilities for women, or flexible job design, thereby intensifying barriers likely to discourage women. Given limited progress in attracting females to truck driving roles in recent decades, closer examination of the perceptions and experiences of female truck drivers is not only warranted but urgently required to inform policy and practice.

Brief Literature Review



With Australian female participation in trucking reflecting global trends, there is a persistent and deeply entrenched gender gap that points to a significant untapped opportunity.

The transport industry remains one of the most male-dominated industries in the world,⁹ and Australia is no exception. With Australian female participation in trucking reflecting global trends,⁴ there is a persistent and deeply entrenched gender gap that points to a significant untapped opportunity.

The business case for increasing women's participation in transport is compelling and urgent. With an ageing workforce exacerbating the labour shortage in Australia,¹⁰ women represent an underutilised talent pool the industry cannot afford to overlook. Available research on women in transport careers revealed that they contribute skills and characteristics beneficial for the industry. These include, but are not limited to, statistically better safety records (e.g., fewer crashes, convictions and violations),¹¹ as well as strengths in equipment care and customer service,¹² which translates to operational and financial benefits.¹³ At the organisational level, workforce gender diversity has been associated with better team performance, stronger sustainability outcomes, and increased firm performance.¹⁴

However, these positive contributions remain difficult to fully realise in an industry that has significant structural and cultural barriers for women. The persistence of the "King of the Road" mythology which frames trucking as inherently "men's work" that requires physical strength and male toughness establishes a gendered ideal worker norm that women must constantly work against.¹⁵ This gendered ideal persists despite strides in transport technologies that have made driving and handling transport equipment more inclusive and accessible.¹⁶ In addition, research among road safety instructors found that pervasive assumptions about women's biological and temperamental "unsuitability" function as active gatekeeping mechanisms further limiting industry access and career advancement opportunities.^{16, 17} The industry's broader "blokey" culture further compounds these barriers.

While there are undeniable challenges, there are also opportunities for women in trucking. Momentum for greater inclusion and reform is growing with efforts from international agencies such as the World Bank.¹² Driven by industry initiatives and advocacy groups in countries like Australia,¹⁸ Mexico,¹⁹ USA,²⁰ and Ukraine,¹⁹ there is a burgeoning group of practitioners, academics, and advocates who are working towards greater gender diversity and inclusion in the trucking industry.

Taken together, the current research makes clear that women have a great deal to offer the trucking industry in areas of safety, operational performance, and organisational culture among many others. Indeed, the transport industry stands to benefit significantly from their greater inclusion. Acknowledging this potential are calls for more research to better understand what enables women to enter, remain, and thrive in this industry.

Method



This study of the career experiences and contributions of female truck drivers in Australia gathered broad perceptions about women in trucking from the general trucking industry, including truck drivers, trainers, advocates, and other key informants. This research was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do female truck drivers join the trucking industry?
2. How or in what ways do female truck drivers contribute to the trucking industry?
3. What are the challenges female truck drivers experience in the trucking industry?
4. How do female truck drivers cope with these challenges?
5. What helpful resources and/or interventions can be retained and/or developed to help female truck drivers thrive in this industry?

This study employed a mixed-method research design, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to address the research aims. The research team utilised three complementary forms of data collection discussed next.

Semi-structured interviews

The semi-structured interviews were designed to develop a rich, in-depth understanding of women's career experiences in the trucking industry—how they enter, contribute, and navigate the challenges of a male-dominated sector—alongside broader perspectives from those who train, employ, represent and work with them. The interviews offered rich data, allowing participants to explain in their own words the cultural and structural dynamics shaping women's participation and to surface nuances that structured survey items could not.

Interviews were conducted with 20 participants: 9 female drivers and 11 key informants, many of whom also had direct experience as truck drivers. Two key informants were male, one of whom was both a trainer and a driver. Participants were drawn from across the road transport sector and its diverse industries—including agriculture, civil construction, mining, long-haul freight and local delivery—as well as advocacy groups, industry associations, transport companies and training providers.

Online survey

An online survey aimed to capture more broadly the perceptions, experiences and working conditions of Australian truck drivers, gathering evidence on how the industry views women drivers and broader insights into the realities of daily work. By reaching a large, national sample of drivers, the survey complemented the in-depth interviews and site observations; allowing the study to test whether patterns raised in individual accounts held across the wider driving population and ground its findings in the lived context of the trucking workforce.

This Australian Transport Industry Survey was an anonymous, online survey distributed nationally to truck drivers, primarily through drivers' Facebook groups. The Qualtrics survey ran from 10th December 2025 to 31st March 2026. The final sample of 489 usable responses sat 27% above the target of 385 responses and the gender and age profiles closely mirrored the broader road transport industry. Over 96.5% of survey respondents were male (women comprised just 3.3%), and respondents were skewed toward older drivers, with 7% aged 55 or above and 71% reporting more than 20 years of driving experience.

Site visit and field observations

The interviews were complemented by a site visit to Geraldton, Western Australia, hosted by the Pilbara Heavy Haulage Girls from 9th to 14th November 2025. As a regional freight hub servicing grain, mining and agricultural corridors, Geraldton offered a setting in which the conditions of regional and remote heavy vehicle work could be observed in context.

Findings



4.1 About the industry

Despite its economic scale, the industry has long resisted diversification of its workforce. Trucking is widely characterised internationally as archetypal “men’s work”, shaped by a persistent mythology that frames driving as requiring masculine physical strength and temperament. This cultural framing has real consequences: it limits who feels able to enter, who is welcomed when they do, and who is supported to stay.

4.1.1 Male-dominated industry profile

The gender profile of the Australian trucking industry is unambiguously male-dominated. Interview participants confirmed this as an undeniable daily reality, with many women describing working their entire careers without encountering another female driver in their company or on the road. While there is a clear and growing sentiment that the industry is in slow transition toward greater gender diversity, participants were equally clear about how far it still has to go.

4.1.2 Labour shortage

There is an undeniable industry labour shortage that has produced what many participants described as a “bums on seats” mentality. Operators were reported to be hiring people whose skills and standards they would not previously have accepted, although few of these are women. This has serious road safety implications, with both survey and interview data documenting a sharp and widely perceived decline in the competency of newer drivers entering the industry. This also has gendered implications, with women facing greater scrutiny and pressure to prove their competence in an industry in flux.

“They have to hire people whose skills and standards are less and less. They have to hire them because we need bums on seats.” — KI02, Male key informant

While the labour shortage also strengthens the business case for women’s inclusion, participants were clear that numbers alone are not enough. All those entering the industry must be well-trained, competent, and legitimately licensed. This concern connects directly to deep dissatisfaction with current driver training and licensing arrangements.

4.1.3 Driver training and licensing

Driver training was widely criticised as inadequate. Participants reported that courses typically run one to two days, are over-reliant on online delivery, and focus on compliance rather than practical skills. Both male and female participants advocated strongly for an apprenticeship model, more supervised driving time, and structured mentoring both before and after licensing.

On licensing, participants consistently opposed faster licencing pathways, calling instead for more demonstrated experience before progressing through licence classes, regular reconfirmation of skills, and stronger oversight of international licence conversions, particularly for multi-combination vehicles.

4.2 Women in trucking

The findings examine women's place in the Australian trucking industry from three angles: whether women are genuinely welcomed, how they find their way into driving roles, and what they bring once they are there. Together our findings paint a picture of an industry that has begun to acknowledge women's value but has not yet created the conditions for their full participation. Women are present, capable, and where conditions are genuinely inclusive, demonstrably effective contributors to the workforce. The barriers to their fuller participation are structural in nature, not a reflection of individual capacity or inclination.

"Who doesn't want to drive a big truck? Like, it's pretty cool. It's really cool." — DR2, Female Driver

4.2.1 Are women welcome?

Survey data reveal a telling gap between opportunity and genuine inclusion. While 86% of respondents agreed that opportunities exist for women to enter the industry, agreement softened considerably when the question shifted from opportunity to welcome, with only 72% agreeing that women drivers are actually welcome. Further, only 66% agreed that the industry would benefit from more women drivers, suggesting that even among those broadly supportive, there is still a persistent gap between the industry's stated openness to women and the reality women encounter.

Conditions vary considerably across industry settings. Agriculture and regional workplaces tend to be somewhat more accepting of female drivers; construction and metropolitan contexts present more entrenched barriers.

Table 2: Survey participants' attitudes towards women in transport

Item	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	Int
There is opportunity for women to enter the transport industry (n=449)	227 (51%)	159 (35%)	44 (10%)	13 (3%)	6 (1%)	4.31	SA
The transport industry will benefit from more women drivers (n=448)	169 (38%)	126 (28%)	126 (28%)	14 (3%)	13 (3%)	3.95	SA
Women drivers are welcome in the transport industry (n=448)	147 (33%)	174 (39%)	84 (19%)	33 (7%)	10 (2%)	3.93	SA

Note. Percentages are based on the proportion of responses for each item. Mean pertains to the average responses for the item. Int refers to response interpretation. SA means "Somewhat Agree".

This discrepancy between stated openness and experienced reality is one of the central findings of this research. The trucking industry has, in recent years, increasingly embraced the language of inclusion. Women are acknowledged as an untapped talent pool, diversity is named as a goal, and targeted initiatives have been introduced to support entry to the sector. Yet the conditions women actually encounter on the job tell a more complicated story, one in which formal welcome and everyday experience remain substantially out of step as captured in the advice of an experienced female driver to potential female recruits entering the industry.

"Sadly, I feel like as far along as we've come, I would still say to a young woman: if this is what you want to do, do it. Don't let anybody stop you. You are more than capable of everything and anything. [But] have thick skin. That would be my advice." — DR3, Female Driver

4.2.2 How women enter trucking

The findings suggest women enter the industry through three broad pathways, and their motivations rarely fit a single narrative. What runs across all of them is a combination of autonomy, financial reward, and freedom from office-based hierarchies that appeals to women who want to work on their own terms.

The first salient and common pathway is family connections and early exposure. For many participants, growing up on farms, around trucks, or in family transport businesses normalised heavy vehicles from an early age and made obtaining a licence a practical and logical step.

"Essentially I was pretty well born into it. Mum and dad had trucks. I spent a fair bit of time in the passenger seat with my mum, carting primarily dairy cattle around. That's where my love of livestock came from."

– DR6, Female Driver

The second pathway is deliberate career choice. Many women described a long-held attraction to trucking and from the outset have clear plans and long-term goals in the industry. They also expressed their appreciation of the freedom, sense of empowerment, independence, and camaraderie that comes with driving a heavy vehicle.

"I like the freedom of being out on the road and not having to have a manager looking over my shoulder... I loved like the confidence I got from that, and like the camaraderie."

– DR2, Female Driver

The third pathway is accessibility. Unlike many professions, trucking does not require a university degree and can be entered directly, making it an attractive option for women seeking well-paid, independent work without years of study or significant upfront investment.

"Look, if you're gonna work all the time, you'll make good money. This is something you can get into without graduate qualifications. No HECS debt."

– KI07, Key Informant

One of the more unexpected findings of this research was the degree to which trucking also functions as a pathway out of domestic violence. The combination of mobile accommodation, financial autonomy, and geographic anonymity that long-haul driving provides can represent a genuine lifeline for women fleeing dangerous situations. Unlike many industries where entry requires stable housing or significant financial resources as a precondition, trucking can simultaneously offer a job, an income, and a place to live.

"I come from a really bad domestic violence situation. A friend of mine said to me, if you promise the girls won't get in the truck, you can come and drive for me. I already had my truck licence."

– KID01, Trainer/Driver

This participant went on to become a trainer and now actively channels that experience into supporting others in similar situations. The pathway can become self-reinforcing when women who have navigated it are positioned to bring others through.

"We do a lot of work with domestic violence survivors. We've got four at the moment."

– KID01, Trainer/Driver

The practical dimensions of this pattern were also observed by a male industry stakeholder, who noted that interstate driving in particular offers a rare and valuable combination of employment and accommodation for women who are financially precarious or homeless following relationship breakdown.

"If you get a job interstate, you get a mobile home as well as a job. A lot of ladies of a certain age and marital status, divorced, homeless. It's an incredible untapped resource." — KI03, Male Key Informant

This intersection between employment in trucking, and domestic violence or homelessness, is largely absent from public policy.

4.3 Women's contributions to the trucking industry

Participants across interviews and the survey consistently identified five strengths women bring to the industry. It is worth noting that these observations reflect perceived patterns rather than fixed characteristics, and should not be read as reinscribing gendered expectations. They are documented here because they carry direct operational and financial significance, and because they make a concrete case for the industry's stated interest in greater inclusion.

4.3.1 Detail orientation

Detail orientation and care across all aspects of the job were among the qualities most consistently cited. Women were described as applying precision consistently and in ways that reduced errors and improved outcomes.

"Women do not cut corners in the trucking industry. Regardless of what they're doing, whether they're strapping down [loads] or filling out paperwork, they make sure it's done properly." — KI06, Key Informant/Driver

4.3.2 Equipment care

Women were consistently described as treating vehicles with a sense of custodial responsibility, understanding that a truck represents significant financial value and someone's livelihood. They were more likely to raise mechanical issues proactively rather than let problems go unreported, with tangible benefits for vehicle lifespan and operational reliability.

"I'm in the truck more than I am at home, so I look after it very well. I drive it nicely. I've seen a lot of men who drive very rough. I feel like women are a good asset. They look after the gear, they're smooth on the gear."
— DR5, Female Driver

4.3.3 Communication

Strong communication practices were identified as a professional strength with direct operational benefits. Clear, consistent communication with dispatch and clients was described as producing better outcomes for companies and contributing to stronger working relationships across the supply chain.

"Females communicate really well. As a result, companies have happier clientele because they're getting that communication." — KI06, Key Informant/Driver

4.3.4 Empathy and patience

Several participants pointed to empathy and patience as qualities women brought to workplace interactions, with women described as more attuned to what colleagues might be going through and more likely to respond with understanding.

"They'll know this person might be having some problems at home. And they can have a bit more empathy, whereas the guys in the industry, it's more like, just toughen up princess." — KI02, Male Driver

4.3.5 Foster positive work environments

Perhaps most significant from an industry culture perspective, participants described women's presence as having a moderating effect on workplace conduct more broadly. Male colleagues reported moderating their language and behaviour around women in ways that made workplaces more respectful overall.

"I think sometimes men have changed their attitude a little bit around women in the workforce. Men have a little bit better manners around women. They swear a little bit less. The topics of discussion change. A little bit more family friendly, you might say. I've found that I tend to be a little bit more polite." — KI02, Male Driver

Taken together, these contributions point to a workforce that brings genuine and measurable value to the industry. The central finding of this research is not that women need the industry to do them a favour by including them. It is that the industry needs women, and is currently failing to create the conditions that would allow their full participation.

4.4 Challenges for women in trucking

While the industry shows signs of transition towards developing a more diverse workforce, women in trucking navigate a range of serious and overlapping challenges. Survey respondents were asked to rate the likelihood of women experiencing specific challenges, with results showing that scrutiny of technical competence (74%), work-life conflict (72%), and risk of sexual harassment (70%) were each considered extremely or somewhat likely by a substantial majority of drivers.

Table 3: Survey respondents' perceptions of challenges for women in the transport industry

Item	Extremely Likely	Somewhat Likely	Neither Likely nor Unlikely	Somewhat Unlikely	Extremely Unlikely	Mean	Int
Scrutiny of technical competence (n=445)	147 (33%)	182 (41%)	93 (21%)	19 (4%)	4 (1%)	4.01	SL
Work-family conflict (n=446)	116 (26%)	205 (46%)	116 (26%)	5 (1%)	4 (1%)	3.95	SL
Risk of sexual harassment (n=445)	110 (25%)	200 (45%)	100 (22%)	23 (5%)	12 (3%)	3.84	SL
Gender discrimination (n=446)	97 (22%)	184 (41%)	115 (26%)	26 (6%)	24 (5%)	3.68	SL
Tensions with male drivers (n=446)	57 (13%)	188 (42%)	159 (36%)	31 (7%)	11 (2%)	3.56	SL
Unequal access to career opportunity (n=445)	70 (16%)	160 (36%)	140 (32%)	45 (10%)	30 (7%)	3.44	N
Isolation from the transport community (n=446)	41 (9%)	155 (35%)	168 (38%)	55 (12%)	27 (6%)	3.29	N
Tensions with female transport drivers (n=445)	21 (5%)	106 (24%)	231 (52%)	60 (13%)	27 (6%)	3.08	N

Note. n is the number of responses. Percentages are based on proportion of responses for the item. Mean pertains to the average response. Int pertains to response interpretation. SL means "Somewhat Likely", N means "Neither Likely nor Unlikely"

4.4.1 Industry culture

A persistent 'blokey' culture remains one of the most significant structural barriers women face. Many described working their entire careers as the only woman in their company, in environments where female drivers were rare enough that encountering another woman on the road was a notable event. Geographic and sectoral variation exists: agriculture and regional workplaces tend to be more accepting, while construction and metropolitan contexts present more entrenched barriers. But the challenges persist across all contexts.

"A lot of the culture is old school. There are some supportive men and great workplaces, but there are also environments where women consistently have to prove themselves. Respect isn't always given. Women often have to earn it twice as hard. There's a mix of mateship, resilience, high expectations and strong personalities. There's also still sexism, gatekeeping and harassment in some workplaces." — DR4, Female Driver

Excessive working hours compound these challenges considerably. Over a third of survey respondents worked between 61 and 80 hours per week, and a further 24% worked between 51 and 60 hours. Long hours normalise fatigue and social isolation, and leave little room for the kind of relationship-building that might otherwise help women find their footing in a new workplace. For many, the working day leaves no space for rest, recovery, or personal life.

"Working full throttle definitely plays with your mental health. You sleep, you eat, you wake up, you do it all over again." — DR5, Female Driver

Increasing automation at delivery sites has further reduced the brief human contact that historically helped offset the loneliness of long-haul driving. Key informants noted that women, who may be more likely to seek conversation and social connection, are disproportionately affected by its absence. The mental health impacts of isolation are significant and remain inadequately supported by the industry. Drivers described the psychological weight of managing emotional distress on the road, far from home and without adequate support structures, while still being required to safely operate heavy machinery.

“Going from local to interstate is a very big mental health jump. It’s a lot different being stuck in that cab every day and not getting out of it.” – DR5, Female Driver

4.4.2 Work-life conflict

Trucking job design continues to assume a worker with minimal commitments outside work. This structural assumption disadvantages anyone with caring responsibilities, but its impact falls disproportionately on women, who continue to carry the greater share of domestic and caring labour in Australian households.

Survey data show that caring responsibilities are more widespread across the trucking workforce than is commonly assumed. Fifty-two percent of respondents, the majority of them male, reported having caring responsibilities. Of those, 47% said those responsibilities affected their work. This is not a niche issue confined to a minority of drivers; it is a majority experience that the industry’s job design has not caught up with.

Table 4: Caring responsibilities of survey participants

Item	Frequency	Percentage	Male		Female	
			Freq	%	Freq	%
Have caring responsibilities?						
Yes	254	52%	243	51%	10	63%
No	230	47%	225	48%	5	31%
Who they care for?						
Adult children	66	13%	63	13%	3	19%
Elderly parent/family	58	12%	54	11%	4	25%
Adolescents	57	12%	55	12%	1	6%
Young children	48	10%	45	10%	2	12%
Person with a disability	30	6%	29	6%	1	6%
Spouse or partner	27	6%	27	6%	0	0%
Did caring responsibilities affect work?						
Yes	112	47%	107	47%	4	40%
No	92	39%	87	38%	5	50%
Prefer not to say	33	14%	32	14%	1	10%

Note. All Frequencies (Freq) refers to frequency of affirmative responses. For male and female results, percentages refer to proportion of submitted responses within the gender category. Only those who had caring responsibilities were asked if these affected their work (n=237 responses received).

Women's caring loads are particularly pronounced. Female respondents were more likely than male respondents to be caring for elderly parents or family members (25% compared to 11%), and more likely overall to report having caring responsibilities (63% compared to 51%). The survey data also reveal caring burdens that extend well beyond early parenthood, spanning adolescents, adult children, elderly relatives, and people with illness or disability, a breadth of responsibility that industry policy rarely acknowledges.

"I've got kids now, and I mean, we have our own business so we can organise around us, but to drive full-time and have particularly young children — it just wouldn't work." — DR6, Female Driver

For women without the flexibility of self-employment, the tension is sharper. The long and unpredictable hours of trucking make it genuinely incompatible with primary caring responsibilities for many women, not as a matter of personal preference but as a structural reality.

"This isn't a job I could do with kids. It's just not realistic." — DR9, Female Driver

Pregnancy presents a particular pressure point. Many trucking workplaces have no policy to cover it, and the burden of managing the situation falls entirely on the woman. One participant lost her assessor accreditation at thirty-six weeks pregnant because she could no longer physically undertake the required number of assessments. Rather than exploring adjustments, her employer applied the standard rule with no further discussion.

"They were like 'we've never had a pregnant assessor before, we don't know what to do'... instead of stopping and asking you a question about what would suit you, it was like 'well, this is the standard.'" — KI04, Key Informant/Driver

The loss of accreditation was not simply an administrative inconvenience but a significant professional setback. Beyond the immediate workplace, she also described the abruptness of moving from supervising forty people in a workshop to being at home alone with a baby virtually overnight, and the loss of professional identity that accompanied it. These experiences point to an industry in which pregnancy and motherhood remain largely unplanned for, with the costs borne almost entirely by women.

4.4.3 Sexism and discrimination

Women drivers routinely navigate a workplace culture shaped by entrenched gendered assumptions about who belongs behind the wheel. Despite their experience and competence, women frequently encounter aggressive language, dismissal of their capabilities, and a pervasive scepticism about their right to be there at all. Seventy-four percent of male survey respondents agreed that scrutiny of female drivers' technical competence is extremely likely or somewhat likely, a finding that reflects not just individual attitudes but a structural feature of the working environment women encounter.

One of the most common forms this takes is unsolicited guidance from male colleagues; advice that implicitly assumes a level of incompetence, regardless of the woman's work experience or track record.

"I'll have some of the guys come up to me and say, hey, what you need to do is go up this hill in this gear... myself, oh, thank you. That I've been doing this for 20 years." — KID01, Trainer/Driver

This credibility-questioning extends across roles. Women in training and instructional positions described having their expertise undermined by men who reframed the use of modern, accessible equipment as evidence of lesser skill rather than technological progress. The 'King of the Road' mythology, which frames trucking as requiring masculine physical toughness, continues to function as a gatekeeping mechanism even as the technology of the job has moved on.

"In the new truck I have, I have electric tarps, so I just press a button." — DR5

Discriminatory attitudes surface from management as well as co-workers. Some women described supervisors who openly stated their opposition to female drivers, and who used workplace authority to make their positions untenable.

"I've literally had supervisors say women have no place in this job. They would give me the jobs that everybody hated to try and push me out. Me being me went: I'll do it. I don't care." — DR3, Female Driver

"I've worked in a company where the [discriminatory] behaviour is ignored or sometimes the behaviour comes from the top. It's that culture of masculinity where you basically keep your head down, get your work done, you get all the crap work, and you just have to take your licks. If you don't like it, there's the gate." — DR4, Female Driver

The consequences of sexism extend into economic life. Some women described clients withdrawing work upon discovering a woman would be driving. One participant recounted that her husband was initially presented as the driver during negotiations in order to secure contracts. This kind of gatekeeping directly constrains women's access to employment and income in ways that are difficult to challenge and easy to disguise.

Beyond these more visible forms of discrimination, participants described deliberate sabotage that is harder to prove but carries real consequences for women's safety and job security. Equipment was tampered with, unroadworthy vehicles were allocated, and safety concerns were dismissed using gendered language designed to delegitimise them.

"One of the girls I mentored was given the worst truck in the yard. They actually went out to the paddock where this truck had been put out to pasture and brought it in. That's your truck. She kept taking it down to the workshop and they'd say there's nothing wrong with it, you're trying to cause trouble, stop tagging the truck out, you're just a pampered woman who wants a new truck. The truck was not roadworthy. She was stuck between a rock and a hard place because they told her if she keeps tagging the truck out, they're going to sack her." — KI06, Key Informant/Driver

This account captures how gender bias and institutional power can combine to place women in positions of acute vulnerability, with their safety and their livelihoods held in tension by those with authority over both. That a woman's legitimate and legally grounded decision to tag out an unroadworthy vehicle was reframed as personal fussiness illustrates the depth of the problem. These are not isolated incidents but patterns, and they point to a structural accountability deficit that individual resilience cannot resolve.

4.4.4 Sexual harassment

Experiences of sexual harassment were reported across all interviews, ranging from persistent gendered comments (e.g., sexist remarks, undermining) to unwelcome sexual attention to serious incidents of physical intimidation and assault. These were not isolated events but part of a pattern of exposure to risk and hostility that male colleagues did not share, and that the industry has been slow to address with the seriousness it warrants.

Table 5: Types of sexual harassment male and female drivers experienced

Types of sexual harassment	Frequency	Percentage
Suggestive comments	151	31%
Intrusive personal questions	77	16%
Prefer not to say	63	13%
Sexual gestures	61	12%
Inappropriate leering	56	11%
Unwelcome touching	41	8%
Inappropriate physical contact	34	7%
Others	26	5%
Explicit images or messages	22	4%
Repeated invitations to date	18	4%
Online harassment	13	3%
Pressure for sex	10	2%

Note. N=489. Percentage pertains to proportion of total respondents.

Seventy percent of survey respondents perceived the sexual harassment of female drivers as extremely likely or somewhat likely. The most common forms reported were suggestive comments (31%), intrusive personal questions (16%), sexual gestures (12%), and inappropriate leering (11%), though unwelcome touching, explicit messages, and pressure for sex were also documented. Perpetrators included other truck drivers, customers, site managers, and other road users, reflecting the breadth of the work environments in which women are exposed to this conduct.

The scale of underreporting is deeply concerning. Survey participants indicated that only 20% of the incidents they had experienced or observed were reported formally. Forty-eight percent went unreported entirely, and for a further 31%, respondents indicated they preferred not to say; a response that itself signals the barriers women face in disclosing. When reports were made, outcomes were frequently poor, with accounts of incidents being dismissed, minimised, or met with institutional silence.

“Something happened, and I reported it, and just yeah, like, swept under the rug.” — DR1, Female Driver

“One of these supervisors took two of my girls by himself, one at a time, and started touching her hair. I went to HR about it. I quickly learned that HR is not there to protect workers. They said, if you didn’t see or hear it, it didn’t happen.”

— KID01, Trainer/Driver

UHF radio communication emerged as a specific and underappreciated enabler of harassment. The anonymity it affords allows perpetrators to avoid accountability in ways that face-to-face interaction would not permit. One participant documented five separate incidents of sexual harassment over the radio, including threats of sexual assault, in a single work week.

"Within seven days I'd already had to fill out five incident reports of sexual harassment, including threats of sexual assault over the UHF." — DR9, Female Driver

The experience of harassment extended beyond radio communication. Women described receiving unsolicited contact after men obtained their phone numbers from site sign-in sheets, being subjected to inappropriate physical contact, and being badmouthed on alternative radio channels by colleagues who assumed they were not listening.

"I just had this gut feeling to put my radio on scan. I did and I caught them on another channel, badmouthing me. So I recorded them... I almost left my job because of that. I was like, I don't deserve that." — KI06, Key Informant/Driver

When women did attempt to report harassment, the response from employers and industry bodies was often grossly inadequate. One participant's employer contacted a director at another company after one of their drivers harassed DR9 over the radio, proposing a collaborative response. The manager from the other company flatly rejected this, saying he did not believe the harassment had occurred and, even if it had, it was "just the industry." This response encapsulates the problem: harassment normalised as an occupational feature rather than treated as the serious workplace health and safety issue it is. The accountability deficit is not simply a matter of individual bad actors. It is structural, enabled by an industry culture that has historically treated women's safety as a secondary concern, and by reporting mechanisms that are neither accessible, responsive, nor trusted.

4.4.5 Physical health and safety

Women face specific and compounding physical health and safety risks in the course of their working lives that male colleagues largely do not encounter. These range from the mundane but persistent problem of inadequate hygiene infrastructure to serious incidents of physical intimidation, confrontation, and assault.

The absence of appropriate toilet and shower facilities at rest areas, worksites, and service centres is one of the most consistently reported practical barriers for women. Many rest areas have no female facilities at all, or provide unisex facilities that are poorly maintained, unclean, and unsafe. Women describe planning entire routes around hygiene needs, carrying personal supplies including hand sanitiser, soap, and sanitary products as a matter of necessity, and in some cases resorting to improvised solutions because no adequate alternative exists.

"Shortage of suitable toilets and sanitary facilities disproportionately affects women, leading to health compromises including dehydration and the use of extended birth control to avoid menstruation at work." — DR2, Female Driver

"Scarcity of toilets and showers at ports and along highways requires drivers to plan ahead; drivers sometimes resort to makeshift solutions." — DR5, Female Driver

The problem is recognised well beyond the women who experience it directly. Male survey respondents also identified the poor cleanliness and suitability of facilities as a significant issue; with some acknowledging the particular burden this placed on women.

"The lack of clean toilets and showers is a problem for men, it must be dreadful for women." — S245, Male Driver

"Women obviously have different needs to male counterparts. Facilities are barely adequate for men, let alone women." — S229, Male Driver

Drivers recounted how their suggestions to site managers about improvements to facilities were often met with confusion or resistance. Those making decisions about infrastructure, participants observed, have typically never had to use the facilities in question. Some women did report incremental progress at individual sites, and noted that raising concerns about facilities sometimes led to improvements that benefited all staff. But progress remains uneven and far from systematic.

Personal security presents a deeper and more serious layer of risk. Women travelling alone on long-haul routes described a heightened and constant awareness of physical vulnerability, particularly when stopping overnight at rest areas. This is most acutely felt where phone service is unavailable. Several participants recounted experiences that went well beyond discomfort, including intimidation, physical confrontation, and sexual assault.

"I got sexually assaulted and I got pushed up against a shed because I had a bloke go, who the hell do you think you are?" — DR3, Female Driver

"I was dragged under a road train by a colleague, and sent alone to remote worksites, often as the sole woman in the workshop or on site." — DR7, Female Driver

"And it's anything from just the typical, oh, get back in the kitchen, what are you doing, to I've been threatened with rape before, threatened with sexual assault." — DR9, Female Driver

These accounts are not outliers. They represent a pattern of gendered risk that women in this industry absorb individually, in the absence of adequate industry-level safety infrastructure or accountability. The physical safety of women on the road is not a peripheral concern. It is a core workforce sustainability issue that the industry has not yet treated with the urgency it demands.

4.5 Navigating industry challenges

As with the safety measures taken above, women drivers have developed sophisticated strategies to manage the demands of working in a male-dominated and at times hostile environment. These strategies demonstrate considerable resilience and capability. They also reveal a structural failure: women are largely left to manage systemic challenges through individual effort, in the absence of the industry-level support the sector has yet to provide.

4.5.1 Proving oneself

Women consistently described entering the industry on a kind of probation their male peers did not face. Mistakes were anticipated, acceptance had to be hard-earned over time, and competence had to be demonstrated repeatedly before receiving the baseline respect extended to men by default. For many, this dynamic extended well into established careers.

"You've got to really prove yourself. Once you've proven yourself, then it's fine. But you always feel like everyone's waiting for you to stuff up. It's kind of like, good luck. I still get it. Sink or swim." — DR2, Female Driver

"Spend a long, long time having to prove who I am. At least sometimes you do have to do 150% to be accepted." — KI01, Key Informant/Driver

While ultimately a catalyst for building confidence in many women, this dynamic places an inequitable burden on women from day one. That it is so widely described, and so widely accepted as simply how things are, points to how deeply the expectation is embedded in industry culture.

"But it took me saving a dude's life to get the same respect as a man just walking in off the street. But once I had their respect, that was it. One of the team, no issues." — KI04, Key Informant/Driver

4.5.2 Self-protection and vigilance

In response to the safety risks documented in the previous section, women have developed elaborate and largely invisible protective routines. These included avoiding isolated or poorly lit rest stops, wearing fake wedding rings to deter unwanted attention, maintaining informal check-in networks with other drivers and devising overnight security measures for their cabs.

"For me personally, I take my personal safety pretty seriously. If it's night time and I'm pulling up for the night, I will never sleep anywhere I don't have reception. I hook up all my lights. If a door opens, those lights come on. I pull my cab curtain shut before I turn all my lights off. I don't know who's in the parking bay and I don't want them to see that there's a female on her own in the truck. I lock my doors, pull my curtains. Then I use a bucket at night time to go to the toilet so I don't have to get out of my truck." — KI06, Key Informant/Driver

Drivers in remote or isolated areas were particularly vulnerable. Some reported having to self-fund essential security measures such as investing personally in satellite connectivity to maintain contact and ensure access to help in an emergency. In some cases, drivers reported moving their truck mid-rest break, despite regulatory restrictions, because they did not feel safe staying put.

"So I used to put a strap between the two doors so that no one could open them, which then puts me at risk of my truck setting on fire and killing me, or someone just being able to get in. So you're kind of like, what's worse?" — KI04, Key Informant/Driver

"I try and stay in the well-lit rest stops. If I do stop somewhere I don't feel safe, I've got people who have my location. I text them when I pull up and when I wake up. I just make sure someone knows where I am at all times." — DR4, Female Driver

Overall, women's responses to their vulnerability are unrecognised, elaborate, exhausting, and expensive. They represent a significant and invisible tax on women's time and energy that their male colleagues rarely pay.

4.5.3 Mentorship and networking

Both formal and informal mentoring relationships play a critical role in retaining women in the industry. Much of the most meaningful mentoring emerged organically through roadside conversations and peer relationships built over time, rather than from structured programmes. Even so, participants conveyed how organisations like Women in Trucking Australia provided vital national platforms for connection and support, and described them as transformative for their sense of belonging.

"Prior to coming across Women in Trucking, I felt very isolated in terms of having a sisterhood in the industry. A lot of the time, I was the only female." — KI04, Key Informant/Driver

Formal networks, however, often struggle to reach women in smaller companies or remote locations. Informal social media networks have helped fill that gap, creating communities of connection that geography and industry fragmentation would otherwise prevent. The value of mentorship is clearly understood by those who have benefited from it, and there is strong appetite across the industry for more structured and accessible pathways to connect experienced women with those just starting out.

4.5.4 Humour and personal advocacy

Humour emerged as a sustainable and effective tool for navigating hostile interactions, allowing women to signal confidence, disarm tension, and establish themselves on the industry's own terms without triggering defensiveness.

"Men will test you. They'll be like, oh yeah, what are you doing here, shouldn't women be in the kitchen? And I'm like, oh mate, you haven't seen my cooking, it'll kill a dog. And then they're like, right, we've got you, we understand who you are. But if you backpedal from that, they'll just go, oh, you're just gonna be another pain in the bum that we have to coddle along." — KI04, Key Informant/Driver

Alongside humour, women carry the largely invisible burden of daily personal advocacy: educating male colleagues about gender inequality, challenging assumptions, and navigating the structural constraint of having to do so in ways that do not cost them their place in the team. This work is uncompensated, unacknowledged, and falls entirely on women.

Taken together, these strategies paint a picture of an industry whose women are not passive victims but active, resourceful, and resilient contributors. The problem is not their capacity to cope. The problem is that coping should not be this much work.

Discussion and recommendations



5.1 Understanding women in trucking: An integration

The ecological systems framework²¹ offers a fitting lens for integrating these findings. Women's experiences in trucking are shaped not at a single level, but through the interplay of nested systems²²: broad cultural norms and structural inequalities at the societal level cascade to shape industry work cultures and practices, which in turn impose real costs on individual women who must navigate them largely alone.

At the industry level, the male-dominated profile, enduring 'blokey' culture, and inadequate support structures create a significant gap between stated openness to women and the conditions they actually encounter. At the individual level, women demonstrate extraordinary resilience and capability — but the burden of facilitating their own acceptance and success falls almost entirely on them. This is fragile and insufficient as a model for inclusion.

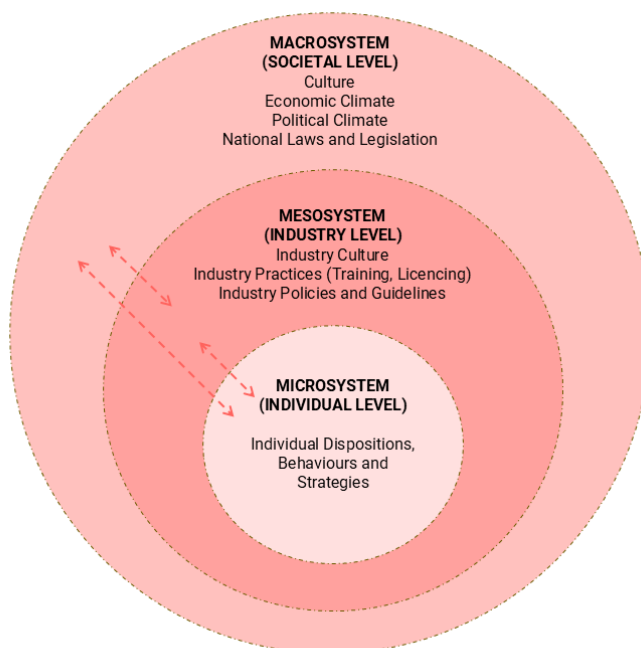


Figure 10. Ecological Systems Framework

Genuine change requires coordinated action across all three levels (see Figure 1). Societal policy must set expectations and resource accountability. Industry bodies must invest in culture change, infrastructure, and support systems. Individual women need better access to resources, rights information, and networks from day one. Without all three, the welcome extended to women will remain conditional and the industry will continue to lose the talent it urgently needs.

5.2 Societal level recommendations

- Set national workforce targets for women's participation in heavy vehicle transport, linking recruitment, training, licensing, and industry development funding to measurable progress toward those targets.
- Strengthen regulatory oversight of psychosocial hazards, including sexual harassment, across the industry's fragmented, subcontracted structure, ensuring the dispersed nature of employment does not shield perpetrators from accountability.
- Formalise pathways connecting women in domestic violence situations with licensing support, training opportunities, and employment in transport, through coordinated policy across transport, employment, and domestic violence portfolios.

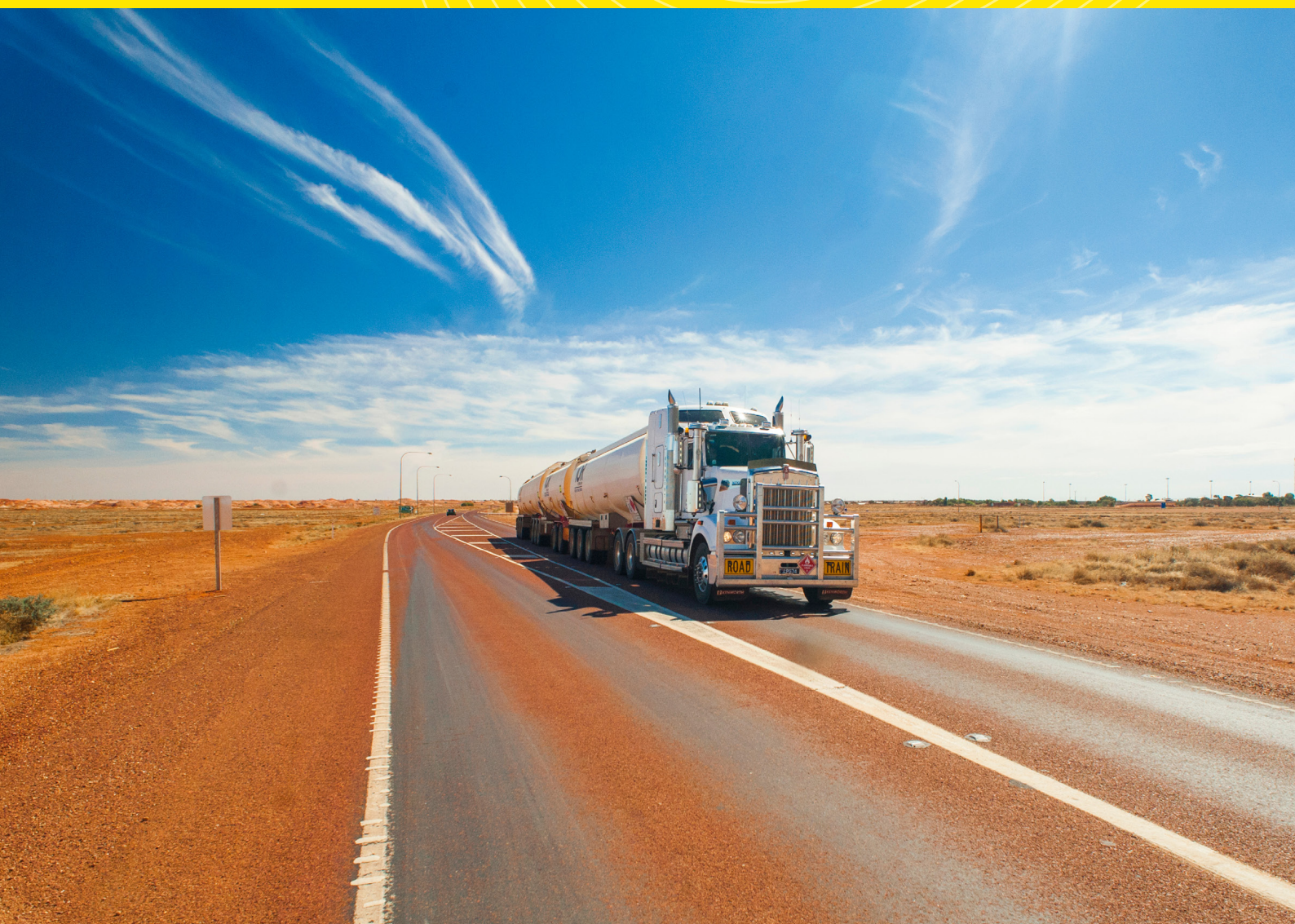
5.3 Industry level recommendations

- Drive genuine culture change through women-inclusive recruitment campaigns, bystander intervention training, and consistently enforced reporting mechanisms with clear workplace policies so women know their rights and employers know their obligations.
- Establish national minimum standards for rest areas and roadhouses covering safe and well-lit parking, clean shower and toilet facilities, and properly equipped female amenities. Monitor and enforce compliance.
- Build a national mentorship register connecting women new to the industry with experienced drivers offering peer-to-peer guidance and day-to-day support.
- Create a single accessible navigation point for industry support and resources, whether through a curated directory or an expanded role for a body such as Women in Trucking Australia or Healthy Heads in Trucks and Sheds.
- Offer structured career navigation support through training providers and industry entry programmes, helping women identify sectors and roles suited to their circumstances, skills, and lifestyle.
- Recognise and resource trucking as a pathway out of domestic violence through partnerships between domestic violence services, training providers, and industry bodies.

5.4 Individual level recommendations

- Promote licensing and upskilling resources, including programmes such as the NHVR and WiTA Foot in the Door initiative, with particular focus on reaching women in smaller companies and regional areas.
- Expand mental health and wellbeing resources to specifically address women's experiences, including managing harassment, personal safety concerns, and building peer connection.
- Ensure women entering the industry have clear, accessible information about their rights and available recourse from day one, distributed through training providers and industry entry points.

Conclusion



Recruiting more women into trucking is a worthy goal, but recruitment without retention is a revolving door.

This research confirms that women are not absent from Australian trucking by choice. They are present, capable, and where conditions support them, effective and valued contributors to a workforce facing a notable labour shortage. The barriers to women's fuller participation are structural, and addressing them requires coordinated action across government, industry, and organisations rather than individual effort and resilience alone.

Recruiting more women into trucking is a worthy goal, but recruitment without retention is a revolving door. The recommendations in this report are oriented toward the sustained, multi-level change that would make entering and staying in trucking genuinely viable for women, and genuinely beneficial for the industry.

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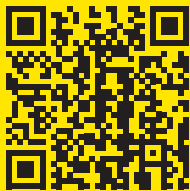
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