

SEO METADATA

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Grain Cartage Rates in Australia: What It Costs to Move Grain in 2026

Freight is one of the biggest line items in grain production, and one of the least talked about. According to AgriFutures research, logistics costs represent 27.5% of the gross value of Australian grain production. That's billions of dollars a year. Whether you're a farmer comparing delivery options or a carrier setting rates for the season, this guide covers what grain cartage actually costs per tonne across Australia in 2026.

How Grain Cartage Rates Are Structured

Grain freight in Australia is priced in one of two ways: a flat rate per tonne for short hauls (typically paddock to local silo), or a cents-per-tonne-kilometre rate for longer movements between depots, to feedlots, or to port.

The Australian Custom Harvesters association publishes suggested cartage rates each season. For 2025, the recommended rate for short-haul grain cartage (up to 10 km one way) was \$16.50 per tonne ex GST, with an additional \$0.10 per tonne for each extra kilometre beyond 10 km. These rates include demurrage (waiting time at the silo or receipt point).

For longer hauls, the industry typically works in cents per tonne-kilometre (c/t/km). This is where rates vary the most, depending on distance, truck configuration, fuel costs, and how much competition there is for loads in a given region.

What Grain Cartage Costs Right Now

Road freight rates for grain across eastern Australia have fluctuated significantly over the past few years. During the big export seasons of 2021 to 2023, rates on the Darling Downs and northern NSW reached as high as 22 c/t/km when trucks were in short supply and the export task was enormous.

Since then, rates have come back. Through 2024 and into early 2025, some carriers were booking loads for as little as 7 c/t/km in competitive patches, though that wasn't sustainable for most operators. The market appears to have settled in the range of 12 to 18 c/t/km for most east coast movements, depending on distance, volume, and route.

Grain Cartage: Typical Rate Ranges

Movement Type	Typical Rate	Notes
Paddock to local silo (under 10 km)	\$16 - \$18/tonne	Flat rate. Includes demurrage.
Short haul (10 - 50 km)	\$18 - \$25/tonne	Depends on road quality and turnaround time
Medium haul (50 - 150 km)	14 - 18 c/t/km	B-double or road train where permitted
Long haul (150 - 400 km)	12 - 16 c/t/km	Better rate per km on longer runs
Interstate / port (400+ km)	10 - 14 c/t/km	Often quoted as a flat \$/tonne figure

All rates exclude GST. Rates assume standard grain (wheat, barley, canola). Specialist loads may attract premiums.

To put those numbers in real terms: trucking wheat from the Vic border to a feedlot near Goondiwindi (roughly 700 km) was costing around \$115 per tonne through late 2024, based on Grain Central reporting. That's a big chunk of the grain's value when wheat is sitting around \$300 to \$350 per tonne.

What Pushes Grain Freight Rates Up or Down

Diesel price. Fuel is the single biggest variable cost for carriers. When diesel was tracking above \$2.00/L through early 2026, every long-haul load got more expensive. Some carriers apply a fuel levy that adjusts with the bowser price. If your quote doesn't mention fuel, ask whether it's built in or variable.

Distance and route. Longer runs generally mean a lower per-tonne-kilometre rate because the fixed costs of loading and unloading get spread over more kilometres. But route matters too. Sealed highways with good overtaking lanes are faster and cheaper to run than narrow B-roads through hilly country.

Truck configuration. A B-double carrying 40 to 44 tonnes is more efficient per tonne than a single trailer carrying 22 to 28 tonnes. Road trains (where permitted) are more efficient again. If you're comparing quotes, check what truck is being used.

Backloading. A carrier who can pick up a return load pays for fuel once instead of twice. Regions with strong two-way freight flows (grain out, fertiliser or livestock feed in) tend to have lower cartage rates than areas where trucks run empty one way.

Season and demand. Harvest is peak demand. Every grower wants grain moved at the same time, and truck availability tightens fast. Rates spike during harvest and ease off through the quieter months. If you can store grain on-farm and move it post-harvest, you'll almost always get a better freight rate.

Receival site wait times. Long queues at silos cost carriers hours of unproductive time. Some carriers factor expected wait times into their quote. GrainCorp and other bulk handlers publish estimated wait times during harvest, which is worth checking before you commit to a delivery schedule.

Should You Own a Truck or Hire a Carrier?

The same own-vs-hire question that applies to headers and spray rigs applies to grain trucks. A used B-double prime mover and set of trailers will set you back \$250,000 to \$400,000 depending on age and condition. Registration, insurance, maintenance and driver costs add up fast.

Research from ORM (a Victorian farm advisory group) estimated a total truck operating cost of around \$4.17 per loaded kilometre for a typical farm grain truck doing 100,000 km per year. That's competitive with contract rates, but only if you're moving enough volume to justify the capital. For a farm producing 8,000 tonnes of grain, the maths can work because the truck driver doubles as an extra worker during seeding and harvest. For smaller operations, contracting a carrier is almost always cheaper.

The advantage of using a carrier through a platform like **AgPages** is that you can compare multiple quotes, check availability, and book without spending half a day on the phone. For carriers, listing your services means you're visible to farmers who are actively looking for grain freight, especially during harvest when everyone is scrambling.

A Note on Western Australia

WA's grain freight market works differently to the east coast. CBH Group handles the bulk of grain logistics through its integrated supply chain, and publishes site-specific freight rates from each receival point to port. These rates ranged from under \$2/tonne for sites close to port (like Mirambeena near Albany) up to \$45/tonne or more for remote inland sites during the 2022/23 season.

If you're farming in WA, your freight cost is largely determined by which CBH zone you deliver into and how far your receival site is from port. The economics of private cartage still apply for paddock-to-silo movements, but the port freight is handled within the CBH system.

Find a Grain Carrier or List Your Trucking Services

For farmers: Post your grain cartage job on AgPages and compare quotes from carriers in your region. Whether it's harvest haulage to the local silo or a long-distance run to port, you can find available trucks without the phone tag.

For carriers: List your trucking services on AgPages and pick up grain freight work from farmers across NSW, QLD, SA, VIC and WA. Free to set up and it puts you in front of growers who need loads moved.

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