

SALARY GUIDE · UPDATED MAY 2026

# International Freight & Logistics Sales Salary Guide 2026

Total remuneration benchmarks for sales and commercial leadership across Australian international freight forwarding, contract logistics, 3PL, and cross-border trade — by role, by state, with market context.

## Executive summary

Global freight forwarding is a \$200B+ market and the Australian segment continues to consolidate around mid-tier 3PLs and the major global forwarders. After the volatility of 2021–2023 container rates and the subsequent normalisation, commercial-leadership salaries have settled into a steadier 5–8% year-on-year lift across the roles in this guide — driven less by rate inflation and more by the premium on hunters who can win complex, multi-modal, cross-border contracts.

The single biggest driver of pay inflation in this category is **contract complexity**. Sales leaders who can construct multi-modal solutions across air, ocean, road, and contract warehousing — and present them credibly to procurement teams at global shippers — command the top of the market. The pure ocean-FCL specialist role is being squeezed by digital freight platforms; the integrated logistics solution-seller is being paid more.

In contract logistics specifically, the premium category is the BDM who can sell bespoke 3PL solutions to enterprise FMCG, retail, and e-commerce shippers — where contract values are \$5M+ ACV and tenures run 3–5 years. Equity participation in PE-backed providers is now standard at Director level and above.

## Methodology

Figures are total annual remuneration in Australian dollars (AUD), expressed as **base salary + on-target earnings (OTE)**. OTE assumes 100% target achievement. Ranges represent the 25th to 75th percentile of the data available to us. Data is drawn from: published 2026 salary surveys (Hays, Robert Walters, SEEK Snapshot), advertised role data on Seek.com.au, and APB Strategy's own market mapping across more than 150 placements in Australian international freight and contract logistics. Sydney premium reflects port-proximate and CBD-based national commercial roles. State loadings apply uniformly across role bands.

## SALARY BANDS BY ROLE

## Base + OTE by sales role

Brisbane baseline. State loadings apply (see next section). All figures AUD '000.

| Role                                | Base (\$'000) | OTE (\$'000)       | Notes  |
|-------------------------------------|---------------|--------------------|--|
| <b>Business Development Manager</b> | \$120–\$160   | <b>\$170–\$240</b> | New-business focus; international freight + 3PL contracts \$1–10M ACV.                       |
| <b>Senior / Strategic BDM</b>       | \$140–\$190   | <b>\$220–\$310</b> | Enterprise accounts, multi-modal contracts \$5–25M ACV; equity common in PE-backed firms.    |
| <b>Sales Manager</b>                | \$150–\$200   | <b>\$220–\$290</b> | Branch / state team leadership (3–8 reps); personal book + team override.                    |
| <b>National Sales Manager</b>       | \$180–\$240   | <b>\$270–\$380</b> | Multi-state team leadership; national accounts strategy; full P&L; exposure.                 |
| <b>Commercial Director</b>          | \$220–\$300   | <b>\$370–\$520</b> | Owns commercial P&L; pricing, growth across freight + contract logistics. C-suite reporting. |
| <b>Sales Director / VP Sales</b>    | \$240–\$320   | <b>\$420–\$580</b> | Top-tier commercial leadership in 3PLs / global forwarders. Equity participation typical.    |

## STATE VARIATIONS

## Regional loading by capital city

| State                | Loading            | Context  |
|----------------------|--------------------|--|
| <b>Sydney NSW</b>    | <b>+5% to +10%</b> | Highest premium. Port and airport proximity; CBD national HQs; complex multi-modal portfolios.           |
| <b>Melbourne VIC</b> | <b>+3% to +5%</b>  | Strong second freight market. Port of Melbourne container traffic and contract logistics concentration.  |
| <b>Brisbane QLD</b>  | <b>Baseline</b>    | Used as the national reference for this guide. Strong domestic 3PL + Port of Brisbane growth.            |
| <b>Perth WA</b>      | <b>+5% to +10%</b> | Mining-driven logistics premium. Project freight and remote 3PL contracts command above-market packages. |

| State       | Loading    | Context  |
|-------------|------------|--|
| Adelaide SA | -3% to -5% | Smaller commercial freight market; defence-adjacent logistics and wine export are the upside categories. |

## MARKET TRENDS 2026

## What's moving the market

### Digital freight platforms are squeezing transactional sales roles

Pure ocean-FCL and simple LCL booking work is increasingly handled by digital platforms (Flexport, Forto, the legacy forwarders' own platforms). The commercial role that wins in 2026 is the one that pairs technical multi-modal knowledge with the ability to construct integrated logistics solutions — air-ocean splits, contract logistics overlays, customs and compliance bundling. Transactional freight sellers are seeing pay flatten or decline; solution sellers are getting premiums.

### Contract logistics is the highest-paying segment

BDMs and Sales Directors who can win bespoke 3PL contracts (\$5M+ ACV, 3–5 year terms) with FMCG, retail, e-commerce, and pharma shippers consistently sit at the top quartile of total remuneration. The work is harder — solution design, warehouse network strategy, technology integration — but contract values and tenure justify the premium. Expect 10–20% pay differential over equivalent pure freight forwarding roles.

### Sustainability and compliance are now revenue criteria

Global shippers — particularly ASX-listed retailers and FMCG — are now writing Scope 3 emissions reporting, ESG performance, and modern slavery compliance into RFTs as mandatory weighted criteria. Commercial leaders who can credibly speak to carbon accounting, sustainable freight options (rail substitution, biofuels, electric last-mile), and supply chain transparency are commanding visible premiums.

### PE consolidation is rewriting compensation at the top

Private equity ownership of Australian mid-tier 3PLs and forwarders has accelerated. PE-backed providers are increasingly offering equity-style participation (LTI plans, phantom equity, retention bonuses) to senior commercial hires — Commercial Directors, Sales Directors, Country GMs. Total package conversations should routinely include cash, variable, and equity-style components.

## HIRING INTELLIGENCE

## What the top-decile sales leader looks like

### Multi-modal fluency

Can construct credible solutions across air, ocean, road, rail, and contract logistics — and price each leg. Speaks Incoterms, ATA carnet, AEO, and modern slavery compliance without referring to notes.

### Operations credibility

Can hold a credible conversation with a head of operations about transit times, cost-per-TEU, dwell-time risk, and warehouse throughput. Buyers in logistics smell pure-sales people instantly; the best commercial leaders speak the operator's language.

### Procurement fluency

Reads RFTs and tender documents the way an accountant reads a P&L.; Knows the difference between weighted and non-weighted evaluation, and can spot deal-breakers (insurance limits, KPI penalties, peak-season surcharges, sustainability clauses) on a first read.

### Carrier and trade-lane network

Names the relationship managers at the right shipping lines, airlines, and domestic carriers. Has a current view of capacity on the key trade lanes (China to Aus, Aus to NZ, transpacific) — not last year's view.

### Pipeline discipline

Maintains a 5x–7x pipeline coverage ratio without being asked. Uses a defined sales methodology (MEDDPICC, Challenger, or proprietary) and applies it consistently. Can articulate where each open opportunity sits and what the next two committed actions are.

### Client tenure correlation

Past employers retained them for 3+ years on average. In freight specifically, short-tenure resumes (under 18 months per role across multiple consecutive positions) correlate strongly with under-performance — the sales cycle is long enough that hunters take 18+ months to demonstrate impact.

## About APB Strategy

APB Strategy is a specialist executive search firm headquartered in Sydney. We place revenue-generating sales and commercial leaders into two industries only: Australian facilities services and international freight & logistics. Our exclusive focus gives us candidate networks and market intelligence that generalist recruiters cannot match.

If you're hiring a commercial leader in freight forwarding, 3PL, or contract logistics and want a confidential conversation about the current market, the candidates we're tracking, and where your proposed compensation sits versus benchmarks, get in touch. Typical response within one business

day.

**Brief us on a hire** → [apbstrategy.com.au/contact](https://apbstrategy.com.au/contact) · [team@apbstrategy.com.au](mailto:team@apbstrategy.com.au) · 1300 629 167

**Disclaimer.** This guide is intended as a market reference, not professional remuneration advice. Individual packages will vary based on company size, ownership structure (PE-backed providers typically pay above market), specific trade lane and modal mix, tenure, and individual track record. Figures are valid as of May 2026 and may shift with market conditions and global rate cycles.