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**BRIDGING THE HERE & NOW OF AUSSIE TRUCK OPERATION**

***2024 Isuzu Future of Trucking Report: Thought Leadership Series***

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***Brett Stewart, Isuzu Australia Limited Head of Aftersales***

There’s a line that’s been used quite a lot in recent times, relating to the theme of change as it applies to the Australian road transport sector.

Some experts are referring to the transformation besieging our industry as the ‘single biggest revolution’ in the history of transport.

They’re referring of course to the evolution of alternate powertrain technology and the shift away from our centuries’ old love affair with internal combustion engines. I must say though, when I first heard that line, I was a little taken a-back.

That said, when you do take a moment to look at the trajectory of human ‘mobility’ more broadly, this assessment isn’t too far off the money.

There’s little doubt this seismic shift is underway and understandably the new and the unknown garners more column inches in the press, but what about the ‘here and now,’ how are transport operators going about their business right now and how are they getting the best results from their tools of trade?

Amongst a vast range of topics covered, the 2024 [*Isuzu Future of Trucking Report*](https://www.isuzu.com.au/news/future-of-trucking/)sought to ponder exactly those queries. Interestingly for people like me - employed to keep trucks on the road - the report has also highlighted some developing trends in the trucking service and maintenance space.

We’ll crunch some of those findings shortly, but first, some geographical context.

**The land of plenty**

Having worked on, in and around trucks for a long period of time, I’m perpetually surprised at how harsh the Australian operating environment can be on the capital equipment we employ to ‘get the job done.’

The vast distances, unforgiving climate, road conditions and an ever-growing freight task, make this country a unique and at times utterly unforgiving place to make a buck in the road transport business.

Put simply, and from a maintenance perspective, we need to be ‘on our game’ down here in Australia, and for a range of different reasons.

From our comprehension of and adherence to compliance obligations, to realising the efficiencies of regular scheduled maintenance (not to mention where to get that work done) – they all contribute to increased productivity and ultimately, more cash in the back pocket.

**Non-negotiables**

Sacrosanct in this heady mix is our local Chain of Responsibility obligations or CoR.

Part of the [Heavy Vehicle National Law](https://www.content.isuzu.com.au/news-articles/keeping-compliant-chain-of-responsibility-for-fleet-owners/) (HVNL), CoR is about identifying risks involved in both on- and off-road activities, evaluating those risks and, where possible, eliminating them.

Isuzu’s research confirms that Australian operators are doing a decent job of this, with 70 per cent of truck dependent businesses having effective CoR strategies firmly in place. This is an encouraging foundation no doubt, but as with anything, there’s always room for improvement.

Analysing the data further, we can see that some smaller operations are still yet to truly grapple with compliance in meaningful way. Specifically, the ‘owner-driver’ sub-group surveyed in the report was revealed as having the lowest levels of awareness and planning for their CoR responsibilities.

For a multitude of safety-centric reasons, we must collectively get to grips with compliance as an industry if we are to continue to grow and prosper under current economic conditions.

One apt example is the attraction and retention of talent within our ranks. A compliant, safer, and more appealing work environment equates to the recruitment and retention of quality candidates – it’s a simple formula, but one we must continue to adopt.

**Smarter trucking**

Building on the broader compliance theme are findings relating to servicing and repair preferences.

Encouragingly, the report suggests the vast majority of major repair work being done within the Australian truck parc is being undertaken by OEM truck dealerships as opposed to third party workshops or on-site. This is an important point.

For reasons of technical and product-specific know-how, as well as overall product knowledge, Australian operators are looking for lasting repair solutions and the resultant reduced downtime and gained efficiencies.

An important aside in these findings is that the repair preferences of the National Fleet Operator subgroup (50+ trucks) are further influenced by not only the quality of workmanship (65 per cent), but equally by the quality of customer service and support (65 per cent). The importance of workshops having the latest technical info and diagnostic tools also attracted strong support within this group, also at 65 per cent.

All told, these preferences point to an Aussie operator with a strong grasp of the total cost of ownership (TCO) equation. They are looking for providers that can deliver the whole package when it comes to procurement right through to the completed lifecycle of a piece of equipment.

The report confirms too that this overarching sentiment extends through to issues such as the proximity to and location of servicing dealerships and a strong preference for genuine OEM parts and componentry.

**Onwards & upwards**

As has always been the case in the world of aftersales and service support, there’s a range of factors at play and all against the backdrop of an extremely demanding operating environment.

The other side to this story is of course the unprecedented rate of technological change we’re currently in the midst of - change that will present a unique set of challenges in the world of aftersales.

What we should take solace in however, and what the latest *Future of Trucking* data confirms, is that Australian road transport operators are well informed, proactive in their approach and generally well positioned to respond, adapt and succeed.

Given Australia’s dependency on road transport within just about every industry imaginable, it’ll be our ability to harness the best thinking, strategy and indeed the best people – that will enable us to continue to ‘get the job done,’ right now and well into the future.

**ends**

**About the 2024 Isuzu Future of Trucking Report Thought Leadership Series**

The Future of Trucking Report (FoT) Thought Leadership Series is a collection of comment pieces penned by industry experts within Isuzu Trucks and informed by from the largest and most comprehensive report of its kind in the Australian truck industry.

The 2024 FoT report examined and identified key insights influencing transport businesses in the coming years and presents survey data collected from over 1,300 Australian stakeholders across the trucking and road transport sector.

**About Brett Stewart**

With his background as a diesel mechanic and a career spanning over 26 years in the transport industry including roles such as truck fleet maintenance manager, Brett moved across to OEM firstly as a Technical Support Consultant and now currently holds the position as Head of Aftersales with Isuzu Australia. Brett’s hands-on, in-depth technical and business knowledge brings an informed and valued aftersales industry perspective as we continue to support customers in today’s challenging economic environment.

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