WHITEPAPER

Thinking of Starting a Trailer or Caravan Import Business?

A practical starting point for businesses planning to import trailers or caravans for sale in Australia. Resolve the approval questions before committing funds.

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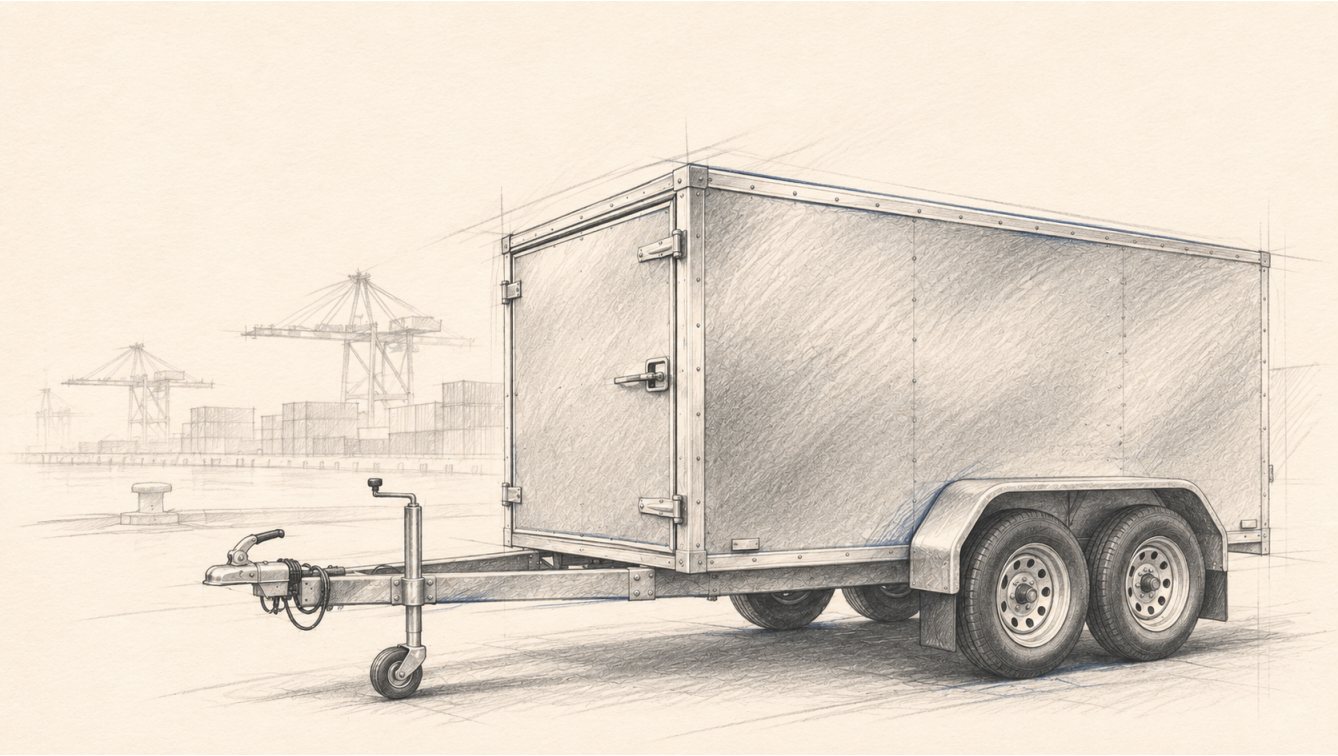


AI-generated concept illustration

You see an opportunity in the Australian trailer or caravan market. You may already have a business and want to add an imported range, or you may be planning a new venture around an overseas manufacturer.

The product looks promising. The price leaves room for a margin. The supplier says they can build for Australia.

Before paying a deposit or committing to production, ask:

What supports the Australian compliance position for the vehicles your business plans to sell?

The answer can influence your choice of manufacturer, product range, launch timetable and budget. Early compliance advice helps you understand what the proposed business will need before commercial commitments narrow your options.

“We already supply Australia” deserves a closer look

A manufacturer’s Australian sales history is useful background. It leaves some important questions unanswered.

Were those trailers the same specification? Which approval arrangements were used? Do the available documents cover the model, components and configuration you intend to order?

An overseas approval or component certificate may support an Australian application. Its usefulness depends on the applicable requirements and what it actually covers. The Department provides specific arrangements for using component and UN approvals as supporting evidence. Department guidance on using other approvals.

A technical review establishes what the documents support, what remains uncertain and what needs attention while purchasing choices are still open.

ROVER Pro helps importers turn supplier claims into a clearer purchasing position.

Establish whose approval you will use

The approval arrangement should fit the commercial relationship between your business and the manufacturer.

An importer may be able to use an existing Vehicle Type Approval (VTA) with written authority to import from its holder. At importation, the approval must be in force and cover the vehicle being imported. Other projects require a different arrangement. Road Vehicle Standards Act 2018, section 22.

A supplier having an approval does not, by itself, settle your business's position.

Before committing, establish whose approval will be used, who holds the responsibilities and whether the proposed trailers fall within its scope.

ROVER Pro can assess the relationship and help establish the appropriate pathway.

Resolve WMI and VIN arrangements before production

"We can stamp whatever number you need" should prompt further questions.

For overseas-manufactured trailers supplied through the VTA pathway, establish the original manufacturer's World Manufacturer Identifier (WMI), Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) structure and arrangements for assigning a unique VIN to each trailer.

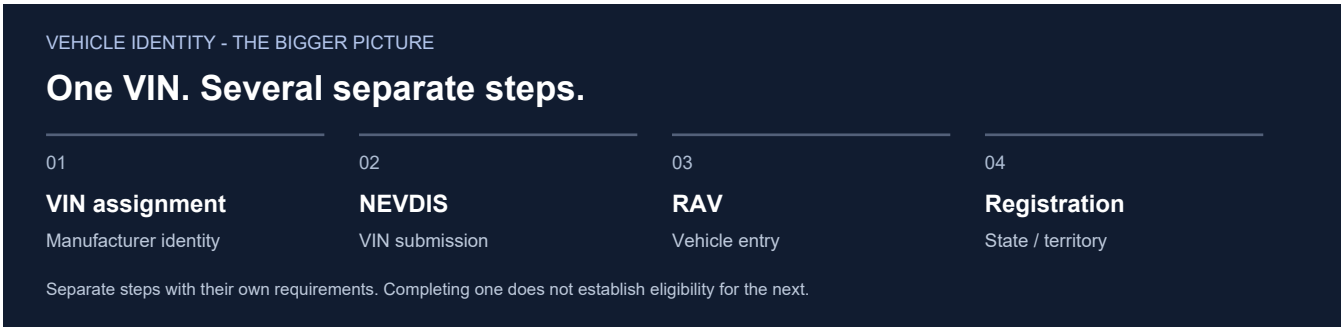
The Department directs overseas-manufactured vehicles and trailers to obtain their VIN/WMI arrangements from the overseas manufacturer or the relevant authority in the country of manufacture. An Australian importer should not assume it can obtain an Australian WMI simply because it sells the trailers under its own brand. Department-issued VIN arrangements under concessional approvals are a separate case. Department guidance on VINs and WMIs.

A 17-character number stamped on a chassis is only part of the picture. The manufacturer must be able to support the identification arrangements and provide reliable VIN decoding information.

Assigning a VIN, submitting it to NEVDIS and entering the vehicle on the Register of Approved Vehicles (RAV) are separate steps. NEVDIS loading precedes RAV submission; registration follows its own requirements. Austroads guidance on VIN submission.

Do not leave vehicle identification to the end of the order.

ROVER Pro can review the manufacturer's WMI and VIN position and help coordinate the agreed identification and submission work before it becomes a delivery problem.



Make sure the evidence follows the specification

Consider a purchasing scenario.

You review a trailer with one axle and braking configuration. Before production, the supplier offers an alternative assembly with a higher advertised capacity and a shorter lead time.

The change looks commercially attractive. Does the evidence still support the revised trailer?

A familiar model name or higher component rating cannot settle that question.

The same issue can arise when adding sizes, changing manufacturers or expanding an established range. A supplier's previous shipment to Australia does not establish the position for your proposed range.

Before accepting a change, understand its effect on the evidence and approval coverage.

ROVER Pro reviews the relationship between the proposed specification, supporting evidence and approval scope, helping you identify issues before production decisions become expensive to reverse.

Importing caravans? Look beyond the chassis

The fit-out deserves attention alongside the vehicle itself. Electrical installations, gas systems and appliances can introduce separate safety and compliance questions.

Include them in your supplier assessment and launch planning. Government guidance highlights electrical and gas safety considerations for caravans, including imported products. South Australian caravan safety guidance and Queensland guidance on imported caravans.

ROVER Pro can help identify where these issues intersect with the vehicle approval programme and where specialist input is needed within the agreed scope.

Check that the manufacturer can support the relationship

An import programme relies on more than the first shipment.

If your business will hold the VTA, a conformity of production system and current supporting records form part of the approval conditions. Road Vehicle Standards Rules 2019, sections 27 and 30.

Commercially, that raises a practical question: can the manufacturer provide the information and cooperation your business will need after the sale?

A responsive sales contact is helpful. Technical support, reliable records and notification of production changes also matter.

ROVER Pro helps businesses assess these arrangements alongside the approval work, so responsibilities are considered from the outset.

Plan beyond the approval letter

A VTA does not complete every step between the factory and your customer.

Vehicle identification, NEVDIS and RAV arrangements need to fit the delivery programme. Customs clearance, biosecurity, registration and any relevant road-access requirements also need attention.

The Department warns that vehicles arriving without the required import approval will not be released from customs control, and storage costs can be considerable. Australian Government import guidance.

Before promising a delivery or handover date, understand what remains outstanding.

Bring us in while you still have choices

The most useful time to involve ROVER Pro is while you can still influence the supplier, specification and purchasing timetable.

We can help assess the approval pathway, review the available evidence, resolve WMI and VIN questions, and prepare the agreed application material. Where engineering or testing input is needed, we can help coordinate it within the agreed scope.

You do not need to have placed an order to start the conversation. Bring us your proposed product range and supplier information, even if some decisions are still open.

Before you commit to your trailer or caravan import business, talk to ROVER Pro.

Request a free initial assessment of up to 20 minutes to discuss your project. We will then propose the scope and fees for any detailed review or further assistance.

General information. The appropriate approval pathway and requirements depend on the trailers and proposed business arrangements. Unfamiliar term? Visit our Glossary, Abbreviations and Definitions.