Hnry Sole Trader Pulse

Australia

June 2026

How the Hnry Sole Trader Pulse was conducted

Hnry commissioned Resolve Strategic to conduct polling to measure and regularly track the sentiment, views and experiences of sole traders in Australia and New Zealand. This report contains the results of the latest track in Australia, with methodology and topics as follows:

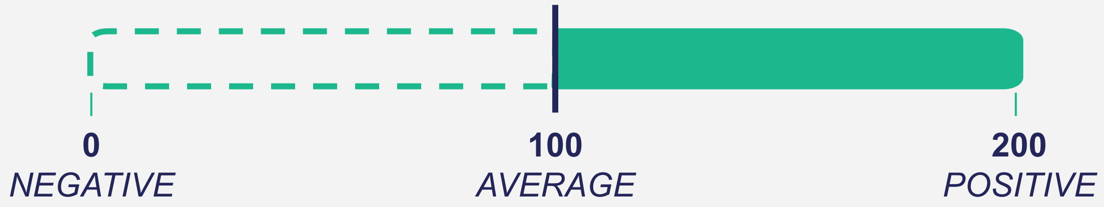
This Pulse was was conducted in June 2026.

- The survey polled 501 sole traders across Australia, with a maximum error margin of +/-4.4%.
- The poll was conducted online via reputable business and general population panels, with respondents screened to ensure they are sole traders (including consultants, freelancers, gig economy workers, tradies, etc.).
- A representative sample by age, sex, area and tenure when compared to known population parameters using minimum quotas and/or weighting where required.
- In this pulse, the poll also asked a series of ad hoc questions about federal budget measures, paying tax and receiving refunds, plus EOFY arrangements.

How the Hnry Sole Trader Pulse works

The questionnaire employs several core questions asked in every track, notably:

- A pulse figure of sole trader sentiment, with 100 being ‘average’, 0 ‘negative’ and 200 ‘positive’, that can be tracked over time and broken down by sole trader groups. It is calculated using 12 variables, each grouped into current / future business performance, personal factors, business / economic conditions, and past business performance (using an average weighted in descending order).
- A series of attributes, such as sex, age, area, tenure, turnover, industry and whether have another job.



The headline measures include:

- Past financial performance: A combination of sole traders’ financial performance in the last 12 months and the last quarter
- Current/future financial performance: A combination of sole traders’ financial performance right now and expectations for financial performance in the next quarter and the next year
- Economic conditions: A combination of sole traders’ perspective on business conditions right now, economic conditions right now and expected economic conditions in 6 months
- Personal conditions: A combination of sole traders’ personal satisfaction, mental well-being, work life balance and degree of freedom

June 2026 Sole Trader Pulse Overview - AU

	LAST PULSE (Mar 2026)	TOTAL (Jun 2026)	INDUSTRY					BUSINESS TENURE			GENDER	
	Index Result	Index Result	Tradie	Freelancer / Creative	Consultant	Health / Wellness	Others	< 2 years	3-10 years	11+ years	Males	Females
Past Financial Performance												
Financial Performance - Last Quarter	119	110	113	99	113	111	111	106	112	110	113	104
Current / Future Financial Performance												
Financial Performance Right Now	119	111	113	101	117	112	112	108	115	111	114	107
Financial Performance Next Quarter	121	117	120	111	121	110	118	116	117	118	120	112
Business & Economic Conditions												
Health of the Economy Right Now	97	88	82	88	101	83	78	90	91	77	91	82
Health of the Economy in 6 Months	98	94	90	94	107	83	88	98	96	86	97	90
Personal Factors												
Personal Satisfaction and Enjoyment	132	127	126	123	128	114	135	122	125	136	130	121
Wellbeing	130	120	119	112	128	112	124	113	121	128	126	111
Work-life balance	132	124	115	120	134	106	129	118	121	137	128	117
Financial Security	120	111	114	104	120	106	107	107	111	116	117	102
Job Security	128	120	122	109	126	109	129	112	121	132	125	112
Total Index	**119**	**112**	**112**	**106**	**120**	**105**	**113**	**109**	**113**	**115**	**116**	**106**

Executive Summary (1/3)

- **Overall sole trader sentiment is at its weakest since the Pulse began, yet businesses are holding up better than the gloom suggests**
  - The Total Index has fallen to 112/200 (down from 119 in March 2026), the weakest result since the Pulse began in October 2021. The sharpest falls are in how sole traders read the wider world rather than their own businesses, with economic outlook dropping to 88 now and 94 in six months (both below the 100 neutral benchmark), while personal well-being (120), satisfaction (127) and work-life balance (124) have eased only slightly and still sit well in the positive range. After a relentless run of negative headlines, fuel prices, rate rises and a Budget most felt wasn't built for them, the ambient gloom is showing up in how sole traders feel.
  - The measures closest to their actual trading have held up far better, and the income data moved the opposite way entirely, with the net income change jumping to +27 (from +8 in March) as 52% reported turnover up and only 25% down. The gap between how sole traders feel and how they are actually trading has rarely been wider.
  - The outlook is the tell, with expectations for the next quarter (117) holding up better than views of the economy today (88). People who genuinely feared for their business would not keep a steadier eye on the future than on the headlines, which points to anxiety about the environment rather than distress in the business itself.
  - The pressure is real but concentrated, with a genuine tail doing it tough, including tradies exposed to fuel costs (39% expect a negative Budget hit) and freelancers and creatives squeezed by AI and softer discretionary spending. For most, though, this is resilience under pressure rather than businesses in trouble. The feelings are recessionary, the numbers are not, and sole traders expect the stress to pass.

- **Almost half of all sole traders believe the May Federal Budget will have little to no effect. Of those that feel impacted, it has largely been received poorly**
  - While 49% of sole traders saw the Budget having little to no effect on their business, 40% expect the Federal Budget to have some impact on their business, and that view skews clearly negative (29% negative vs 11% positive), more negative still when they consider the impact on their household (36% negative).
  - Tradespeople are the most concerned (49% expect some effect, 39% negative), likely reflecting broader pressures on housing and construction. Note this poll was taken before the tax "carve-outs" for small business.
  - Tellingly, the Budget measures sole traders support most are the ones that either don't apply to them or weren't actually in Budget 2026. The single most popular, the $1,000 instant tax discount (75%), does not apply to most sole traders at all, the draft guidance from the ATO excludes anyone earning income substantively from business. The second, the drop in the lowest income tax rate from 16% to 15% (69%), was legislated last year rather than announced in this Budget.
  - The genuinely new measures that do apply to them sit just behind: making the $20,000 instant asset write-off permanent for small business (68%) and $10bn to secure fuel supplies (62%). The pattern suggests sole traders are reaching for the idea of relief even where it isn't really on offer to them, and that the measures aimed squarely at them are at least well-supported.
  - The least popular measures are the housing-focused tax reforms, removing the 50% CGT discount (36%), restricting negative gearing (37%) and family trust changes (34%).

Executive Summary (2/3)

- **Most sole traders back a simpler way to be paid super, but many stay quiet for fear of losing the work**
  - Awareness is real but patchy, with 58% of tradies and consultants knowing a client may be required to pay them the Super Guarantee on top of their invoice, but only 46% having ever had it paid and just 9% receiving it regularly.
  - The biggest barrier is not admin but fear, with 41% saying sole traders do not raise super in case it risks the engagement, ahead of low awareness among sole traders themselves (39%) and their clients (37%). Only 6% say they do not need it, so this is an access problem rather than a demand problem.
  - Appetite for a fix is strong, with 70% supporting a simpler way to pay the Super Guarantee without a payroll process and just 2% opposed, pointing clearly to system design rather than sole trader reluctance as the blocker.

- **Legislative change is being felt on the ground, with clients asking more questions but rarely pushing sole traders to convert**
  - Two in five tradies and consultants (40%) have noticed a change in how clients engage them over the past year, following the Closing Loopholes reforms, sham-contracting protections and Super Guarantee changes.
  - The change is mostly scrutiny rather than conversion, with 52% asked for more documentation on their contractor status and 30% facing greater scrutiny over whether they are a contractor or an employee. More concerning, 35% have lost work as clients change how they use contractors.
  - Wholesale reclassification remains rare, with only 11% asked to move to PAYG employment and 15% to incorporate. Clients are asking harder questions, and sometimes using sole traders less, but largely still engaging them as sole traders.

- **Financial and tax admin remains a real time-and-money burden, and the long-term shift away from accountants continues**
  - Accountant use is holding at a low of 38% (down from 45% a year ago), with tax agents (24%) and bookkeepers (8%) while the proportion using programs and apps is steady at 21%.
  - Sole traders spend an average of 5 hours a week and $266 a month on managing their financial and tax affairs. Programs and apps continue to offer the clearest saving on both time and money, with app-only users spending around 3 hours a week; by contrast, financial planners and advisors cost around $629 a month, more than double the ~$300 typical of accountants.

Executive Summary (3/3)

- **EOFY stress is quietly building year on year, driven less by the work itself than by not knowing where they stand**
    - End-of-financial-year stress has climbed steadily for four years, from 26% in 2022 to 38% today, and the driver looks structural. Costs are up and margins are tighter (78% are paying themselves more just to keep pace and 66% say business is getting tighter), so tax time lands on people already stretched. With most still leaving tax to an annual reckoning (49% pay only at EOFY), it arrives as a large, uncertain bill in one hit, and it is that not-knowing-until-the-last-minute that turns a deadline into dread.
    - The stress lands unevenly, and hardest on those least equipped to absorb it. Women feel it more than men (45% vs 33%), younger sole traders more than older (49% of 35-54s vs 31% of over-55s), and the newest businesses most of all (49% of those under a year vs 30% of those trading 11+ years). Health and wellness sole traders carry it most (61%), while consultants are the most relaxed (26%).
    - The clearest signal is in who feels it least, and it is not those spending the most on help. Accountant and tax-agent users are the most stressed (40%), while app users report less stress (35%), less time (around 10 hours versus 15) and lower cost.