



# DFAT ADJUSTMENTS TO ABS OFFICIAL TRADE DATA

## Introduction

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) makes a number of adjustments to published Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) official monthly merchandise trade data to produce the most accurate dataset possible on Australia's merchandise trade data on a calendar year and financial year basis. These adjustments include using ABS trade data that is released after a time lag, DFAT estimates and the correction of a number of small errors in the ABS monthly trade dataset.

## 1. Merchandise trade data released after a time lag

The ABS has been able to negotiate special reporting arrangements with a number of providers of trade data by releasing confidential data with a time lag. These export commodities include:

- *Lupins* (AHECC 1214.90.21) — all country details released on a monthly basis six months after the reference period. This data is automatically included in the regular monthly updates of ABS merchandise trade data after the time lag.
- *Raw cane sugar* (AHECC 1701.11.40) — commodity and country details (values and quantity) on a quarterly basis are released six months after the reference period. This data is not automatically included in monthly updates of ABS merchandise trade data but is available in a spreadsheet format.
- *Non-industrial diamonds* (AHECC 7102.31.00) — commodity and country details (values only) released on a quarterly basis only. This data is not automatically included in monthly updates of ABS merchandise trade data but is available in a spreadsheet format.

The ABS monthly export dataset does not include the *Raw cane sugar* and the *Non-industrial diamonds* (though it does include *Lupins* six months after the reference period). In DFAT's annual trade publications and time series datasets exports of *Raw cane sugar* and the *Non-industrial diamonds* has been included.

## 2. Confidentiality in ABS monthly trade data and its impact on accurate partner country export and import data

The ABS has been required to apply country level restrictions to a number of commodities to maintain confidentiality within its monthly export and import data. This has resulted in some commodities being excluded from partner country totals and State/Territory totals.

For exports, from June 2013 a number of export commodities<sup>1</sup> were excluded, with the major ones *Cane sugar*, *Nickel Mattes*, *Nickel alloys unworked* and *Non-industrial diamonds*. From this period onwards, a number of Country/State totals for exports will be under-reported in ABS monthly trade statistics. The ABS advised that data was confidentialised in this way to ensure that trade to individual countries/states could not be identified, even if the transactions were unusually large<sup>2</sup>.

The confidential export commodity codes excluded from partner country totals may not remain consistent over time. The ABS reviews confidentiality on a monthly basis and may add or remove some exports codes

<sup>1</sup> AHECC at the 8-digit level that have the confidentiality restrictions 'No commodity details' or 'No value details'. See the ABS publication *International Merchandise Trade: Confidential Commodities List* (catalogue 5372.055.001).

<sup>2</sup> *International Trade in goods and services Australia*, June 2013 issue, page 4 (catalogue 5368.0).

from this list. For example the ABS added a new commodity, *Fresh or dried macadamia nuts* to the list from October 2013.

In aggregate \$5.3 billion has been excluded from ABS partner country export data in 2019 (refer to **Table A**).

**Table A: Value of 'No country details' included in export totals**

	No country details A\$m	Total goods exports A\$m	Share of total exports %
<b>Calendar year</b>			
2013 (from Jun-13)	3,694	261,959	1.4
2014	5,808	265,923	2.2
2015	5,964	249,625	2.4
2016	6,044	258,469	2.4
2017	5,750	301,336	1.9
2018	4,652	344,618	1.3
2019	5,258	390,758	1.3
<b>Financial year</b>			
2012-13 (from Jun-13)	596	246,982	0.2
2013-14	5,667	272,921	2.1
2014-15	6,176	254,552	2.4
2015-16	5,802	243,424	2.4
2016-17	6,109	290,882	2.1
2017-18	5,373	313,184	1.7
2018-19	4,592	372,591	1.2

Based on ABS trade data (January 2020) on DFAT STARS database.

In terms of imports, from the month of September 2008 onwards a number of import commodities<sup>3</sup> have been excluded from partner country totals and State/Territory totals for the same reasons as the export data.

The major commodities excluded include selected aircraft, selected LNG floating platforms, refined petroleum and natural gas imports. From this period onwards, a number of Country/State totals for imports will be under-reported in ABS monthly trade statistics. In aggregate \$4.4 billion has been excluded from ABS partner country import data in 2019 (refer to **Table B**).

As with exports, the confidential import commodity codes excluded from partner country totals may not remain consistent over time.

Given the importance of accurate trade data, DFAT has been working with the ABS to find a solution that will allow accurate partner country export/import totals on a financial and calendar year basis to be published while maintaining business confidentiality. As a result, the ABS was able to provide calendar and financial year export and import totals to DFAT for selected trading partners for the periods affected in the publication *International Trade: Supplementary Information* (catalogue number 5368.0.55.003 & 004).

**Appendix A** (<http://www.dfat.gov.au/trade/resources/trade-statistics/Pages/trade-time-series-data.aspx>) shows the full list of the actual partner country export and import data that has been obtained from the ABS on a calendar and financial year basis. This data is included in DFAT's annual trade publications and time series datasets.

<sup>3</sup> Harmonized Tariff Item Statistical Code (HTISC) at the 10-digit level that have the confidentiality restrictions 'No commodity details' or 'No value details'.

Table B: Value of 'No country details' included in import totals

	No country details A\$m	Total goods imports A\$m	Share of total imports %
<b>Calendar year</b>			
2008 (from Sept-08)	2,025	225,946	0.9
2009	5,491	200,604	2.7
2010	6,099	210,494	2.9
2011	6,728	226,903	3.0
2012	5,155	241,863	2.1
2013	4,541	241,037	1.9
2014	6,784	252,789	2.7
2015	6,908	267,092	2.6
2016	2,440	254,368	1.0
2017	15,139	288,318	5.3
2018	5,710	304,077	1.9
2019	4,435	307,648	1.4
<b>Financial year</b>			
2008-09 (from Sep-08)	4,761	219,487	2.2
2009-10	5,712	204,027	2.8
2010-11	5,897	213,809	2.8
2011-12	6,674	239,736	2.8
2012-13	4,295	236,509	1.8
2013-14	5,797	252,345	2.3
2014-15	6,948	256,982	2.7
2015-16	4,686	263,284	1.8
2016-17	7,448	264,032	2.8
2017-18	12,025	301,157	4.0
2018-19	5,156	306,669	1.7

Based on ABS trade data (January 2020) on DFAT STARS database.

Please note that this issue is going to make it difficult to determine actual trends in Australia's total exports and imports by partner country on an ongoing basis. **All users are advised to use ABS partner country merchandise export and import data with caution for the countries not covered by the additional ABS data.**

For State/Territory exports and imports, the ABS has published actual totals on a balance of payments basis in the quarterly publication *Balance of Payments and International Investment Position* (catalogue number 5302.0) and the annual *Australian National Accounts: State Accounts* (catalogue number 5220.0).

### 3. Corrections to ABS merchandise trade data

DFAT has identified a number of small corrections to ABS merchandise trade data that the ABS did not apply to their monthly trade dataset as the value of the transaction fell below the ABS normal threshold level for amending trade records<sup>4</sup>.

The following is a list of corrections that have been applied to ABS trade data by DFAT in its annual and financial trade statistical publications and time series datasets:

- Exports of *Arms & ammunition* (AHECC 9306) from the ACT to Germany in October 2009 valued at \$2,380,000 were a re-export and should not be included as an export produced from the ACT.

<sup>4</sup> Refer to the ABS article - [International Trade Review: Data Quality and Client Queries](#) for further information.

- Imports of \$93,000 of *Meat of bovine animals, frozen* (HTISC 0202) from the United States in May 2005 were incorrect in ABS import statistics. The Department of Home Affairs confirmed the imports were pork (HTISC 0203) not beef.
- Imports of *Iron ore* (HTISC 2601) from New Caledonia were incorrectly being coded in ABS import statistics. The imports were actually *Nickel ores* (HTISC 2606). All time periods have been corrected.
- Imports of *Arms & ammunition* (HTISC 9306) from Timor-Leste were incorrectly coded. Imports have been coded to miscellaneous manufactures. All time periods have been corrected.

#### 4. DFAT estimates for missing data items.

In some cases DFAT has estimated trade that is not included in published ABS data.

- Raw cane sugar exports – To overcome the time lag for *Raw cane sugar* exports, DFAT has estimated data for the June quarter 2019 (for the financial year 2018-19) by using information from the Australian Bureau for Agricultural and Resources Economics and Sciences (ABARES) and partner country import data from Australia’s major *Raw cane sugar* export markets.
- France imports – DFAT has estimated actual imports from France for the period September 2008 until June 2017 (excluding the periods July 2013 to June 2014, January 2015 to June 2015 and January 2017 to December 2017 which is based on actual ABS data). The major import excluded from partner country import data from September 2008 onwards is aircraft.
- United States imports – DFAT has estimated actual imports from the United States for the period January 2016 to June 2016 and July 2017 to December 2017 (all other periods are based on actual ABS data). The major import excluded from partner country import data from September 2008 onwards is aircraft.
- LNG floating platforms imported from the Republic of Korea – DFAT has estimated the value of the import of the INPEX’s *Ichthys Explorer* LNG central processing platform in May 2017 and the *Ichthys Venturer floating production* platform in August 2017. This adjustment has been allocated as imports from Korea to Western Australia and allocated to the SITC code *793 Ships, boats & floating structures* and TRIEC code *2434 Other transport equipment & parts*.
- Cotton exports – DFAT has estimated cotton exports to China and Indonesia from the period August 2017 until October 2018, which were confidential in ABS trade data. These estimates are included in SITC code *263 Cotton* and TRIEC code *1143 Textile fibres unprocessed & waste*.
- Sodium cyanide exports – DFAT has estimated cyanide exports to Peru from the period July 2005 onwards which are confidential in ABS trade data. These estimates are included in SITC code *283 Salts of inorganic acids & metals* and TRIEC code *2322 Inorganic chemicals*.

These estimates are included in DFAT’s annual and financial year trade statistical publications and time series datasets.

#### 5. Estimates for LNG exports by partner country (introduced June 2019)

With the growing importance of Australia’s Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) exports – now Australia’s third largest export, DFAT has started producing estimates of LNG exports by partner country on an annual and financial year basis. Estimates for the major markets (China, India, Japan, Malaysia, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Taiwan and Thailand) have been generated. These estimates will be progressively included in all of DFAT’s statistical products through 2019 and are included in SITC code *343 Natural Gas* and TRIEC code *1232 Petroleum gases & other gaseous hydrocarbons, processed*. An overview of the methodology used to produce these estimates is included in Box A below.





## BOX A – METHODOLOGY FOR ESTIMATING CONFIDENTIAL LIQUID NATURAL GAS (LNG) EXPORTS BY PARTNER COUNTRY

Data on Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) exports (AHECC<sup>5</sup> code 2711.11.00) by partner country have not been published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) from August 1995 onwards. With LNG now being Australia's third largest export, there is a growing demand for information on these exports to our major markets.

In response to this demand, DFAT has produced a model to estimate time series data for LNG exports.

### Model for LNG exports by partner country

DFAT's model uses merchandise import data published by our major trading partners (or mirror statistics) to source data on import quantities of LNG from Australia for each partner country. The quantity data was weighted to the total Australia LNG quantity export data (published by the ABS) to produce estimates of Australian LNG export quantities by partner country.

The average price of total Australian exports of LNG (value divided by quantities) was applied to these quantity estimates to produce initial estimates for the total value of LNG exports by partner country.

Different markets however will have different LNG prices – depending on the mix of present and historical contract prices and spot price rates. An analysis of average prices using the monthly value and quantities data of Australian LNG imports published in the partner country data found some differences to the ABS average. Where the price<sup>6</sup> was significantly different to the ABS average, the average Australian LNG price for that country was either inflated or deflated, to more accurately represent the price of the LNG exports to that market

Analysis was also undertaken to see if a timing adjustment could be applied to take into account the time it takes to ship the LNG from Australia to its markets. Due to the quick shipping times for LNG shipments (one to two weeks), it was not possible to apply a timing adjustment to the monthly series<sup>7</sup>. However publishing the estimates on a calendar and financial year basis only should help smooth out any timing issues.

Some manual manipulation was required to the model (mainly for Taiwan and Singapore) to match the estimates to the published ABS time series data for LNG values and quantities<sup>8</sup>.

For historical data, pre-June 2015 the ABS total LNG quantity data used to generate the estimates in this model is not published by the ABS. A simplified model was used to generate these estimates by taking partner country import values, reported on a cost insurance and freight basis (c.i.f.) and adjusting them, to a proxy free on board basis (f.o.b.) to be compatible with ABS total export data for LNG.

### Quality of estimates

As part of a consultancy service for the Department of the Environment, the ABS has been able to publish LNG exports by partner country for both values and quantities for the financial year 2017-18<sup>9</sup>. To ensure the quality of the DFAT's LNG estimates the results from the model have been compared to the actual ABS LNG

<sup>5</sup> AHECC – Australian Harmonised Export Commodity Classification.

<sup>6</sup> Average prices from partner country data were adjusted from a cost insurance and freight basis (c.i.f.) to a proxy free on board basis (f.o.b.) to make them compatible with ABS export data.

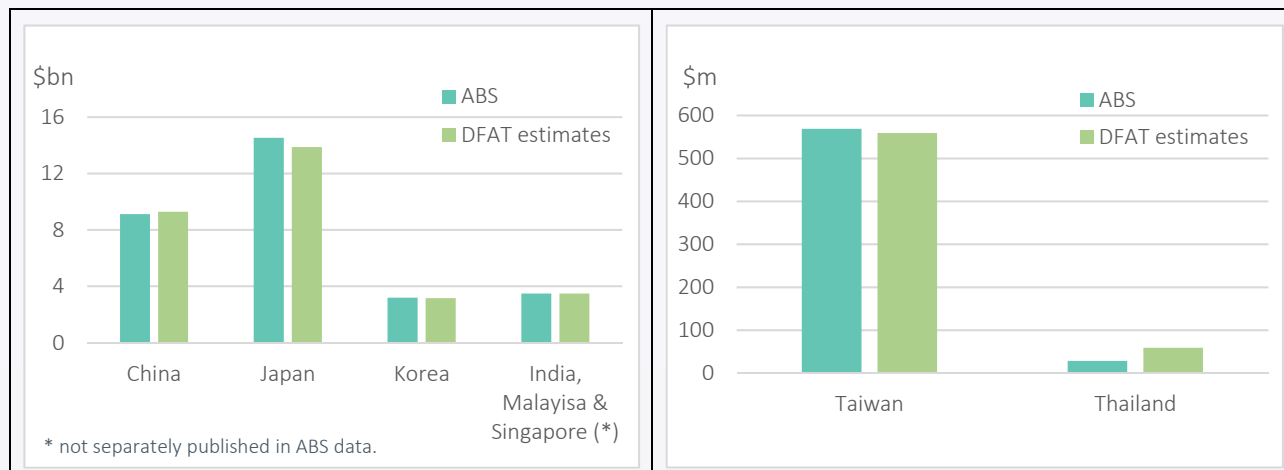
<sup>7</sup> It would be necessary to have weekly trade data to apply a timing adjustment to LNG shipments

<sup>8</sup> Mainly due to LNG shipments through third party countries.

<sup>9</sup> Data for India, Malaysia and Singapore could not be separately published. It is hoped that the ABS will be able to publish this data for future years.

data for 2017-18. For the top three markets the results were extremely close with the estimates for China, out by just +1.8 per cent, Japan (-4.5 per cent ) and Republic of Korea (-1.2 per cent) – refer to **Chart 1**.

**Chart 1 – DFAT LNG estimates vs actual ABS data, 2017-18**



Based on ABS catalogue 5368.0 and DFAT estimates.

The estimate pre-June 2015, are considered to be of a poorer quality than those used in the model but are still useful to generate a full time series (from 1995) for LNG exports by partner country.

As the ABS publishes data on LNG exports by partner country (currently only for 2017-18 & 2018-19), this data will replace the modelled estimates, in all DFAT trade products.

The ABS will be providing 2019-20 LNG data in February 2021. This will be incorporated in the next edition of this publication.

## For further information

DFAT publishes a number of articles that provide supplementary information on Australian trade data not included in ABS official trade statistics including:

- *Australia's imports of aircraft & parts;*
- *Changes to ABS merchandise export statistics and its impact on partner country aggregates;*
- *Impact of ABS confidential restrictions on exports of Nickel; and*
- *Confidentiality in Australian merchandise export statistics.*

These articles are available on the DFAT website at <http://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Pages/recent-trade-statistical-articles-and-information-papers.aspx>.

For further information on the impact of confidentiality in ABS merchandise trade statistics please refer to the ABS publication – [catalogue 5372.0.55.001 – International Merchandise Trade: Confidential Commodities List](#).

Author: Frank Bingham  
Office of the Chief Economist  
[statssection@dfat.gov.au](mailto:statssection@dfat.gov.au)

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