



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade**



# **HISTORICAL TRADE TIME SERIES EXPLANATORY NOTES**

## INTRODUCTION

This product provides time series data on Australia's merchandise trade from Federation (in 1901) to June 2017 and for selected series back further.

The series are in a Microsoft Excel document and compatible with most versions of this software.

*Australia's direction of merchandise trade*, provides time series data for around 60 of Australia's major merchandise trading partners back to 1901 (and in some cases to 1885). Data is in current price terms and on a recorded trade basis.

Data is usually presented on an Australian financial year basis (year ended June), except for merchandise trade data for the period 1825 to 1913.

## DATA SOURCES

The merchandise trade statistics used to compile this publication are derived by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) from information provided to the Department of Home Affairs by exporters and importers. Data has been obtained from the following sources:


- ABS – *Year book* No. 3 1901 to 1909;
- ABS – *Trade and Customs and Excise Revenue of the Commonwealth of Australia* 1903 through to 1911 editions;
- ABS – *Overseas Trade - Australian Statistics of Overseas Imports and Exports and Customs and Excise Revenue*, 1921-22, 1925-26 & 1934-35 editions;
- ABS – *Overseas Trade and Customs and Excise Revenue*, 1938-39 & 1947-48 editions;
- ABS – *Overseas Trade*, 1951-52, 1954-55, 1958-59, 1961-62, 1964-65, 1965-66, 1969-70, 1974-75, 1976-77, 1977-78 & 1979-80 editions;
- ABS trade data on the *Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's STARS database* (period 1977-78 to 2016-17) consistent with ABS trade data published March 2018; and
- ABS – *International Trade Supplementary Statistics*, 2016-17.

The historical ABS trade publications are available in PDF format on the ABS website at [www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au).

## VALUATION

### *Merchandise trade on a recorded trade basis*

Exports: Valued at the *free-on-board* (f.o.b.) basis at the Australian port-of-shipment. Charges for distributive services provided beyond the customs frontier are not included (e.g. international freight and insurance charges).



Imports: Valued at the *Australian Customs Value* for Australian data. This is based on the price actually paid, provided the buyer and seller are independent, on a f.o.b. basis, i.e. charges and expenses involved in delivering the goods from the place of exportation to Australia are excluded.

## MERCHANDISE TRADE – INCLUSIONS/EXCLUSIONS

The following inclusions/exclusions have been applied to the merchandise trade data:

- Exports and imports data includes both merchandise and non-merchandise trade up to 1976-77. From 1977-78 onwards only merchandise trade is included;
- Trade in gold and gold coins (also called specie) has been included in exports and imports for all time periods;
- Exports include ship stores (goods procured in port by non-resident carriers in Australia) for all periods. This is consistent with the latest international standards for both balance of payments and international trade statistics. Note that the ABS excluded ship stores from exports for the period 1906 to 1981-82 in its historical trade publications. Exports of ship stores for the period 1906 to 1979-80 are sourced from the ABS. Data for 1980-81 and 1981-82 are DFAT estimates; and
- Imports data prior to 1976-77 also included the charges involved with placing the good on the vessel in port.

## VALUES

### *Current price*

Current price values are expressed in terms of current Australian dollars. Historical data in pounds (1826 to 1964-65) were converted to Australian dollars at the rate of one pound to two Australian dollars.

## TOTAL TRADE


Total trade is the sum of exports and imports. This is a useful measurement of the overall trading relationship between Australia and its trading partners. Total trade data is useful in ranking Australia's major trading partners, without a bias towards ranking only the larger export markets, or the larger import sources.

## ECONOMY DATA

All partner economy trade data are presented for all periods shown on a basis consistent with their composition as at the end of 2017. However, given the extreme length of the time series many of our major trading partner's economy boundaries have undergone significant change. As a result it was not always possible to match the historical statistical data to the present day economy structure.

For example, Vietnam up to 1954 was part of French Indochina, which also included present day Laos and Cambodia. After 1954, Vietnam consisted of two separate countries, North and South Vietnam, until the modern state of Vietnam was formed in 1976. Therefore the time series for Vietnam includes trade with Laos and Cambodia up to 1954.

The 'Historical Economy Map' provided with this release, summaries the cases where it was not possible to exactly match the historical statistical data to the present day political country boundaries. The economy



footnote section in this document provides additional information on the composition of each partner country over the time series period.

For exports, 'country' refers to the final destination as reported by exporters. It is understood, however, that exporters may not know the country of final destination of their goods at the time they are shipped. This applies particularly to goods directed through entrepôts such as Singapore, Hong Kong (SAR of China), and major European ports, with a consequent overstating of Australia's exports to these countries and corresponding understatement of exports to countries 'down stream' from them. For imports, 'country' refers to the country of origin of the goods, which is defined as the country of production for Customs purposes.

For import data prior to 1916-17, the ABS reported imports on a 'country of shipment' basis rather than 'country of origin'. A time series break for partner country import data exists at this point.

## CONFIDENTIAL TRADE DATA

### *Goods*

To avoid divulging commercially-sensitive details of individual firms, the ABS restricts release of statistics on certain commodities. The total value will be correct for exports or imports with a particular economy except for the following cases:

#### *Alumina exports – Bahrain, Egypt and Iceland*

The partner country total value for exports will be correct except for total exports to Bahrain, Egypt and Iceland (from March 1992 to December 2012) which exclude alumina exports. These exports are coded to a 'confidential country' category and cannot be separately identified. As a result, the values of exports to these countries are understated in aggregate.


#### *Imports September 2008 to June 2017*

The ABS announced that it had changed the method used in making confidential data for merchandise imports from the month of September 2008 onwards. Import data commodities that have the confidentiality restrictions of "No commodity details" or "No value details" are now aggregated into a single confidential country code.

For import data prior to September 2008, these data are added back into the appropriate country totals (i.e. these totals show the correct level of trade). From September 2008 the confidential data are not being added back into the appropriate country totals. Instead they are published as "No country details" in total Australian import data. Of the commodity codes affected by this change, SITC code 792 - Aircraft, spacecraft & related parts would make up the most significant component.

The ABS has been able to release the actual total country import totals for selected countries on a financial and calendar year basis only as a special data service. As a result total imports data for these countries includes these confidential data.

Refer to DFAT's technical note – *DFAT adjustments to ABS official trade data* on the DFAT website (<https://www.dfat.gov.au/trade/trade-and-investment-data-information-and-publications/trade-statistics/trade-time-series-data>) – for further details.



## Exports June 2013 to June 2017

The ABS announced that it had changed the method used in making confidential data for merchandise exports from the month of June 2013 onwards. Export data commodities that have the confidentiality restrictions of "No commodity details" or "No value details" are now aggregated into a single confidential country code.

For export data prior to June 2013, these data are added back into the appropriate country totals (i.e. these totals show the correct level of trade). From June 2013 the confidential data are not being added back into the appropriate country totals. Instead they are published as "No country details" in total Australian export data.

The ABS has been able to release the actual total country export totals for selected countries on a financial and calendar year basis only as a special data service. As a result total exports data for these countries includes these confidential items. The ABS is unable to release this data for other partner countries.

Refer to DFAT's technical note – *DFAT adjustments to ABS official trade data* on the DFAT website (<https://www.dfat.gov.au/trade/trade-and-investment-data-information-and-publications/trade-statistics/trade-time-series-data>) – for further details.

To assist users of Australian trade data, the ABS publishes monthly, a list of all Australian Harmonized Export Commodity Classification (AHECC) and Harmonized Tariff Item Statistical Code (HTISC) commodities with confidential restrictions in place in the publication *International Merchandise Trade: Confidential Commodities List* (ABS catalogue 5372.0.55.0.01) available at the [ABS website](#). This publication is an essential reference guide for users of ABS merchandise statistics to March 2022 to ensure they are interpreting the trade statistics correctly. Since April 2022, the Confidential Commodities list is included in the *ABS International Trade in Goods monthly releases* (previously known as International Trade in Goods and Services until August 2023)

## DATA QUALITY

The historical time series data has in most part been manually compiled from historical trade paper publications. Specific historical publications have been chosen (see data sources) to create the time series data. Please note that trade data from a publication used may not exactly match that in earlier or later editions due to revisions to ABS trade data.


The Trade Data Section (TNS) have taken great care to ensure the information provided in these spreadsheets are correct and accurate as possible. However DFAT does not guarantee correctness or accuracy and accepts no legal liability arising from, or connected to, the use of this material.

If you identify an error in the data in these spreadsheets please email TNS at [statssection@dfat.gov.au](mailto:statssection@dfat.gov.au). If an error is confirmed in the time series data TNS will amend the spreadsheets accordingly.

## OTHER DATA SOURCES

There are a number of useful sources for historical trade statistics including:

- [Australian Bureau of Statistics, \*Overseas trade\*](#) 1903 to 1976-77 (ABS Cat. No. 5409.0);
- [Queensland Government Statistician's Office](#) – QLD trade data from 1860 to 2007-08; and
- [United Nations \*Historical Trade Statistics\*](#) 1900 to 1960.



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This time series data was compiled mainly by Julie-Anne Andrew, Frank Bingham and Tara Collins. Revision to this note was completed by Leonard D’Costa and Jorge Castiço.


If you want to know more about these statistics or about other trade and economic publications produced by DFAT, please visit the [Trade Statistics](#) page on the DFAT website.

## ECONOMY FOOTNOTES

Country	Notes
Argentina	n/a
Austria	Hungary included up to 1917-18. Austria included with Germany from 1938-39 to 1944-45.
Bahrain	Included in Arabia until 1924-25. Formerly called Bahrain Island.
Bangladesh	Included in India until 1947-48, then in Pakistan until 1970-71.
Belgium	Includes Luxembourg from 1952-53 to 2002-03.
Brazil	n/a
Brunei	British Borneo from 1905 to 1960-61 (which includes the Malaysian state of Sabah).
Canada	Includes Newfoundland and Labrador for all time periods.
Chile	n/a
China	n/a
Denmark	Includes Greenland. Faeroe Islands joined in 1946.
Egypt	Includes Syria from 1958 to 1961. Formerly known as United Arab Republic from 1958 to 1971.
Fiji	Includes Pitcairn Island 1967-68 to 1976-77.
Finland	Formerly part of Russia until 1918.
France	n/a
Gabon	From 1960-61 (previously included as part of French Equatorial Africa).
Germany	Changed to Germany (Eastern Zone) and Germany (Western Zone) in 1950-51. Unified on 3 October 1990. Includes Austria from 1938-39 to 1944-45.
Guam	Included in the United States 1926-27 to 1951-52.
Hong Kong, SAR of China	n/a
India	Includes Bangladesh and Pakistan until 1947-48.
Indonesia	Formerly known as East Indies until 1919-20 and then Netherlands East Indies until 1947-48.
Iran	Formerly known as Persia until 1960-61.
Iraq	From 1919-20. Formerly included in Turkey (Ottoman empire) up to 1920.
Ireland	Included with the United Kingdom until 1922. Formerly known as the Irish Free State (1922 to 1937) and Eire (1937 to 1949).
Israel	From 1949-50.
Italy	n/a

Country	Notes
Japan	Includes Formosa (present day Taiwan) until 1945-46.
Kuwait	Included in Arabia prior to 1937-38; then Other Arabian States until 1955-56.
Libya	From 1910. Formerly known as Tripoli.
Malaysia	Formerly Straits Settlement and British Malaya until 1946-47. Includes Singapore prior to 1946-47 and from July 1964 to September 1965. Excludes the Malaysian state of Sabah from 1905 to 1960-61 (included in Brunei).
Mauritius	n/a
Mexico	n/a
Nauru	From 1914-15. Formerly known as Pleasant Island.
Netherlands	n/a
New Caledonia	n/a
New Zealand	Includes Cook Island from 1937-38 to 1945-46.
Pakistan	Included in India until 1947-48. Includes Bangladesh until 1970-71 (former East Pakistan).
Papua New Guinea	Territory of Papua (British New Guinea until 1905) and Territory of New Guinea (formerly Kaiser-Wilhelm land, Bismarck Archipelago and Neu Pommern until 1918-19).
Philippines	Formerly called Philippine Islands.
Qatar	From 1958-59. Included in Arabia prior to 1937-38; then Other Arabian States until 1957-58.
Republic of Korea	Korea was a single state until 1948, when it split into The Republic of Korea and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Includes Democratic People's Republic of Korea prior to 1956-57.
Russian Federation	Includes the USSR from 1918-19 to 1991-92. Includes Finland until 1918.
Saudi Arabia	Formerly included in Arabia until 1945-46. Arabia also included Bahrain up to 1924-25, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates up 1937-38. Includes Yemen from 1946-47 until 1953-54.
Singapore	Included in British Malaya until 1946-47. Included in Malaysia from July 1964 to September 1965.
South Africa	Formerly Cape Colony, Natal and Transvaal. Formerly known as Union of South Africa until 1960-61. Includes Zimbabwe for 1910 and 1911.
Spain	Includes the Balearic Islands. Canary Islands included from 1960-61.
Sri Lanka	Formerly known as Ceylon until 1972.
Sweden	n/a
Switzerland	n/a





Country	Notes
Taiwan	Included with Japan until 1945-46. Formerly known as Formosa, then China Republic of Formosa until 1971-72.
Thailand	Formerly known as Siam until 1939.
Turkey	Includes Asia Minor until 1924-25.
United Arab Emirates	Included in Arabia prior to 1937-38; then Other Arabian States until 1963-64. Formerly called Trucial States from 1964-65 to 1970-71; then Union of Arab Emirates until 1974-75.
United Kingdom	Includes Ireland until 1922. Excluding Channel Islands until 1963-64.
United States	Includes Alaska and Hawaiian Islands for all time periods. Excludes Puerto Rico after 1950-51. Includes Guam from 1926-27 to 1951-52.
Vietnam	Formerly Cochin China then French Indo-China (includes present day Laos and Cambodia). Divided into Vietnam North and Vietnam South from 1954 to 1975.
Zimbabwe	Includes Malawi from 1954-55 to 1963-64. Included in South Africa for 1910 and 1911.