

FACTSHEET ON THE TRANSPORT OF AUSTRALIAN IMPORT & EXPORT CARGOES by Shipping Australia

About¹ 99.93 per cent by volume² and 84.5 per cent by value³ of all cargo that arrives or leaves our shores does so in ocean-going cargo ships.

What is physically exported and imported?

The vast majority of our export trade cargoes by physical volume⁴ are iron ore, coal and grain. We also have major export trades in metals, minerals and agri-goods such as meat, dairy, wool, cotton and orchard produce. Our import trade by volume is also dominated by bulk cargoes, such as mineral fuels, which includes oil⁵. The dollar value of containerised cargo – often goods you will see on supermarket shelves and in shopping malls – is a lot higher⁶. These are the ordinary goods that matter most on a day-to-day basis for Australian families. The types of goods on any given ship will vary according to what type of ship it is, where it came from and what is being sold into Australia.

The following list shows a few of the types of goods imported into Australia. It includes business and consumer goods. For instance, “chemicals” includes bleach, which is used in homes, businesses, and hospitals. There are many more types of products imported to this country than this list shows.

Summary list of some of the types of products imported into Australia⁷

Misc. manufactured items	Petroleum products	Stone
Machinery	Steel	Supermarket goods
Foodstuffs	Aluminium	Glass & Ceramics
Beverages	Other metal objects	Transport equipment
Tobacco	Paper products	Cement
Plastics	Electronic equipment	Building products
Rubber	Wood pulp	Timber
Chemicals	Textiles (e.g. clothes)	Fertilizer
Household goods	Liquefied Natural Gas	Electrical equipment

Carrying and handling Australia's containerised trade; trade volumes

Imagine you're driving along the motorway and a truck passes you with a container on its back. That's probably a forty-foot container. We refer to forty-foot containers as "FEUs" and twenty-foot containers as "TEUs". Two TEUs are, logically, the same size as a forty-foot container. Container volumes are normally measured in TEUs. The biggest ship to berth in Australia so far carries 10,666 TEU⁸. That's equivalent to about 5,333 trucks (i.e. divide the TEU ship capacity by two).

¹ Obtaining accurate, up-to-date, volume and value figures split by imports, exports, maritime and aviation (and all combinations thereof) is surprisingly difficult. Figures in this factsheet contain estimates and approximations.

² Ports Australia 2018-2019 figures show that there was about 1.6 billion tonnes of physical two-way sea-trade. BITRE figures (see note 13) show that in 2019 there was about 1.1 million tonnes of two-way aviation trade.

³ The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's "Composition of Trade 2018-2019" states that the value of Australia's two-way trade is \$692 billion. The Australian Airports Association's 2018 Factsheet, "Airports & Australia's Freight Network" estimates that in the 12 months to October 2017, about A\$100 billion worth of goods were transported by air. Deducting the air from sea value gives air a 14.4 per cent share by value. Sources vary on the value of air freight: Statista quotes \$113.65 billion in 2019 giving air a 16.5 per cent share by value. Infrastructure Partnerships Australia and Oxford Economics in their "International Airfreight Indicator 2019" (p9) quotes \$109 billion (FY2017-2018) giving air a 15.8 per cent share by value. Averaging these three numbers gives a by-value air / maritime split of 15.5 percent by air and 84.5 per cent by sea.

⁴ "Trade at a glance 2019" DFAT; "Composition of Trade 2018-2019" DFAT; "Australian Trade Indicators Factsheet" DFAT

⁵ Ports Australia 2018-2019 figures; Reserve Bank of Australia "Australia's Top 10 Imports"; DFAT Composition of Trade

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Derived from the trade statistics pages of various port authority websites; includes approximations and generalisations

⁸ The "CMA CGM Ural" see NSW Ports (28 June 2020) and Port of Melbourne (26 June 2020)

Typically, however, ships calling into Australia fall into two main cohorts: vessels with a capacity of up to 3,999 TEU (51 per cent) and vessels with a capacity between 4,000 to 5,999 TEU (38 per cent). Ships of 6,000 TEU or over account for about 10.6 per cent of all container ships calling in Australia⁹.

Each year¹⁰ Australia handles at least¹¹ eight million TEU. The Port of Brisbane handles about 1.3 million TEU; Port Botany in Sydney handles 2.6 million TEU; Port of Melbourne handles three million TEU; Fremantle Port handles just under 800,000 TEU and Adelaide handles about 330,000 TEU.

Australia's physical trade: value and volume figures

Value: A\$373 billion of exports; A\$320 billion of imports; A\$692.9 billion of two-way trade¹².

	Maritime	Aviation	Rail	Land logistics
Value of cargo exports & imports	Total two way physical trade¹³: A\$592.9 billion	Total two way physical trade¹⁴: A\$100 billion	n/a	n/a
Volume of cargo^{15,16}	Export tonnes: 1.47 billion	Export tonnes: 565,455	n/a	n/a
	Import tonnes: 149.8 million	Import tonnes: 537,330		
	Two-way trade: 1.62 billion	Two-way trade: 1.1 million		
Annual revenues¹⁷ in Australia¹⁸	A\$6.88 billion	\$45.98 billion	\$26.56 billion	A\$102.87 billion
Australian workforce¹⁹	18,317	93,000	60,000	520,040

Approximate containership sailing times Australia from south east Asia (Sg) and North Asia (HK)

Singapore – Brisbane: 9 days	Hong Kong – Brisbane: 11 days
Singapore – Sydney: 10 days	Hong Kong – Sydney: 12 days
Singapore – Melbourne: 11 days	Hong Kong – Melbourne: 14 days
Singapore – Fremantle: 6 days	Hong Kong – Fremantle: 9 days

Assuming ships travel consistently at 20 knots; times will vary according to speed, weather, routing etc

⁹ Ports Australia Trade Statistics; accessed 29 October 2020

¹⁰ Sources: Port of Brisbane, NSW Ports, Port of Melbourne, Flinders Ports, Fremantle Ports; figures vary each year

¹¹ The five ports listed above handle most of Australia's box trade; some other ports also handle small volumes of boxes

¹² Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's "Composition of Trade" 2018-2019, Table 1(a)

¹³ Estimate: DFAT figures for total trade values minus value figures for aviation trade

¹⁴ "Airport Fact Sheet; Airports and Australia's Freight Network", Australian Airports Association Feb 2018

¹⁵ Ports Australia Trade Statistics accessed 29 October 2020; Aviation:

¹⁶ Bureau of Infra, Transport & Regional Economics "Statistical Report Aviation International Airline Activity 2019" p.8

¹⁷ Australian Industry Standards Skills Forecast Reports (2019) Aviation, Maritime, Rail, Transport & Logistics

¹⁸ Most global shipping company revenues are reported overseas and do not appear in Australian figures

¹⁹ Australian Industry Standards Skills Forecast Reports (2019) Aviation, Maritime, Rail, Transport & Logistics