

Assessment of waste exports from Australia in February 2019

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Blue Environment is commissioned by the Department of the Environment and Energy to undertake a monthly analysis of waste export data to June 2019. The data is provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, and comprises monthly data covering the previous six months, including any updates.

Summary

In February 2019, Australia exported about 343,000 tonnes of waste with a value of \$A485 million. This represents an increase of 29% in both the quantity and value of waste exports compared with January 2019. The increase is attributable to a sharp rise in metals exports, reversing a significant decline in the previous month. Exports of waste plastics are at their highest level for at least 20 months.

Comparison by destination

In February 2019 six countries received 81% by weight of exported Australian waste. These were, in order, Indonesia, India, China (including Hong Kong and Macau), Bangladesh, Malaysia and Vietnam. These countries were also the top six receivers of waste in January 2019, but China and Vietnam both dropped two places in the ranking compared with January. Table 1 compares exports to the top six receiving countries in January and February 2019, and also includes each country's 2017-18 monthly average. Waste exports to China and Vietnam in February 2019 were less than their 2017-18 averages, but those to the other countries in the top six were higher.

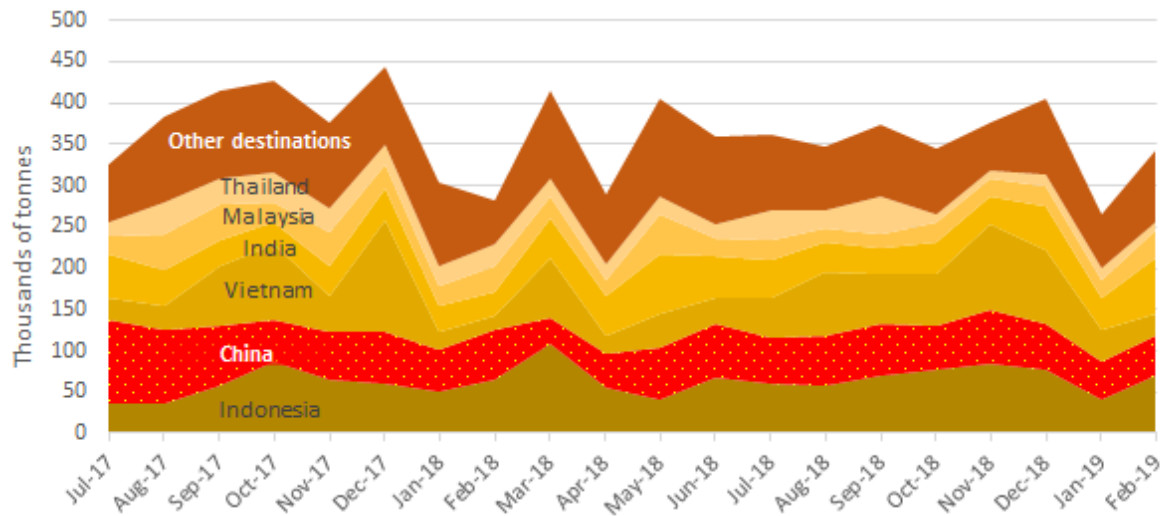
Table 1 Comparison of month-to-month waste export volume by destination

Export destination by monthly rank		February 19		January 19			2017-18 monthly avg	% change
		Tonnes	% of total	Rank	Tonnes	% change		
1	Indonesia	70,500	21%	2	41,100	72%	60,600	16%
2	India	67,800	20%	3	38,400	76%	42,400	60%
3	China	46,900	14%	1	46,700	0%	62,100	-24%
4	Bangladesh	34,500	10%	5	23,200	49%	13,900	148%
5	Malaysia	32,100	9%	6	20,900	54%	31,200	3%
6	Vietnam	27,500	8%	4	37,300	-26%	50,300	-45%
Top 6 total		279,300	81%		207,700	35%		
Monthly total		343,300	-		265,600	29%		

Figure 1 (overleaf) presents the monthly trend in exports of waste from Australia to the top six receiving countries and the other destinations between July 2017 and February 2019. Examined over this timeframe, the top six includes Thailand but not Bangladesh.

As recorded in previous reports, exports to China fell markedly during much of 2017-18. They reached a low of 30,000 tonnes in March 2018, recovered to 63,000 in May, remained fairly stable for several months and began declining again from December 2018. Exports to Vietnam have been highly variable over this timeframe, varying between 16,000 and 135,000 tonnes per month. Exports to Indonesia have also varied widely. Overall, however, no clear trend is apparent in waste exports over the 20-month timeframe.

Figure 1 Monthly exports of waste from Australia by destination, ranked by total quantity received, July 2017 – February 2019



Comparison by material

Table 2 presents a comparison of waste export volumes between January and February 2019 and the monthly average from 2017-18 as well as the year to date volumes.

Month to month –

- February 2019 saw a large 46% increase in the export of metals, following a similar decline in the previous month. All the main metals export categories experienced this dip.
- Exports of waste plastics also increased sharply in February (33%). This was mainly due to a big rise in exports of mixed plastics to Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand. Exports of this grade reached their highest level (16,200 tonnes) in the 20-month timeframe.
- Paper and cardboard quantities increased slightly (4%). This small change encompassed a 26% fall in exports of unbleached kraft paper and a 93% increase in exports of unsorted scrap. The monthly total of 38,000 tonnes for this unsorted low-grade material was the highest monthly total in the 20-month timeframe.
- Exports of hazardous and other wastes increased.

2017-18 monthly average – The quantities of metals, paper and cardboard, hazardous waste and ‘other’ exported in February 2019 were 5-18% lower than their monthly averages for 2017-18, but exports of waste plastics were 46% higher. Overall, exports of waste in February 2019 were 7% lower than the monthly average for 2017-18.

Year to date – Year-to-date waste exports in February 2019 were about 2.82 million tonnes, compared with 2.95 million tonnes in the equivalent period last financial year (5% less). Most of the difference is due to lower exports of paper and cardboard.

Table 2 Comparison of waste export volume by material

Material category	Month			Monthly avg 2017-18	% change	Year to date (Jul-Feb)		
	Jan 19	Feb 19	% change			2017-18	2018-19	% change
Metals	132,300	193,200	46%	203,800	-5%	1,569,600	1,651,700	5%
Plastics	14,500	19,300	33%	13,200	46%	98,300	118,100	20%
Paper & cardboard	92,500	96,000	4%	109,800	-13%	934,600	749,100	-20%
Other	18,100	20,200	12%	23,800	-15%	212,100	144,600	-32%
Hazardous	8,300	14,700	77%	17,900	-18%	139,700	153,900	10%
Total	265,600	343,400	29%	368,500	-7%	2,954,200	2,817,400	-5%

Figure 2 presents the monthly trend in exports of waste from Australia by material type between July 2017 and February 2019. Waste paper and cardboard exports have remained fairly stable since falling below 100,000 tonnes per month in February 2018. Metals exports remain volatile. Waste plastics now appear to be on a rising trend, having more than doubled since their nadir in January 2018.

Figure 2 Monthly exports of waste from Australia by material type, July 2017 – February 2019

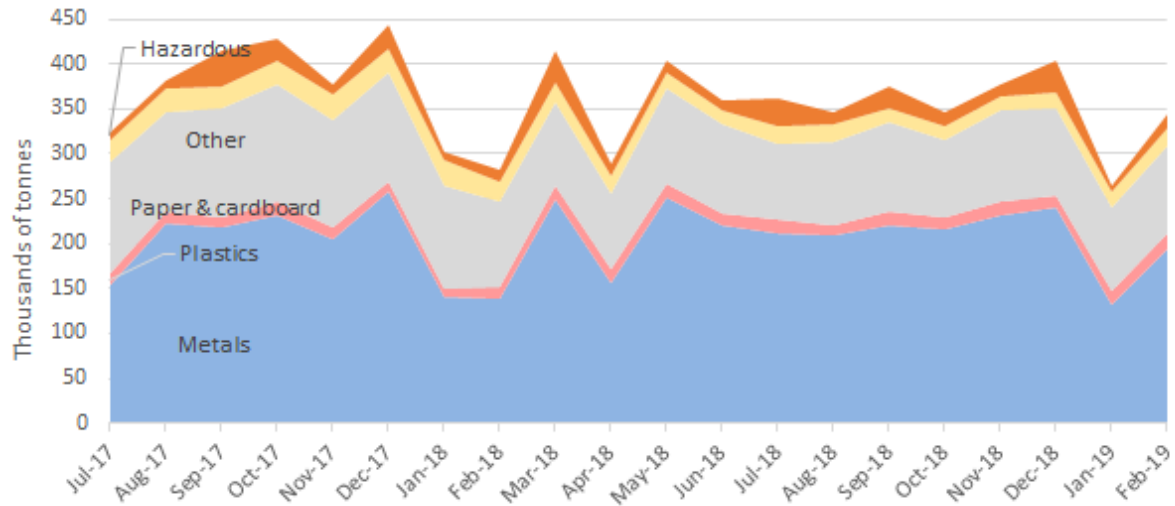
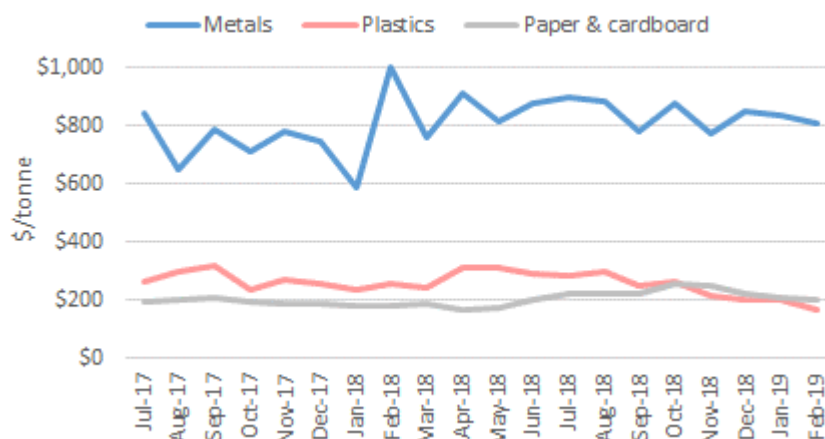


Figure 3 presents monthly trends in the unit prices of the main waste export materials between July 2017 and February 2019. Over this timeframe, average unit prices for metals and paper and cardboard have remained fairly stable. Average prices for waste plastics appear to be falling. This is mostly attributable to declining prices for low-grade mixed plastics, which averaged \$140/t in February 2019 compared with \$263/t over 2017-18.

Figure 3 Comparison of unit prices by material (in \$/tonne), July 2017 – February 2019



The current status of waste import restrictions

Table 3 (overleaf) presents our understanding of waste import restrictions that countries have implemented or are planning to implement. This information has been compiled based on the best publicly available sources, sometimes translated from local languages.

Table 3 Current status of waste import restrictions

Country	Scope of restrictions	Announced & implemented	Associated exports (tonnes) Types	2017-18		Impact and uncertainties
				2017-18	Feb 19	
China	<p>Restricted the import of certain materials covering specific commodity codes, mainly by specifying a threshold contamination rate of 0.5%¹.</p> <p>A ban (issued in April 2018) on the import of 32 varieties of solid waste codes which were previously restricted. 16 of these are banned from 31 December and the other 16 to take effect from 31 December 2019².</p> <p>Further restrictions on metals imports flagged in Dec. 18³</p>	<p>Ann.: Jul & Nov-17, Apr-18.</p> <p>Imp.: Jan & Mar-18, Dec-18, Dec-19</p>	Plastic, paper, metals, other	745,700 (62,100/month)	46,800	Impact evident (2016-17 exports averaged 105,300/month)
India	<p>Import of scrap plastics banned. Also covers areas that were previously exempt under the 2016 ban such as special economic zones and export-oriented units⁴. Excludes electrical/electronic assemblies or components that are defective which can be imported within a year of export.</p>	<p>Ann.: Mar-19</p> <p>Imp.: Mar-19, Aug-19 for importers currently exempt under SEZs and EOUs.</p>	Plastic	800 (70/month)	0	Impact uncertain.
Indonesia	<p>All imported scrap paper must be inspected, similar to steel and plastic. A maximum 0.5% contamination rate will apply⁵.</p>	<p>Ann.: Apr-19</p> <p>Imp.: Apr-19</p>	Paper	296,000 (24,700/month)	18,700	No impact apparent
Malaysia	<p>Import permits revoked from 114 factories that process imported plastic waste^{6,7}. Import of non-recyclable plastic waste to be banned⁸.</p>	<p>Jul-18.</p>	Plastic	71,300 (5,900/month)	8,100	No impact apparent

¹ Blue Environment (2018) [Data on exports of recyclables from Australia to China](#)

² Ministry of Commerce, State Development & Reform Commission (incl. former State Development Planning Commission), General Administration of Customs (2018) *Announcement No. 6 [2018] of the Ministry of Ecology and Environment, the Ministry of Commerce, the National Development and Reform Commission and the General Administration of Customs*

³ Reuters, 28/12/18, [China to restrict imports of scrap steel, aluminium from July](#)

⁴ Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (2019) [Amendment in Hazardous Waste \(Management & Transboundary Movement Rules, 2016\)](#)

⁵ Waste Management Review (2019) [Indonesia announces 100 per cent paper inspection rate](#)

⁶ FMT News (2018) [Permits to import plastic waste for 114 factories revoked](#)

⁷ Waste Management Review (2018) [Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam waste imports crackdown](#)

⁸ The Star Online (2018) [Govt to ban import of all non-recyclable waste](#)

Country	Scope of restrictions	Announced & implemented	Associated exports (tonnes)			Impact and uncertainties
			Types	2017-18	Feb 19	
Taiwan	Import of plastic waste is banned. Exceptions are made to licensed local firms that import plastic waste originating from their own overseas production processes or are a single material, but not from original production processes ⁹ . Paper imports restricted to only deinked paper, kraft paper, corrugated paper or cardboard that is not bleached. Import of waste newspapers and magazines banned.	Ann.: Aug-18 Imp.: Oct-18	Plastic, paper	14,100 (500/month)	1,800	
Thailand	Revoked a broad plastic scrap import allowance, meaning plastic waste and scrap is banned from import by 2021 ^{10,11,12} . Looking to ban e-waste imports within 2 yrs ⁷ .	Both ann. Aug-18, plastic imp. Aug-18, e-waste within 2 years.	Plastic	26,900 (2,200/month)	1,500	Apparent impact evident. Government announcement available in Thai only.
Vietnam	Tighter controls over imports of plastic, paper and metals. Only accepted if importers can prove that their shipment meets the specified environmental standards and there is capacity in the country to process the materials ¹³ . No new licences issued for waste imports ⁷ . Under the new national standard QCVN 32: 2019/BTNMT, import of e-waste plastics such as cases of TVs, computers, office equipment would be forbidden ¹⁴ . From 22 February 2019, all imports through road and railway border gates to be banned ¹⁵ . Import of mixed metal waste (containing any plastic, paper, other non-metallic metals) now understood to be restricted. Composition of metal waste needs to be 99% metal to be allowed in ¹⁶ .	Ann. in Aug-18, appears to be implemented. Mixed metal waste restricted from October 2018.	Plastic, paper, metals	603,000 (50,300/month)	27,500	Apparent impact evident for metal and plastic exports from Australia. Environmental standards used to determine when shipments are acceptable or when the ban on e-waste plastic imports would take effect unavailable in English.

⁹ Taipei Times (2018) [New waste plastic, paper import rules to take effect](#)

¹⁰ The Nation (2018) [Import of plastic waste banned](#)

¹¹ CIWM (2018) [Thailand set to ban plastic waste imports by 2021](#)

¹² [Government Gazette Thailand](#) (2018)

¹³ Vietnam Briefing (2018) [Vietnam to Restrict Surging Scrap Imports](#)

¹⁴ Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (2018) [Vietnam to ban imports of plastic from used electronics](#)

¹⁵ VietnamPlus (2019) [Scrap imports through road, railway border gates to be banned](#), Ministry of Information and Communications

¹⁶ S&P Global Platts (2019) [Vietnam's Jan scrap imports plunge amid stricter government rules](#)