

Assessment of waste exports from Australia in July 2018

18 September 2018 Joe Pickin and Luke Richmond

In July 2018, Australia exported around 368,900 tonnes of waste with a value of \$A536 million. This is an increase in the total volume (2%) and value (9%) of waste exports compared with June 2018.

Comparison by destination

The top six countries receiving waste exports from Australia in July 2018 accounted for 75% of all that was exported. These countries were, in order, Indonesia, China (including Hong Kong and Macau), Vietnam, India, Thailand and Malaysia. The top four countries were also the top four receivers of waste in June 2018, with Vietnam moving one place up the rankings after receiving 52% more tonnage than the previous month. In July Thailand received more than double the volume it received in June 2018. Indonesia, India and Thailand all received more waste in July 2018 than their monthly 2017-18 average, while China, Vietnam and Malaysia received less. Table 1 compares the top six receiving countries in July 2018 with their June 2018 volumes and 2017-18 monthly average.

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

Export destination by monthly rank	July 18		June 18			2017-18		% change
	Tonnes	% of total	Rank	Tonnes	% change	monthly avg		
1 Indonesia	61,200	17%	1	67,000	-9%	60,600	1%	
2 China	58,400	16%	2	65,900	-11%	62,100	-6%	
3 Vietnam	48,900	13%	4	32,000	52%	50,300	-3%	
4 India	47,100	13%	3	49,700	-5%	42,400	11%	
5 Thailand	35,200	10%	8	15,800	123%	25,700	37%	
6 Malaysia	24,300	7%	7	23,100	5%	31,400	-22%	
Top 6 total	275,100	75%		253,100	8%			
Monthly total	368,900	-		360,500	2%			

Comparison by material

Table 2 presents a comparison of waste export volumes between July 2018 with: June 2018; the monthly average from 2017-18; and the equivalent year-to-date from 2017-18 (in this first iteration, July only).

Month-to-month – Exports of metals (-3%), plastics (-4%) and paper and cardboard (-9%) waste all decreased between June and July 2018. Exports of other (32%) and hazardous (247%) waste increased. The increase in exports of hazardous waste is representative of a trend which experiences sharp spikes, likely to be due to the removal of waste from stockpiles for export.

2017-18 monthly average – More metals, plastics and hazardous waste were exported in July 2018 compared with the monthly average for 2017-18 however less paper and cardboard and other waste was exported. Overall, July 2018 total exports of waste matched closely to the 2017-18 monthly average, likely to be led by a spike in export of hazardous waste.

Year to date – The total waste exported to July 2017 was around 325,500 tonnes compared to 368,900 tonnes in July 2018, a 13% increase in waste exported from Australia for the year-to-date.

Table 2 Comparison of waste export volume by material

Material category	Month		% change	Monthly avg 2017-18	% change	Year to date (July)		% change
	June 18	July 18				2017-18	2018-19	
Metals	219,200	212,400	-3%	203,800	4%	153,000	212,400	39%
Plastics	20,100	19,300	-4%	18,300	6%	17,700	19,300	9%
Paper & cardboard	98,000	89,100	-9%	109,800	-19%	122,300	89,100	-27%
Other	15,100	19,900	32%	23,800	-16%	25,800	19,900	-23%
Hazardous	8,100	28,200	247%	13,600	108%	6,600	28,200	325%
Total	360,500	368,900	2%	369,200	0%	325,500	368,900	13%

The current status of waste import restrictions

Table 3 presents our understanding of waste import restrictions which countries have implemented or are planning to implement. This information has been compiled from the best publicly available sources, sometimes translated from local languages. It may not match the most up-to-date information available through official channels.

Table 3 Current status of waste import restrictions

Country	Scope of ban	Announced & implemented	Associated export volumes Material	Associated export volumes		Impact and uncertainties
				2017-18	Jul-18	
China	Restricted the import of certain materials covering specific commodity codes, mainly by specifying a threshold contamination rate of 0.5% ¹ .	Ann.: Jul & Nov-17, Apr-18. Imp.: Jan & Mar-18, end 2018.	Plastic, paper, metals, other	745,700 (62,100/mth) 16-17 = 1.26 Mt (105,300/mth)	58,400	<i>Impact evident.</i> Uncertainty whether newer announcements override older ones.
Malaysia	Import permits revoked from 114 factories that process imported plastic waste ² .	Jul-18.	Plastic	71,300 (5,900/mth)	8,100	<i>No impact evident.</i> Full number of plastic processors in Malaysia and how ban impacts Australian exports.
Thailand	Revoked a broad plastic scrap import allowance, meaning plastic waste and scrap is banned from import ^{3, 4} . Looking to ban imports of e-waste within 2 years ³ .	Both ann. Aug-18, plastic imp. Aug-18, e-waste within 2 years.	Plastic	26,900 (2,200/mth)	36	<i>Impact evident.</i> 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 ⁵ .	Ann. in Aug-18, appears to be implemented.	Plastic, paper, metals	603,000 (50,300/mth)	48,900	<i>No impact evident.</i> Unable to find environmental standards used to determine when shipments are acceptable. Processing capacity of sector.

Source:

1. Blue Environment (2018) *Data on exports of recyclables from Australia to China*, available from <https://blueenvironment.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Exports-of-recyclables-from-Aust-to-China-v2.pdf>
2. FMT News (2018) *Permits to import plastic waste for 114 factories revoked*, available from: <https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2018/07/24/permits-to-import-plastic-waste-for-114-factories-revoked/>
3. The Nation (2018) *Import of plastic waste banned*, available from: <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/detail/national/30351792>
4. Government Gazette Thailand (2018), available from: <http://www.ratchakitcha.soc.go.th/DATA/PDF/2561/E/188/T15.PDF>
5. Vietnam Briefing (2018) *Vietnam to Restrict Surging Scrap Imports*, available from: <http://www.vietnam-briefing.com/news/vietnam-to-restrict-surg-ing-scrap-imports.html/>